

THE FAST FASHION EPIDEMIC

By: Adele Wiebke

April 22, 2020

Instructor: Joey Iuliano

Mentor: Adriana Zuniga, Ph.D.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE FAST FASHION CRISIS	2	
LITERATURE REVIEW	3	
PROPOSED METHODS	<u>11</u>	Deleted: 9
PILOT STUDY SURVEY FINDINGS	<u>13</u>	Deleted: 11
INTERVIEW RESULTS AND FINDINGS	<u>18</u>	Deleted: 16
OVERALL DISCUSSION	<u>20</u>	Deleted: 18
LIIMTATIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS	<u>23</u>	Deleted: 21
CONCLUSION	<u>24</u>	Deleted: 22
APPENDIX	<u>26</u>	Deleted: 24
WORKS CITED	<u>27</u>	Deleted: 25

INTRODUCTION TO THE FAST FASHION CRISIS

The clothing industry is sneaky, polluting our world as we know it without batting an eye. As a woman, especially growing up, the need to fit in was always somehow “important.” Society has always told women that they are defined by their looks, from a very young age. I can remember buying clothing items on an impulse, thinking it might contribute to making me more “popular,” even being as young as elementary school. When in reality, these impulse purchases sat in the back of my closet for years without me even touching them. The next thing I knew, a \$20 shirt I swore I “could not live without,” and that was supposed to “make me more liked” ended up back in a Goodwill two years down the line. This is a constant cycle I went through as a teenager, and throughout a little bit of college. It was not until I learned the dark truth about what it takes to produce large amounts of cheap clothing, that I stopped consuming clothes at such a fast rate. Like many other women, even men can relate, purchasing clothing to fit a specific look is something we might all inherently do, especially if we see the price tag fitting in line with our frugal mindsets. The production and promotion of cheap and readily disposable clothes are a recent phenomenon known as “fast fashion” (Anguelov, 2016).

Scientists have been studying this increasing source of waste and consumerism around the world. Some of these popular stores, among those who can access them, include H&M, Zara, Gap, to even luxury brands with fast fashion options, such as Versace or Louis Vuitton, which are all included under this category. The fashion industry is usually perceived as one of the most materialistic industries in existence. Beautiful models fill magazine pages in lavish fluffy coats and expensive purses; no wonder it is one of the largest industries in the world, with a domestic market value of 406 billion dollars (Fashion United, n.d.). However, should it be held in such high esteem? The hard truth is that the fast fashion industry is **one of the dirtiest in the world, second to the oil industry** (EcoWatch, 2015). The truth hurts: the fashion industry is the second-biggest consumer of water, responsible for the production of 20% of global wastewater and 10% of global carbon emissions, which is more than the emissions that come from all international flights and maritime shipping combined (UNECE, n.d.). When we think about pollution, our first thoughts go to burning coal and fossil fuels, not to what we put on our bodies every day. Therefore, environmental movements have not targeted the fashion industry directly. The purpose of this project is to explore why, currently, humans who can (more

specifically, teenagers to undergraduate college students) consume fast fashion are consuming it at such an alarming rate, and what solutions can be made to solve this world crisis.

Not only is our fashion industry harming the environment and other humans everyday 'work' lives, but we are also producing way more than ever before, which can be seen through the emissions produced from the apparel and footwear industries (Cerullo, 2019). Both the apparel and footwear industries, "account for more than 8 percent of global climate impact, greater than all international airline flights and maritime shipping trips combined" (Cerullo, 2019). Additionally, we already have enough clothing in our current world to wear. It does not make sense, in terms of our Earth's resources, that we are continually producing more. We are wasting resources in order to produce something that has no real purpose, other than to continue the idea of fashion "trends." If our current world amount of clothing is sufficient, why do we continue to produce more and more textiles every year? This study sets out to answer what factors are driving our current world in consuming clothing so quickly, and what alternatives are there to this fast fashion epidemic? There has to be a better solution.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many industrial sectors have been changed by globalization, as the evolution of supply, demand, and environmental factors is "driving companies towards operating as if a homogenous worldwide market existed in their industries," but the fashion industry and industries related to it are most predominant (Gamboa, p.86,1988). It is the most pervasive and internationalized industry in the world, encompassing all facets of dressing from accessories, to shoes, to undergarments, and more (Anguelov, 2016). All of these are based on trends—which can be defined as what is popular at a particular point in time. Back in the day, trends used to originate from one individual, whereas now trends can no longer be traced back to one particular person (Gordon, 2017). Trends are always changing, some even coming back to make a reappearance! For example, leggings were a big "trend" in the 1980s, and now they are worn by many young consumers (the company Lululemon, for example) (Gordon, 2017). It is hard to predict which trends will come back and how often they arise; in the words of Grace Gordon, "Conventional wisdom in the fashion

industry declares that trends cycle every 20 years. This cycle, however, is now an imprecise and fairly useless measure of trends” (Gordon, 2017). At their modern rate, trends are changing exponentially faster than they did only two decades ago (Anguelov, 2016).

The widespread epidemic of Fast Fashion would be nothing without the retailers behind the phenomenon. The retailers, such as big brand names like H&M, Zara, Topshop, and many more, have reshaped the industry by offering inexpensive products that look somewhat expensive (Anguelov, 2016). The retailer’s business model has been so successful that it has inspired other retailers to explore fast fashion products and lines, even some luxury brands. Fast Fashion retailers, such as those listed above, sell products that are, “expected to be used less than ten times at very competitive price points” (McAfee et al., 2004). This had led to the increased popularity of disposing of garments after only being worn a few times (Birtwistle and Moore, 2006).

The Fast Fashion Epidemic is a global issue—not only does it affect our planet’s environment, but it also impacts the lives of everyday people. One of the ways this can be shown is through sweatshops. Sweatshops, as defined by the Merriam Webster dictionary, are, “a factory or workshop, especially in the clothing industry, where manual workers are employed at very low wages for long hours and under poor conditions” (Sweatshop Definition, n.d.). Sweatshops are also related to the production of various products, some of which include clothing, accessories, and other items that are regarded to be within the “fashion” category. To define some terms, a sweatshop is, “an employer that violates more than one federal or state labor law governing minimum wage and overtime, child labor, industrial homework, occupational safety and health, worker’s compensation or industry regulation” as stated by the U.S. General Accounting Office (1994). Sweatshops can be found all over the world, most being in developing countries, but some existing here in the United States. While there is no hard evidence showing that every fast fashion brand uses sweatshops, many cases have come out with some big fast fashion brands; some of which include big names, like Gap and H&M (Hodal, 2018).

The concept of sustainable consumption did not come into the public eye until the 1990s. The concept came from the public awareness of environmental and ethical issues that became a widespread phenomenon during the 1970s and 1980s

(Birtwistle and Moore, 2006). Research has shown that early “fashion innovators” compared to “fashion followers” were, “heavily influenced by the fashion media, they shopped and purchased fashion garments more frequently, were influenced in their purchasing by celebrities and were spending more per month” (Birtwistle and Moor, 2006). In contrast, the fashion followers were more interested in how practical the garments were and if they could be brought into the following season and be used/kept longer. Continuing, younger fashion followers did not expect to keep clothing for a long time. Additionally, another study had found that early fashion innovators are impulse purchasers and that they seek self-gratification by/through shopping (Lee, 2003).

Generational gaps also play into the consumption of fast fashion. Trends are created and introduced within the industry in order to stimulate sales. In today’s society, we see that many young adults are purchasing fast fashion than any other generation, which could be linked to the fact that Millennials and Generation Z are constantly engaged in social media feeds that keeps them coming back for more (Gilliland, 2019). Generation Z is dubbed, “the most photographed generation in history” by Jason Dorsey, a Generation Z expert and consultant (Hanbury, 2019). The youngest millennials and the entirety of Generation Z have grown up with the internet, more specifically, social media. Many people within this age range, including myself, document over lives for everyone to see online, whether it be on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or Snapchat (Hanbury, 2019). Companies are onto us young folk and have moved to advertise onto these social media/internet platforms. For example, a popular brand known as Fashion Nova has been around since 2006 (Gilliland, 2019). In recent years, it has gained an insane amount of success, which can be widely attributed to social media (Gilliland, 2019). The key strategy of marketing with “influencers” capitalizes on the influence of celebrity personalities to promote their products (Gilliland, 2019). Even more interesting, a study done by consultancy CGS found that “64% of Gen Z reported that they would pay more for sustainable products” (CGS, 2019).

The fast fashion industry has neglected to cater towards older adults. Previous research done has shown that baby boomers, a generation that has already changed what it means to be old by staying active and mentally young, have limited merchandise choices within the fashion industry (Rocha et al., 2005). A Finland 2003 research study by Rocha et al. (2005) focused on older female consumers and said

that, “middle-aged women often complain they cannot find clothes that would please them” (Rocha et al., p.381, 2005). They say that their body has changed and fashion designers seem to ignore that. If the clothes fit the aging body the style is not right but seems to be designed for an older generation” (Rocha et al., p.381, 2005).

However, even with bigger pockets and the luxury of having a more disposable income, there are still limited products that meet older generations’ needs. Another study done by Li in 2003 explored the female grey market and found that there was a high demand in garments for quality, comfort, aesthetic elements, and functionality. Most interesting, the aesthetic elements were characteristics that were more commonly associated with the youth market (Li, 2003).

Additionally, the popularity of luxury fashion within younger generations has increased. A study done by Giovannini et al. (2015) found that Generation Y (born 1980–1994) is, “becoming a very important segment for the luxury market in the USA.” This study found that Generation Y’s consumption behavior comes from significant influence in terms of “public self-consciousness and self-esteem” (Giovannini et al., 2015). Generation Y consumers are “individuals with high public self-consciousness who tend to make purchasing decisions based on influence and opinions of their peers due to high levels of public-consciousness” (Fernandez, p.13, 2009). Generation Y consumers display, “high levels of materialism, brand signaling importance, and status consumption” (Giovannini et al., 2015). Furthermore, “high levels of self-monitoring and low levels of dispositional guilt and empathic concern were also found” (Loroz and Helgenson, 2013). Below, **Figure 1** is shown, displaying the average annual retail spend by generation, based off of Epsilon’s February 2019 report.

Average annual retail spend

	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers	Silents
Apparel	\$1,267	\$1,051	\$1,103	\$934	\$722
Department stores	\$1,237	\$1,061	\$1,149	\$1,106	\$876
Discount stores	\$206	\$189	\$200	\$198	\$181
Electronics	\$1,032	\$884	\$967	\$845	\$697
Home improvement	\$1,996	\$1,849	\$1,853	\$1,841	\$1,334
Mass merchandiser	\$1,883	\$1,787	\$1,762	\$1,557	\$1,316
Plus size	\$349	\$339	\$359	\$331	\$299
Warehouse clubs	\$2,133	\$1,895	\$2,145	\$2,039	\$1,804

Figure 1 (Bedgood, 2019)

While this figure does not explicitly show the fast fashion industry alone, it does include both apparel, department stores, discount stores, and plus size, which to some extent can be included under the realm of fast fashion (depending on specific clothing items and the brands that made them).

Consumer behavior also plays a role. A research study conducted by McNeil and Moore (2015) found a way to categorize consumers of fashion in three groups: Self-consumers, Social-consumers, and Sacrifice-consumers. **Self-consumers** are those concerned with hedonistic needs (i.e., shopping for pleasure, entertainment; usually for fun) while **Social-consumers** are those concerned with their social image (how one wants to be perceived by others) (McNeil & Moore, 2015). **Sacrifice-consumers** are those who try to reduce their environmental impact on the world (eco-conscious shoppers).

They made these categories because each group is so different, they all view fast fashion in different lights. These discrepancies might explain why marketing sustainability within the fashion industry is perceived by each group as vastly different. A recent study done by ThredUp, a resale consignment company, found that 64% of

women bought or are now willing to buy secondhand products with 56 million women buying secondhand products in 2018, up from 44 million in 2017 (ThredUp, 2019). More interestingly, they found that 18–37 year-olds are adopting second hand apparel 2.5x faster than other age groups, with discovering that 1 in 3 generation Z-er's will buy secondhand in 2019. They also found that resale can satisfy two biggest demands of the "Instagram generation": being seen in new styles constantly, with 56% of 18–29 year old's preferring retailers that offer new arrival every time they visit (which often fast fashion retailers do) and being a sustainability conscious consumer, something that has more recently than ever showing to be a trend, with 74% of 18–29 year old's preferring to buy from sustainability conscious brands, as buying a single used item reduces its carbon footprint by 82% (ThredUp, 2019). However, these statistics and spiked interest in resale cannot be said the same for older generations and even older millennials. This emerging behavior with resale online is growing, and will be impacting the fast fashion retailers.

There is also the influence of technology and logistics, which have evolved and made the fast fashion industry what it is today. Bhardwaj and Fairhurst (2010) looked into how the fashion industry has evolved over the past two decades, particularly at how the "boundaries of the industry" were forced to expand, and why this has led to the phenomenon now known as fast fashion. There has been a fading in the mass production side of the fashion industry, and an increased amount of "seasons" as previously mentioned, and changes in the structural supply side of the industry that have demanded, "lower cost and flexibility in design, quality, and speed to market" (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). Moreover, there has been evidence of both marketing and capital investments as being a driving force of competitiveness within the industry (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). Over the past 20 years, fashion changed from the public preferring "basic, classic apparel" to more "fashion-oriented apparel" (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). For example, when women's legwear began to release colorful and textured garments to coordinate with more outfits, this eventually led to an increase in mark-downs within the fashion market because there was a failure to sell fashion during the forecasted season with the higher, original prices (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). This then led to more and more companies releasing more of a selection to provide varieties of fashion apparel, which then led to strong competition, changing the market from being product-driven to buyer-driven chains (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010).

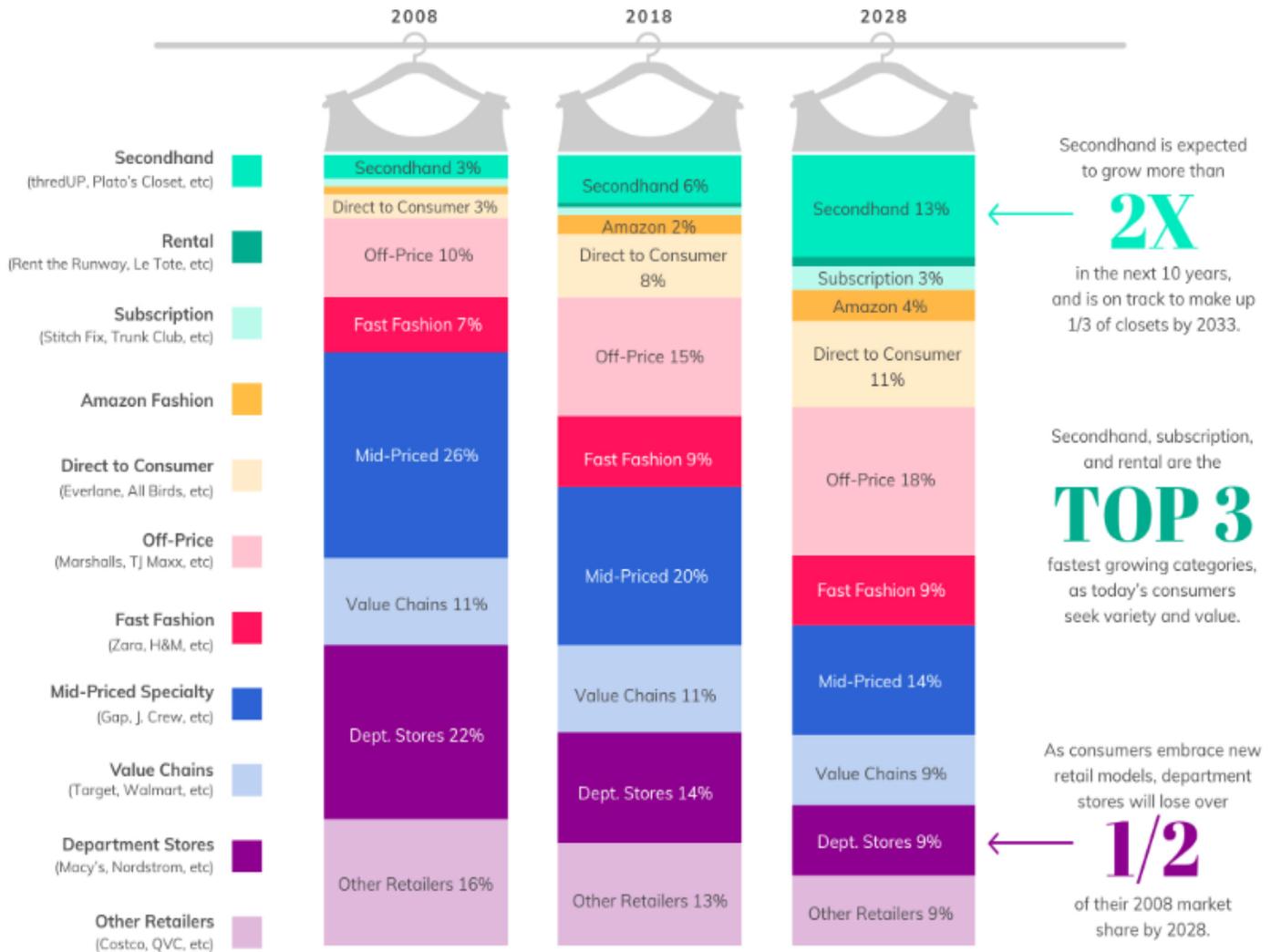
Eventually, companies within the industry realized how costly it was to keep textiles in a large warehouse when they could be making it based on demand. Best put by Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, “in order to stay in competition, [UK] retailers shifted sourcing of merchandise to the Far East for a lower cost average. In doing so, supply chains became more complex due to extensive geographical distance, thereby forcing these retailers to introduce practices such as just-in-time, computer integrated manufacturing, total quality management in manufacturing along with emphasis on shorter supply lines and quick response in the market” (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). Consumers now expect items to be shipped to their home- often overnight, thanks to companies like Amazon. Such quick turnaround places heavy strain on warehouse workers who frequently are underpaid and work in conditions that cause physical and mental harm (Sainato, 2019).

A capitalist market has consumed the fashion industry, making money everyone's number one priority, despite the negative impacts that gaining said money has. A quote by David Harvey best frames this situation: “[Capitalism] never solves crises; it moves them around geographically” (Roos, 2014).). Harvey's quote demonstrates not only how fashion production has moved overseas to capitalize on low-cost labor, but also how streamlining logistics has been performed at the cost of the health and wellbeing of warehouse workers in the US and other countries. As labor laws or environmental laws evolve in a region, capitalists seek out new places to maintain or extract greater value- hence the crisis (of solving labor issues) is never solved and merely moved around.

So, what can be done?

Education is a great step towards lowering current consumer habits. The idea is that by informing those who are unaware of the environmental, physical, and general harm of fast fashion, maybe it will persuade them to consume less and educate others if they are not already aware. Moreover, because of the slowly growing trend of being environmentally conscious with consumerism, predictions are being made about the future of people's closets. Below is a diagram from the ThredUp Resale Market and Trend 2019 report, which compares the average closet from the year 2008 to what it is predicted to look like in 2028 (Figure 2).

Meet The Closet of the Future



GlobalData Market Sizing and Growth Estimates (2019)¹

Figure 2 (ThredUp, 2019)

However, this will only be accurate if those stuck in the fast fashion quicksand are able to pull themselves out with more education and awareness regarding the environmental harm that shopping fast fashion can cause and what it already produces to stay successful.

PROPOSED METHODS

My research questions answer why are younger adults (20's/College aged) are so apt to purchase fast fashion, and if those who have some educational background on the environmental harm of fast fashion purchase from more sustainable options (like second hand stores or sustainable friendly brands) because they are aware of the environmental issues that come with fast fashion?

1. Create a list of factors found within said literature that have been identified as things that might contribute to a person's personal consumption of fast fashion habits
 - o Note features found within literature and cite them
 - o Note year and location of each piece of literature; institutions/programs that designed/wrote them
 - o Pull out factors that might contribute to fast fashion consumption
 - o Organize findings and patterns found within the literature collection
2. Compose a pre-survey to the public using the following factors (Spring 2019)
 - o Said survey asked questions of age
 - o Question of a person's gender/ how they identify as
 - o Question of current purchasing patterns (when they purchase, how often...)
 - o Will include a selection of store names (some being fast fashion brands, other being ethical/sustainable alternatives—asking if they have purchased from these companies within the past year)
 - o Will include a personal reflection ranking system asking survey-takers to rank their previous knowledge on the environmental effects of fast fashion
3. Use results of the survey in order to find out who to interview (average age, gender) and further questions to develop for said interview
4. Using literature and responses from the survey, develop in-depth interview questions that may help pull out common patterns between study group in terms of fast fashion consumption

- Ask about how often they shop and from where (second hand, sustainable retailers, fast fashion)
 - How often they think about the environmental effects of their purchases, asking them to be honest as to if they really care and consider that when purchasing garments, unless they are unaware of the environmental harm
 - If they shop from any specific sustainable brands (such as Reformation or Madewell, or thrifting)
 - Ask how they discard of clothes, or the longevity of their clothes (throw it out, burn it, donate it, hoard it)
 - Ask if they think what they purchase was influenced by social media, wanting to be perceived a certain way, insecurities, etc....
 - If uneducated, ask if they would like to learn more about the impacts of shopping fast fashion
 - If educated already, ask if they think this has an influence on their purchasing habits as well as disposal habits of garments
5. Find four participants within the preferred age range (18-23 years old) to involve themselves in said long interview, preferably within the United States
- Find at least one person who has little background knowledge of fast fashion/sustainable fashion (someone who ranked themselves low on the self-assessment question in the questionnaire)
 - Find at least one person who does have basic background knowledge on the subject and may have varying purchasing patterns than those who are uneducated
 - Interview at least one male

** Use responses in order to determine some common themes within fast fashion consumption between the average ages of those who take the original survey; preferably interview people who reside in the United States and see the impacts that education may provide (whether positive, neutral, or negative)*

PILOT STUDY SURVEY FINDINGS

The following section will reflect back on the pilot study conducted in Spring of 2019, by means of a survey. There is some existing information on consumption patterns of fast fashion, but none specifically on U.S. young adult females. Below are some of the results found from the Qualtrics Survey, which was given over a one-month span with 35 total responses. This survey was posted to Facebook and on a D2L discussion group, so of course, there is some response bias. This comes from the fact that not everyone has access to the internet or is digitally savvy, and not everyone has a Facebook account or access to the private D2L group in which this survey was also posted.

The youngest person to take the survey was *18 years old*, whereas the oldest person to take the survey was *77 years old*. Below are some visual figures found from the survey in [Figure 3](#).

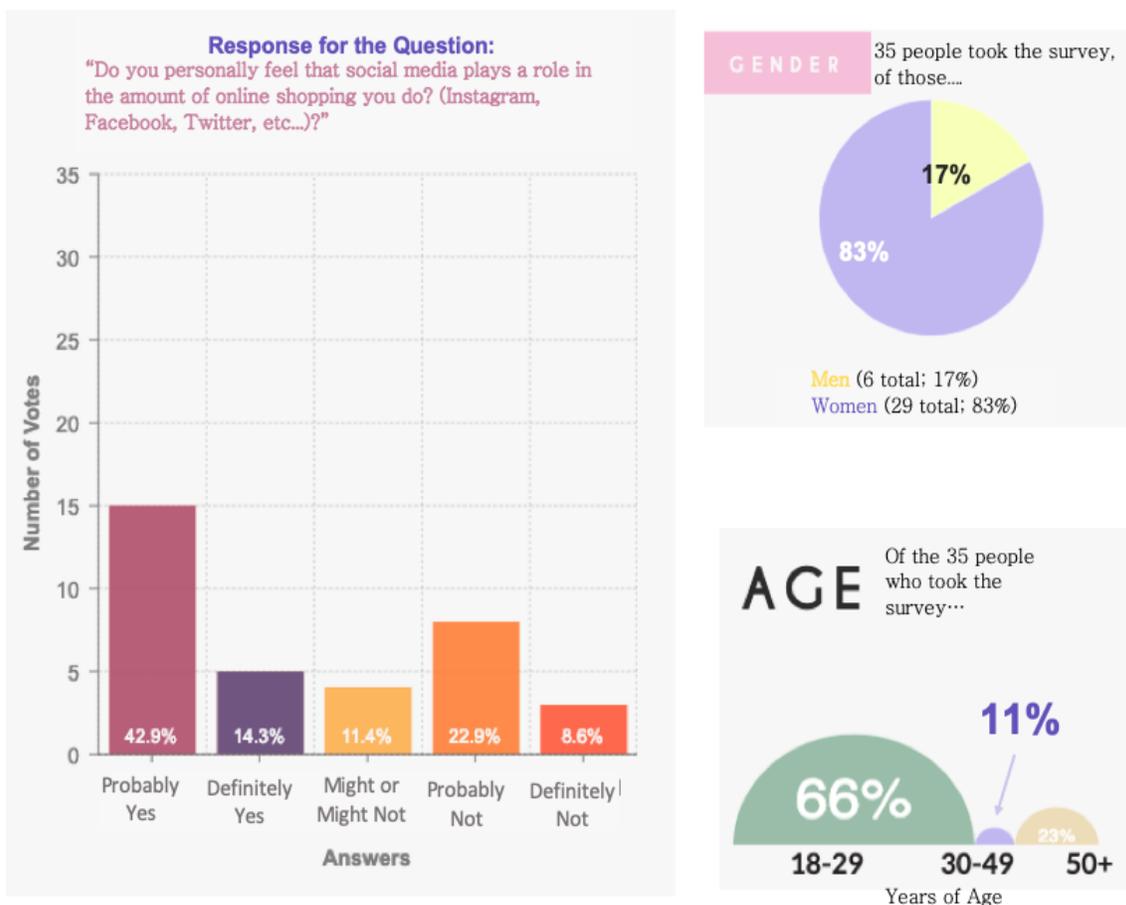


Figure 3 (from a survey conducted in Spring 2019)

From the answers received from completed surveys, it was found that the **majority of people participating in the survey were females**. The most common age (the mode) being 20 years of age. There were a few older people who responded, some in their 50s, some in their 30's, even one person in their 70s! However, the **majority of my responses can from people between the ages of 18-22**. This age range seemed to pop out the most; therefore, **this age range was used when picking out interview candidates**.

When comparing ages with their responses, the results should that:

People aged **between 18-27** (with 27 being the oldest age in the 20's) put down "**definitely yes**" or "**probably yes**" when asked if they believed "**social media impacted the amount of shopping they did.**" **No one** in this age range put "**might or might not**" or "**definitely not**" or "**probably not.**"

Starting from the age range of **age 30** to the **oldest age of 77**, *only one person* (age 32) said "**probably yes**" to this question, with *everyone else in this age range putting* "**probably not,**" "**might or might not,**" or "**definitely not.**"

When asked to rank, on a scale of 0 to 10 (10 being very educated, 0 being no clue) how educated they felt they were on the environmental harm of the fast fashion industry. Five people left this question **blank!**

The results of all the answers based off of the ranking scale question is as follows:

The mode: **6**

The median: **5**

The mean: **4.6**

This shows that most people, on average (of the people who took my survey), know **very little** about fast fashion and its environmental impact.

“Have you purchased clothing from any of the listed stores below in the past year?”
 (out of 35 people, these were their answers)

STORE/BRAND	Answered “YES”	Answered “NO”
<i>Forever 21</i>	17 people	18 people
<i>Free People</i>	12 people	23 people
<i>Urban Outfitters</i>	24 people	11 people
<i>Zara</i>	5 people	30 people
<i>TopShop</i>	20 people	15 people
<i>BooHoo</i>	3 people	32 people
<i>FashionNova</i>	3 people	32 people
<i>H&M</i>	20 people	15 people
<i>Reformation</i>	6 people	29 people
<i>MadeWell</i>	10 people	25 people

I compiled this list of stores by choosing some of the most popular fast fashion brands that catered towards young adults. Additionally, I included two stores that are most known from social media (Instagram) (stores: BooHoo and FashionNova) and two stores that are known for being sustainable/ethical (stores: Reformation and MadeWell).

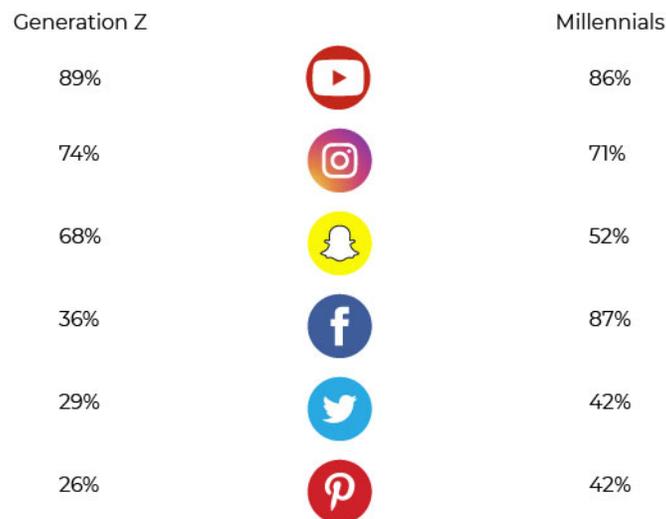
My main hypothesis going into this survey was that younger adults would state that they shop from fast fashion retailers, shop online often, and that they would not shop at sustainable retailers as often due to price and convenience factors. I thought this because I often see many people my age post online, always in a new outfit, which without cheap clothing options, would be a very expensive lifestyle. Clothes that are ethically made are often priced higher, which makes sense as they consider factors like gallons of water used, material and sourcing said materials, the people they make clothing for, CO² emissions, and waste. A great example would be Reformation, a sustainable clothing retailer that primarily focuses on bringing sustainable fashion to everyone, stating in their sustainability framework that, “People, planet, and profits is a core value, and we strive for ‘no trade-off’ solutions” (Reformation, 2019).

Many of the people aged in their early 20’s saying they shop online occasionally, purchase something at least one every 3 months, normally purchase on holidays

such as Black Friday and Cyber Monday, and most of them purchasing clothing from many popular fast fashion brands such as Forever 21, Topshop, Free People, Urban Outfitters, Zara, BooHoo, FashionNova, and many more. Of the two listed sustainable/ethical clothing companies in the survey, most survey responses had shown that *many people have never purchased clothing from either Reformation or Madewell (sustainable companies)*.

Clearly, those who took the survey did not know about BooHoo or FashionNova, as most of their marketing is done on Instagram. The survey was distributed on both D2L and my Facebook page. This allowed several various age groups to respond. Moreover, younger generations are less apt to use Facebook (see figure 4 below). **Figure 4** comes from a report done by The Manifest, a company whose mission is “to gather and verify the hard data, expert insights, and actionable advice that you need to build your brand and grow your business – to provide the practical business wisdom that manifests in your success” (The Manifest, n.d.).

Generation Zers Use Fewer Platforms on a Weekly Basis Compared to Millennials



Not all answer choices shown
Percent of total respondents, N=627 U.S. social media users
Source: 2019 The Manifest Consumer Social Media Survey



Figure 4 (Cox, 2019)

These Instagram brands are considered to be fast fashion, but the approach to marketing is different than the way; for example, Forever 21 or Urban Outfitters does their marketing. Most notably purchased from Fast Fashion stores from my survey were Urban Outfitters (with 24 people saying “yes” they have purchased clothing from there in the past year), Top Shop (20 saying yes), H&M (20 said yes) and Forever 21 (with 17 saying yes).

As for the two ethical/sustainable brands listed, *very few* had ever purchased from either Reformation or Madewell. Brands like these, who use ethical and sustainable practices in order to make their clothes, are often priced at a higher price point due to the labor, materials, water, and marketing put into their apparel.



Figure 5 via Spring 2019 Survey

"How often do you purchase clothing online?"

the options and results were as follows, with the most popular answer being "Once every 3 months" and the least popular being both "Once a week" and "Never"

- Once a week 3.35%
- Once a month 28.60%
- Once every 3 months 36.10%
- Once a year 28.60%
- Never 3.35%

Many middle-aged women (the ones who responded to my questionnaire, being in their 40s–50s) told me *they shop online, but for Amazon Prime*, not for clothes necessarily. Most of these people did not purchase from any of the fast fashion companies I listed.

After reviewing several literature articles (from Google Scholar) and results from the pilot survey, questions were pulled out that were thought to be important to ask in order to receive back answers that might follow consumption patterns seen in previous studies or assumptions previously had. These were used for the **interviews**.

**See Appendix for interview questions*

INTERVIEW RESULTS AND FINDINGS

As a **qualitative approach** to seeking information, **four interviews** were conducted to willing participants. This was in hopes of getting a sense of the average person in their 20s clothing consumption patterns/habits. These participants did not necessarily have to participate in the original survey in order to be interviewed. Purposely, I reached out to a few people I know that have been educated on the fast fashion issue to see how it would compare to those that do not know much about its environmental impacts. The participants were chosen from people I knew but were not necessarily close with. I tried to reach out to people who I do not talk to on a daily, even weekly basis. More on the limitations of this approach can be found further down. The results were found by pulling out similarities, differences, or overall patterns between participants' answers.

The interviewees were asked to define the term fast fashion in their own words. Many similarities were found between their various definitions. More specifically, the term “landfills” was brought up often, as well as the discussion of those creating fast fashion clothing getting paid unfair, low wages. Most knew that the fast fashion

industry was terrible for the environment, but not all knew specifically how it was impacting it or what caused the fast fashion industry to cause so much harm. For example, participant #3's definition of fast fashion was, "I know it has to do with putting people in poor working conditions with little pay in wages to make clothing", going further to state (when regarding the environmental harm) that, "we keep making more landfills and filling them with textiles, but that's about as much as I know". Another participant, who happened to be a male (participant #2), had a bit more background information on the topic and stated that, "low quality pieces are not meant to last and are often made up of inorganic materials that soon enough end up in our landfills and struggle to decay. Beyond this, the increased consumer desire for low-cost, trendy fashion has put the pressure on manufactures (factories) to produce more, leading to further emissions of greenhouse gases and over abuse of natural resources". More interestingly, participant #4 had no idea about any environmental impacts of fast fashion, and their definition was, "I want to say it is when, like, stores, such as Forever 21 or H&M, also make clothes that are knock-offs of high end fashion... I am not sure if that's correct though". While this is true, it ignores the fact that the fast fashion industry overproduces, and often puts out new clothes, in large quantities and over short periods of time leading to, as participant #2 stated, "an over abuse of natural resources".

All but one of the interviewees stated that they believed social media played a role in their own style. The one outlier was the only male who was interviewed, participant #2. When asked if he thought social media played a role in his style or how often he purchases clothing, he stated that, "Personally, no, but I know that it certainly can be for others." Other interviewees, when asked this question, stated that they believe that it can definitely play a role, two of which stated that they follow a lot of stores on Instagram and look at online stores a lot, looking to social media stars or celebrities for style inspiration. Two mentioned their admiration for Kendall Jenner's style (participant #1 and participant #3). On the topic of why they enjoy or enjoyed shopping fast fashion, participant #1 (one of the interviewees) noted that, "I wasn't educated about it at all and it was super cheap" and points out that "I do think that as more people become more educated about fast fashion, they will start shopping at stores that make ethical clothing decisions, even if it is a bit more expensive. I love getting style inspiration from fashion bloggers and celebrities, and I often try and find similar pieces in thrift stores". In contrast, participant #4, who mentioned not knowing anything about the environmental harm of fast fashion, stated, "I like purchasing from

those places, mostly Forever 21 and maybe Urban Outfitters sometimes, because they are cheap. They usually have what I want when I'm looking for it, and they're so convenient, which is a big thing for me. It's also in a wide variety. For example, if I can't find the item I'm looking for in one particular color, I can probably find something similar in like 10-15 different ones".

Another small thing to note: only one interviewee was in a sorority. Participant #4 mentioned how she feels some social pressures to fit in and simply buys into fast fashion to meet sorority dress code requirements for events or for photo opportunities. This can tie back into the literature review article by Hanbury, who discussed how Generation Z is the most photographed more often than any other and how it fuels their shopping habits. This can also tie into popular festivals and fashion culture, such as events like Coachella. Anupreet Bhui, a senior editor for global street style at the trend forecasting agency WGSN, watches, and monitors over 20 festivals around the world. He mentions that, "Fashion and nostalgia have always gone hand in hand, and when it comes to Coachella, it's that whole romanticism about having a music festival," and then later goes on to say, "It's more about the looks than the ideology. Let's not forget: it's the Instagram generation" (Saad, 2018).

However, the most shocking part to come out of all of these interviews, regardless of whether or not the participant was educated on the environmental harm of fast fashion, was that they all mentioned enjoying shopping second hand, a trend that has slowly been catching popularity as fast fashion brands are struggling to keep their business model going. Each interviewee mentioned thrifting, as they enjoyed that it's also a cheap way to buy clothing, sometimes more unique pieces that are harder to find in fast fashion like stores. Importantly, three participants made the same remarks about the timeline of their clothes, best stated by participant #3, "I want to buy lasting fashion rather than fast fashion. I try to buy things that I know can be versatile and that I can wear and have last like forever." Participant #1 also had a good take, saying that, "Fast fashion is terrible for the environment because the pieces are usually worn once or twice and then tossed into landfills because new articles of clothing come along, contributing to more pollution and global warming."

OVERALL DISCUSSION

Regarding the 2019 survey, those results had shown that many people were not aware of the environmental harm of the fast fashion industry. This could be due to a number of factors, but it is most likely the lack of education on the subject. This might explain why so many fast fashion retailers are able to cater to young people so easily and so successfully. As mentioned earlier, social pressures to fit in, whether in person or online persona may also play a role, especially with regards to younger Millennials and Generation Z.

Regarding these interviews, the most interesting thing to come out of them was how each participant mentioned their love for second hand/thrift shopping. My finding aligns with the predictions from **Figure 1**, shown on page 7. While fast fashion brands still survive and tend to do well overall, my interviews are showing how many younger people (young adults, as my interviewees were between the ages of 20–22) shop at both fast fashion retailers and second hand retailers. This is interesting for many reasons: one, it shows that there is some sort of shift happening; and two, there is something very appealing about second hand shopping to all participants. This is starting to show in the fast fashion realm as well, and the fast fashion brands are noticing and now having to face their sustainability challenge head on.

As recently as September 2019, Forever 21, one of the more popular fast fashion retailers that exists, filed for “Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in the U.S.” (BBC, 2019). For context, a Chapter 11 protection “postpones a U.S. company’s obligations to its creditors, giving it time to reorganize its debts or sell parts of the business” (BBC, 2019). Continuing on, the company stated that it “plans to exist most international locations in Asia and Europe” (BBC, 2019). The company also mentioned struggles “against rising competition from online rivals” (BBC, 2019). This goes back to the interview question regarding the rise of social media and how each interviewee mentioned that it most likely plays a role in either their own or other people’s styles.

Even more recently, Forever 21 got a second life in February of 2020. Thanks to a successful \$81 million deal to sell its business to Simon Property Group and Brookfield Property Partners along with Authentic Brands Group LLC, Forever 21 is aiming to be brought out of bankruptcy (Unglesbee, 2020). However, the main issue for Forever 21 and other fast fashion brands is that “shoppers, especially the younger ones who, thanks to their desire to have trendy styles on a budget are most

likely to buy fast fashion are increasingly concerned about sustainability” (Howland, 2020). A study done by the consultancy CGS Inc. in 2019 discovered that 41% of consumers are turning to secondhand apparel in order to save money or find more affordable items, with 13% saying they do so in order to reduce their environmental impact (CGS, 2019). More interestingly, 64% of Gen Z said they would pay more for sustainable products (CGS, 2019). The participants involved in said survey include more than 17,000 consumers coming from a variety of brands/retailers (CGS, 2019). More interestingly, these brands/retailers participants reported that only 5% “have considered using a subscription service to rent clothes and footwear”, with only 3% having used the service previously (CGS, 2019). Renting could be another future option to help brands/retailers produce less. Other sustainable clothing options include resell apps such as Depop, Poshmark, and eBay, as well as luxury resell brands such as companies like The RealReal, Rebag, and What Goes Around Comes Around, which are consignment shops that authenticate luxury items to be resold through their service. Other alternatives include stores like Buffalo Exchange, My Sister’s Closet, and Plato’s Closet. These stores only sell gently used clothing items that are brought in by anyone willing to donate. Those who do donate, and if their second-hand items are accepted by the store, are compensated with cash or store credit.

Now, the fast fashion sustainability complex now exists; companies like H&M and Zara have begun appealing to these more eco-friendly mindsets by placing sustainability in their four pillars for growth. Ten years strong, H&M has released a collection titled “Conscious” every spring (Howland, 2020). These collections have been made more recently with textiles such as recycled plastic and polyester, organic cotton, linen and silk, and more (Howland, 2020). However, the other complex still remains with the popularity of online shopping: concerns with additional packing and carbon emission from delivery. It is important to note that despite both of these, some shoppers will care more about these issues than others might. Interestingly, Thomari Serdari, a Professor in Luxury Marketing and Branding at NYU’s Stern School of Business, states, “Shoppers who are still in college and in liberal arts curriculum or focus on art and design have left fast fashion behind. Shoppers in the sciences or business still see fashion as entertainment and tend to spend more money on fast fashion” (Howland, 2020). This further shows how education might be linked to the difference in shopping behaviors.

In the end, these stores, despite their efforts, still are harming the environment. Paul Magel, who is part of the President Business Application Division at CGS, puts it best in his interview with Retail Dive; “The devil’s in the details. Speeding up the supply chain and making it more sustainable can co-exist, but fast fashion needs to appreciate the depth of feeling among consumers” (Howland, 2020). Resale seems to be on the rise, and these companies will need to adapt if they want to keep their customers and keep a livable planet.

LIIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

The limitation that influenced the results of this study the most were the participants that were chosen to be interviewed. Those interviewed were all people that I knew, which is a sample of convenience. There are also limits with age, gender, and location, and also the fact that those who were interviewed know that I am very vocal about the fast fashion industry. While I would not consider the participants to be my best friends, they are close enough to me that they know that I shop secondhand almost consistently for clothes. Moreover, one participant in particular (participant #1), was chosen specifically because she runs a very successful Depop shop, which now has over 35k followers. Depop, if curious, is a second-hand social media app, where anyone can create an account and sell clothing, shoes, and accessories; it could be comparable to an odd mix of both eBay and Instagram in one social media. Most importantly, being able to interview random strangers, I think, would have really given the best results, but this was hard to do when on a college campus. Many people have conflicting schedules and often do not want to take the time to go into an interview about their personal shopping habits, especially when there is no incentive to do so. Another bias factor would be the fact that those willing to participate were interested and were somewhat educated, if not really educated, on the topic.

Other limitations include the time span of this study. With more time, I might have been able to find a more diverse group of people to interview. Additionally, because I was interviewing people ages 20–22, scheduling the interviews was hard as many people are also enrolled in a university and need to find a time in which both of us could communicate and perform these interviews. The timespan for this interview process was about two months, but that required getting people who wanted to take time out of their schedules to help me with this project. The interviews themselves

were no longer than 20 minutes. Furthermore, I could have re-sent out my survey to more people to gather more data. Any future explorations of this study can distribute a better, maybe more informative survey and do a post-survey after a bit of fast fashion education. More, up to date articles within the literature review might also help improve this study. To take it even further, doing a case study on one or more subjects in following someone unaware of the fast fashion environmental damage, educating them, and then following up on their consumer habits post-education might be interesting.

CONCLUSION

This study's purpose was to look into why the fast fashion industry, despite its environmental harm, is still so successful. Additionally, it sought to find out why it caters to younger generations more often than older ones. From both the survey and the interviews, it can be noted that there is a shift that is forming, especially within Generation Z, towards being a more eco-conscious shopper. While yes, younger generations tend to be the most photo obsessed and seem more socially motivated online, they are slowly realizing the real dangers of climate change and want to live on a planet where their future families are able to survive. Conscious consumerism is on the rise, and my interviews have shown that. Going back to the literature review, there are various examples as to why more women tend to spend more money on clothes and how generational gaps play a difference in what and how much they consume.

This is a topic that is often overlooked, as people generally just wear and buy clothes every day without thinking about each individual item's environmental footprint. Education is critical, as education seems to be the driving link between shoppers who consistently purchase fast fashion and those who are eco-conscious. Before I became educated on the topic, I was purchasing fast fashion, mainly as my wardrobe. Now, I have not shopped fast fashion in over one and a half years. More education and maybe less social pressure from social media or the need to fit in could help lessen consumerism of fast fashion and might lead the industry away from its currently environmentally harmful business operations. Positive change can result from more knowledge and acting on it to change habits.

APPENDIX

These interview questions were...

- What is your name and where are you located?
 - How old are you?
 - How often would you say you go shopping in person (per month)?
 - How often would you say you shop online (online store websites, resell apps)?
 - **Do you know what the term “fast fashion” means?**
 - Do you know about any environmental effects of fast fashion?
 - **How would you describe your style, and what influences it?**
 - Do you think social media, such as Instagram, plays a role in your style? Or how often you purchase clothing?
 - Do you think there is celebrity influence that might impact your personal shopping?
 - Why do you like purchasing from fast fashion stores such as Forever 21, Zara, Urban Outfitters, etc....?
 - **Because *you are educated* on the impacts of the fast fashion industry, does that have any personal effect on the amount you purchase?**
- OR
- **Because *you are unaware of the impacts* of the fast fashion industry, would you be interested in learning about them?** Do you think with this new knowledge of the environmental harm the industry produces might change your outlook on where you purchase clothing from?

WORKS CITED

Associated Press. "Forever 21 to Sell Its Retail Business to a Group of Buyers for \$81 Million." *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 3 Feb. 2020, www.businessinsider.com/mall-owners-among-group-bidding-81-million-for-forever-21-2020-2.

Anguelov, Nikolay. "The Dirty Side of the Garment Industry | Fast Fashion and Its Negative Impact on Environment and Society." Taylor & Francis, Taylor & Francis, 4 Sept. 2015, www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781498712231

Barrett, E.C. "THE HIGH COSTS OF CHEAP FASHION: Graduate Students studies the market for ethical clothing" *Human Ecology*, vol. 45, no. 2, Fall 2017, <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-533094861/the-high-costs-of-cheap-fashion-graduate-student>

BBC News. "Forever 21 Files for Chapter 11 Bankruptcy Protection." *BBC News*, BBC, 30 Sept. 2019, www.bbc.com/news/business-49874688.

Bhardwaj, V., & Fairhurst, A. (2010). Fast fashion: Response to changes in the fashion industry. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 20(1), 165-173.

Binkley, Christina. "Green Fashion: Beyond T-Shirts." *Wall Street Journal – Eastern Edition*, Vol. 250, no.92, 18 Oct. 2007, p.D8.

Biondi, Annachiara. "Vogue Asks H&M: Can Fast Fashion Be Green?" *Vogue*, British Vogue, 7 December, 2018, www.vogue.co.uk/article/vogue-ask-hm-can-fast-fashion-be-green.

Birtwistle, G. and Moore, C.M. (2006), "Fashion Adoption in the UK: a replication study", paper presented at Conference, Brisbane.

Black, Sandy (2012) *The Sustainable Fashion Handbook*, New York, NY: Thames & Hudson

Bedgood, Larisa. "Consumer Shopping Trends and Statistics by the Generation: Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers and the Silents." *Business 2 Community*, 15 July 2019, www.business2community.com/trends-news/consumer-shopping-trends-and-statistics-by-the-generation-gen-z-millennials-gen-x-boomers-and-the-silents-02220370.

Computer Generated Solutions. "2019 Future of Fashion & Retail Consumer Survey." CGS, 23 Oct. 2019, www.cgsinc.com/en/resources/2019-future-fashion-retail-consumer-survey-infographic.

Curello, M. (2019, April 19). Fashion industry's carbon impact bigger than airline industry's. Retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/earth-day-2019-fashion-industrys-carbon-impact-is-bigger-than-airline-industrys/>.

Cutter, Kimberly. "On Thin Ice." *Marie Clarie (US Edition)*, Vol. 23, no. 9. September 2016, p.300.

"Fast Fashion Is the Second Dirtiest Industry in the World, Next to Big Oil." *EcoWatch*, 31 Jan. 2019, www.ecowatch.com/fast-fashion-is-the-second-dirtiest-industry-in-the-world-next-to-big--1882083445.html.

Gamboa, E. C. (1988). *Globalization of Industry Through Production Sharing*. In *Globalization of Technology: International Perspectives*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Gilliland, N. (2019, April 9). Four factors fueling the growth of fast fashion retailers. Retrieved from <https://econsultancy.com/four-factors-fuelling-the-growth-of-fast-fashion-retailers/>.

Giovannini, S.M. (2012), The influence of brand consciousness on young consumers' self-versus social consumption for luxury fashion products, Unpublished Master of Sciences Thesis, Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University

Gordon, G. (2017, September 19). Understanding the (Surprisingly Short) Life Cycle of a Fashion Trend. Retrieved from <https://www.savoirflair.com/fashion/237591/fashion-decoded-life-cycle-fashion-trend>.

Hanbury, M. (2019, July 2). Gen Z is likely photographed more often than anyone else – and it's fueling big changes in how they shop. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/gen-z-most-photographed-generation-changes-shopping-habits-2019-6?r=US&IR=T>.

Hodal, Kate. "Abuse Is Daily Reality for Female Garment Workers for Gap and H&M, Says Report." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 5 June 2018, www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/jun/05/female-garment-workers-gap-hm-south-asia.

Howland, Daphne. "Forever 21's New Owners Face a Slowdown in Fast Fashion." *Retail Dive*, 25 Feb. 2020, www.retaildive.com/news/forever-21s-new-owners-face-a-slowdown-in-fast-fashion/572715/.

Li, Z. (2003), "Functional clothing design for the active grey market", Proceedings of Include 2003 Conference, Royal College of Art, London. [Google Scholar]

Loroz, P. and Helgeson, J. (2013), "Boomers and their babies: an exploratory study comparing psychological profiles and advertising appeal effectiveness across two generations", *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 289-306. [Crossref], [Google Scholar] [Infotrieve]

Paton, Elizabeth. "In Milan, Fashion Walks the Green Carpet." The New York Times, 25 September. 2017, www.nytimes.com.2017/09/25/fashion/green-carpet-fashion-awards-milan.html

Rocha, Maria Alice V, et al. "Age, Gender and National Factors in Fashion Consumption." *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2005, www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/13612020510620768.

Roos, J. (2014, February 6). More evidence that capitalism never solves its crisis. Retrieved from <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2014-02-06/more-evidence-that-capitalism-never-solves-its-crises/>.

Saad, Shirine. "Coachella: Why All Music Festival-Goers Look the Same." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 19 Apr. 2018, www.cnn.com/style/article/festival-fashion-trends-style/index.html.

Sainato, M. (2019, January 1). 'We are not robots': Amazon warehouse employees push to unionize. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/jan/01/amazon-fulfillment-center-warehouse-employees-union-new-york-minnesota>.

"Sustainability at Reformation." *Reformation*, 2019, www.thereformation.com/pages/sustainability-at-reformation.

Sweatshop definition. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sweatshop>.

Talbot, Lindsay. "Fashioning the FUTURE." *Marie Claire (US Edition)*, Vol. 24, no. 8, August 2017, p.126.

ThredUp Team. "2019 Fashion Resale Market and Trend Report." *ThredUP*, 2019. www.thredup.com/resale.

UNECE. n.d."Fashion Is an Environmental and Social Emergency, but Can Also Drive Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals." UNECE, 2018, www.unece.org/info/media/news/forestry-and-timber/2018/fashion-is-an-

[environmental-and-social-emergency-but-can-also-drive-progress-towards-the-sustainable-development-goals/doc.html](#).