Impact of Sustainability Consciousness on Slow Fashion Behavior

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Today there is a growing push towards "ethical consumerism" in the fashion industry and consumers. While fast fashion has had a major hold on the industry recently, consumer preferences are shifting to slow fashion. In a slow fashion study, Fletcher (2010) noted, "slow fashion represents a vision of sustainability in the fashion sector based on different values and goals to the present day. It requires a change of infrastructure and a reduced throughput of goods." While slow fashion at the beginning was created as a movement towards environmental sustainability, it has developed to include a broader range of sustainability values from an environmental standpoint and a social and economic standpoint. These three different types of sustainability help form each individual's orientation to sustainable shopping behavior. Emphasizing a sustainable consumption model, Ertekin and Atik (2014) proposed a holistic view of sustainability from a social, environmental, and economic standpoint, which, in turn, provides a better quality of life for the coming generations and reduces negative environmental impact. They suggested some examples of slow fashion behaviors, such as buying fewer but more valuable items, buying recycled garments, upcycling old used clothes, and making clothes from waste. In a study of sustainable apparel consumption, Cho, Gupta and Kim (2015) found that sustainability consciousness positively influences environmental apparel purchase and sustainable apparel divestment. They also found that the ecologically conscious consumption style increases the likelihood of sustainable consumption. McNeill and Moore (2015) found that consumers tend to be aware of sustainable and ethical consumption; however, they lack sustainable and ethical fashion consumption practices. The discrepancy between awareness and actual behavior was consistent in the earlier study done by Szmigin, Carrigan, and McEachern (2009). Many participants of the survey reported they value ethical products but shop in a contradicting way regardless.

Based on the review of existing literature, we developed two primary research questions in this study: 1) what is the domain of slow fashion behavior? and 2) is the slow fashion behavior related to sustainability consciousness? To answer these questions, the present study aimed to 1) investigate slow fashion behaviors and develop a scale of slow fashion behavior and 2) examine the influence of sustainability consciousness, through the lenses of sustainability knowingness, attitudes and behaviors, on consumers' slow fashion behaviors. In this study, we adopted the theory of sustainability proposed by Ekardt (2016) and the sustainability consciousness model developed by Gericke, Pauw, Berglund, and Olsson (2018). The sustainability concept posited the three principles in the sustainability concept: economic, environmental, and social aspects of sustainability. Using the three sustainability principles from the theory of sustainability, the sustainability consciousness model proposed three constructs of consciousness: sustainability knowingness, sustainability attitude, and sustainability behavior. We adopted Gericke, Pauw, Berglund, and Olsson's (2018) sustainability consciousness constructs (knowingness, attitudes and behaviors) with three pillars of economic, environmental and social aspects of sustainability.

To identify the slow fashion behavior domain, an open-ended survey was conducted via the judgment sampling method, as suggested by Churchill (1979). The survey was distributed to 65 fashion merchandising majors and minors at a southeastern university in the US. The students were asked to answer the survey voluntarily during the class period. Three open-ended questions were presented: (1) in your opinion, what is the slow fashion movement? (2) What are the examples of slow fashion behavior? and (3) what slow fashion behaviors do you practice? At the beginning of the open-ended survey, a short description of the slow fashion concept was provided to avoid any confusion in answering the questions. From the responses to the three questions on slow fashion behaviors, we identified nine themes. We developed nine items to measure slow fashion behaviors based on the identified nine common themes of slow fashion behaviors. Both non-experts and experts examined the content validity of the initially developed items in the fashion merchandising areas to ensure each scale item's meaning. A structured online survey was created using Qualtrics and distributed through the university e-mail with their email-ids to examine the proposed relationship. Survey participants were asked questions measuring their slow fashion behaviors and sustainability consciousness (sustainability knowingness, attitudes, and behaviors). A total of 1855 responses were used in the data analysis. The majority of the respondents were female (73.7%) and age between 18 and 24 (76.3%), who are falling under Gen Z. The reliability coefficient of Cronbach's α was examined to ensure an acceptable level of internal consistency of each scale. The Cronbach's α for each variable revealed that .66 for slow fashion behaviors ($\underline{m}$ = 2.74), .93 for sustainability knowingness ($\underline{m}$ = 4.18), .91 for sustainability attitudes ($\underline{m}$ = 4.28), and .80 for sustainability behaviors ($\underline{m}$ = 3.41), respectively.

We used exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify each variable's underlying dimensions in the study. *Maximum likelihood factor analyses* with *oblimin* rotation with Kaiser normalization were used to extract the constructs for each variable of the study because they allow the factors to correlate, which is more realistic for social science research. F*actor analysis for slow fashion behavior revealed* only one factor (Cronbach's α = .74), with Goodness-of-fit Test of χ^2 = .38, df= 2, explaining 35.55% of the variance. Two factors were extracted for sustainability knowingness: *social knowingness and environmental knowingness*, with Goodness-of-fit Test of χ^2 = 11.73; df= 8, explaining 63.54% of the variance. Sustainability attitude revealed three constructs: *environmental attitude*, *social attitude,* and *governmental Attitude*, with Goodness-of-fit Test of χ^2 = 11.46; df= 7, explaining 61.41% of the variance. Sustainability behavior revealed only one factor, with the Goodness-of-fit Test of χ^2 = 5.370; df= 2, explaining 41.95% of the variance. Multiple regression analysis was implemented to examine the influence of all five sustainability consciousness aspects (*social and environmental knowingness*; *social, environmental and governmental attitudes*; and *sustainability behaviors*) on slow fashion behaviors. When all sustainability consciousness constructs were entered into the regression equation, the overall regression model was significant, (R^2 =.238), F (6, 1848) = 96.29, p <.001, indicating 23.8% of the variance in slow fashion behavior was explained by all five constructs of sustainability consciousness identified from the factor analyses. The test of the relative contributions of independent variables to explain the slow fashion behavior showed that *social knowingness* (β = |.12|, p<.001), *environmental knowingness* (β = |.08|, p<.01), and *sustainability behavior* (β = |.37|, p<.001) were significant determinants that influence slow fashion behavior. However, none of the sustainability attitude constructs (social, environmental and

governmental sustainability attitudes) were significant factors that influence slow fashion behavior. Through these results, it is apparent that there is a gap between sustainability attitude and behavioral practices like slow fashion. Our study suggests the importance of sustainability knowingness and consumer education on sustainability issues and proposes the need for policy development to respond to these challenges.

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