Pushed by Publicity, Guided by Influencers, and Driven by Consciousness: How Young Consumers Transition to Sustainable Fashion

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Introduction. The fashion industry, fueled by fast fashion brands, faces mounting criticism for its environmental degradation, resource overuse, and unethical labor practices (Mamun et al., 2025; Niinimäki et al., 2020). Fast fashion's quick-turnaround production cycle and lower-priced offerings heavily promote overconsumption and disposable shopping habits (Bläse et al., 2024). While media coverage of exploitative working conditions and environmental harm has prompted many young consumers to question their loyalty to fast fashion brands, many continue to purchase from them (McNeill & Moore, 2015). At the same time, a growing segment of young consumers is transitioning to sustainable fashion, driven by a heightened sense of personal responsibility and global awareness (Bläse et al., 2024). Thus, this study asks a critical question: What factors drive young consumers to switch from fast fashion to sustainable fashion consumption? Employing the Push–Pull–Mooring (PPM) framework (Bansal et al., 2005), this research integrates psychosocial factors such as negative publicity and influencer advocacy that shape fast fashion brand reputation as push factors, sustainability consciousness as a pull factor, and brand resilience and perceived greenwashing as mooring factors. By examining the direct effects of PPM factors as well as moderating effects of mooring factors, this study aims to clarify the mechanisms through which young consumers move away from fast fashion and toward more sustainable consumption choices. The findings expand existing knowledge on ethical consumerism and offer practical insights to fashion brands navigating increasing demands for social and environmental responsibility.

Literature Review. Originally proposed to explain causes for human migration, the PPM framework has been widely applied to understand consumer switching behavior (Bansal et al., 2005; Agrawal et al., 2022). In the fast fashion context, negative publicity of unethical or irresponsible business practices provokes moral outrage, prompting consumers to disengage from fast fashion, thus functioning as a push factor (Roozen & Raedts, 2020). Similarly, influencer advocacy, or endorsements and criticisms by social media personalities, can sway public perception and discourage fast fashion purchases, thus pushing consumers away from fast fashion (Li et al., 2024). In contrast, an awareness of social, environmental, and economic impacts, termed sustainability consciousness, can act as a pull factor that draws consumers toward ethical brands (Buerke et al., 2017). Additionally, brand resilience, defined as a willingness to forgive brand missteps, can either deter switching through loyalty or encourage it if consumers perceive the brand's sustainability initiatives as credible

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(Kang et al., 2023). Finally, perceived greenwashing, or skepticism about ethical or environmental claims, can make consumers stay skeptical or actively seek more transparent alternatives (Apaolaza et al., 2022). Therefore, we hypothesize that negative publicity (H1), influencer advocacy (H2), and sustainability consciousness (H3) each positively influence (push and pull factors) consumers' switching intention to sustainable consumption, whereas brand resilience (H4) and perceived greenwashing (H5) negatively influence it. Lastly, we propose that both brand resilience and perceived greenwashing moderate (mooring factors) the proposed relationships between push factors, pull factors, and switching intention to sustainable consumption (H6a–H6c; H7a–H7c).

Methodology. Data were collected via an online survey from a quota-based convenience sample of 472 U.S. consumers aged 18–43 who have purchased fashion products from a list of 15 top fast fashion brands in the last six months. Most participants were female (54%), aged 22–34 (63%), and 59% earned less than $60,000. About 60% shop for fashion products monthly or less. The survey used 5-point Likert scales with items adapted from existing scales (Apaolaza et al., 2022; Buerke et al., 2017; Cayban et al., 2023; Gericke et al., 2019; Kang et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2011; Quan et al., 2023; Woo et al., 2019) with acceptable reliabilities ($\alpha > .70$). After confirming the reliability and validity assumptions (Hair et al., 2021), the data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM).

Results. The bootstrapped PLS-SEM results indicated positive influences of Negative Publicity (NP) and Influencer Advocacy (IA) on young consumers' intention to switch to sustainable consumption ($\beta = 0.101$, $p < 0.01$ and $\beta = 0.105$, $p < 0.05$ respectively), supporting H1 and H2. Furthermore, Sustainability Consciousness (SC) emerged as a strong positive predictor of consumer switching intention ($\beta = 0.416$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3. Regarding the direct influence of mooring factors, Brand Resilience (BR), which was hypothesized as a negative mooring factor, had a significant positive influence on switching intention ($\beta = 0.283$, $p < 0.001$), thus, rejecting H4. Perceived Greenwashing (PG) did not exert significant influence on switching intention ($\beta = 0.033$, $p = 0.364$), rejecting H5. In terms of moderating effects, BR negatively moderated the effect of NP on switching intention ($\beta = –0.101$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H6a, indicating that higher resilience weakens the push from negative publicity. However, it did not moderate the influence of IA ($\beta = 0.004$, $p = 0.918$) and SC ($\beta = 0.055$, $p = 0.269$), rejecting H6b and H6c. Similarly, PG did not significantly moderate the effects of NP ($\beta = 0.028$, $p = 0.409$), IA ($\beta = 0.020$, $p = 0.602$), or SC ($\beta = 0.022$, $p = 0.596$) on switching intention; thus, H7a–H7c were not supported.

Conclusion. This study enriches the growing body of literature on sustainability transitions by demonstrating how external social forces (negative publicity, influencer advocacy) and internal psychological beliefs (sustainability consciousness) interact with mooring factors (brand resilience and perceived greenwashing) to shape young consumers' intention to move away from fast fashion. Theoretically, our findings challenge the traditional notion that brand resilience always anchors consumers to the status quo; instead, it can drive them toward sustainable alternatives, highlighting the

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need for a more nuanced understanding of brand-based loyalty in ethical consumption contexts. Practically, marketers and policymakers should leverage the power of social influencers and transparent communication to encourage this shift, while recognizing that brand loyalty can be harnessed when retailers genuinely improve their sustainability efforts. Future research could explore how cultural or regional factors moderate these relationships or investigate longitudinal data to capture how repeated negative publicity and evolving brand initiatives influence young consumers' sustainable behavior over time.

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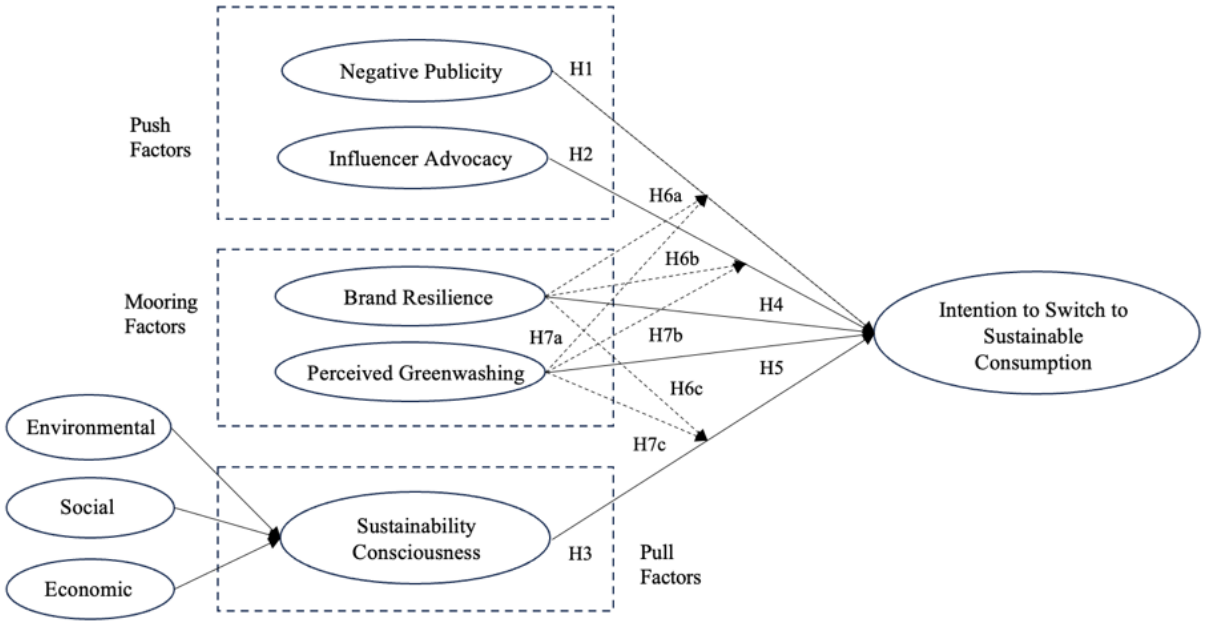

Figure 1. Research Model with Hypotheses

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