Fast fashion and its consequences

Millennials and Gen Z attitude towards fast fashion

Abstract

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Abstract

This study originates from the author's interest in exploring how younger generations navigate their lives on social media and in reality. Influencers play a significant role in pressuring Millennials and Gen Z to embrace fast fashion, an industry that hides its negative impact on the environment.

The goal of this research is to understand people's attitudes towards fast fashion and its environmental consequences. This involves exploring sub-questions such as what defines fast fashion, the trade-off between durability and affordability, and comprehending the environmental harm it causes.

Drawing on concepts like consumerism, climate change, and consumer perception, this thesis utilizes quantitative research by conducting a survey on social media to collect factual data. The survey allows participants to share their experiences anonymously, while additional insights are gathered from secondary sources including online platforms, the LUT library, and documentaries. Through this concise study, the aim is to provide valuable insights into the far-reaching effects of fast fashion on our planet.

Keywords

Fast Fashion, Millennials, Gen Z, Customer behaviour, Climate change

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1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The topic of this report flows naturally due to the complimentary passion that the author has. Foreseeing a long project, the author knew the research that was faced had to be focused on their interests, and the idea came right away. Fast fashion was the concept that was landed on.

In today's world the newer generations live two lives: social medial and actual reality. In social media we are peer-pressured to act a certain way and to copy the "Influencers": title given to public figures that have reached a certain number of followers and have the power to influence their daily lives. Influencers in social media are people who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic (Geyser 2023).

To act successful in social media does not translate to being wealthy in reality, and that is the cause that has driven the latest generation to take advantage of fast fashion: an industry that manufactures items in developing countries where the cost of labor is low to keep the prices affordable. One side of the story they are ignoring is no longer easy to sweep under the rug as all this fast fashion industries are damaging the planet and the people that work in the factories.

1.2 Objectives

The purpose of this study is to research the attitude that millennials and gen z have towards the fast fashion industry and how their shopping habits impacts the environment.

The aim of the research is to establish a link between the latest generations shopping habits and the damage the manufacturing industry has caused the environment. Through this study the author wants to undeniably demonstrate how, even the smallest of purchases, in the fast fashion manufactories can damage the planet. It might take less than a minute to buy from one of these companies, but the detriment one article of clothing can cause on the environment will take years to repair.

1.3 Main research question

How do Millennials and Gen Z perceive fast fashion and how their shopping habits impact the environment?

To properly answer to the main question of this research, the following sub-questions are composed

- What is fast fashion?
- Buy expensive and durable or cheap and short-lived?
- How is fast fashion damaging the environment?

1.4 Research Limitations

The limitations of the research are the following: size of the research group. The targeted audience will be approached through a survey created digitally and shared on WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook accounts, ensuring anonymity of the respondents. This sample cannot be considered significant or representative of the entire Millennial and Gen Z population, but can only indicate a trend, give an idea of the authors network's shopping habits and behavior towards fast fashion. This thesis is also limited by the area of residency of the respondents, as a result of the survey being shared via social media accounts. The reached audience will encompass individuals located geographically, including Finland and Indonesia.

With this research, however, one can have an indicative idea of how these two generations located in different countries approach the idea of purchasing clothing and if they are aware of the damage that it causes to the environment. This research can be useful as the beginning of a broader assessment to deeper understand how to influence or extend the knowledge to future generations all over the world of harmful shopping habits and the immediate repercussion they have on their surroundings and hopefully preventative measures.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

This thesis will be based on the concept of consumerism, climate change and consumer perception and behavior and fast fashion, discussed in the second chapter in correlation to the topic.

Some key concepts that will be discussed in the thesis are the persuasion of the so called "influencers," the new discovered hobby of the new generation to focus on the superfluous objects and climate change.

1.6 Research Methodology and Data Collection

The research methodology is the process a researcher uses to create a study that will produce valid and reliable results. This process must be designed carefully to address the research goals (Jensen & Warren 2020).

The following paper is a result of empirical research: it starts from questions, or the need to know explicitly translated into sets of questions about reality. Contrary to a very widespread idea, the purpose of scientific activity is not to explain the real but to answer questions about the real. Therefore, it would be preferable to speak of empirical research as an answer to questions of knowledge rather than a solution to theory problems. (Bouchrika 2022.)

Before collecting useful information to elaborate the answer to a question, the problem must be explicitly formulated, i.e., the several factors potentially relevant to the problem must be identified and hypotheses must be advanced about the simple or joint effects of these factors. In doing this, the researcher uses a reference theory, and it is on the basis of it and of his own intuitions that he puts forward hypotheses of viable solutions. (Bouchrika 2022.) Indeed, any empirical investigation presupposes a theory (be it explicit or implicit) which consists of an interrelated set of concepts, definitions, and propositions capable of providing a systematic view of phenomena by specifying the relationships between the variables, in order to explain and predict the phenomena themselves.

To approach a problem there are two opposing ways: deductive and inductive methods. The deductive method proceeds by deduction implying the act or process by which a conclusion is reached through reasoning. In particular: the logical process in which, given certain premises and certain rules that guarantee its correctness, a conclusion follows as logically necessary. (Bradford & Weisberger 2023.) Generally used as opposed to induction, the term is also defined as the reasoning that comes to particular propositions starting from general propositions.

The inductive method, on the other hand, is defined as: logical procedure, opposite to that of deduction, whereby from the observation of particular cases one rises to universal affirmations reasoning, arguing, proving by induction. In the experimental sciences, empirical or incomplete induction, the enunciation of a law valid in general is based on a succession of observations, on the assumption that certain characteristics of regularity are valid in the phenomenon studied. (Bradford & Weisberger 2023.)

Inductive reasoning will be implemented throughout this thesis as the author will research small groups and generalize the concept that will be found as the conclusion.

1.6.1 Research Methodology

The research methodology implemented in this study is quantitative.

The process of quantitative research involves collecting data (Bhandari 2021) from various sources and analyzing it using numerical methods. To get this calculation, statistical

mathematical tools are utilized. This study is important because it provides hard data that can be used to understand how widespread the search for projectable results is.

Quantitative research will allow for numerical representation of the respondents and their level of awareness regarding previous research linking the damage to the environment and its pollution to fast fashion companies.

The survey designed encompasses questions to which answers will identify every respondent into a generation and of their level of knowledge regarding fast fashion and the impact every purchase has on the environment. Following the results of the survey will allow the creation of a diagram on Excel illustrating the trend of the answers.

1.6.2   Data Collection Methods

Primary sources are firsthand accounts of an event or topic from people who were directly involved in it. In the natural and social Sciences, in addition, empirical studies are often the primary sources, i.e., research based on the results of an experiment or direct observation of a fact or event. Empirical studies typically publish their findings in academic articles or at conferences. (Delozier 2022)

Secondary sources provide an analysis or interpretation of primary sources. They can cover the same topic but offer a distinct perspective that is based on interpretation and analysis. (Bowling Green State University 2021.)

In the following thesis the primary source used will be a survey designed to gather the firsthand data needed to elaborate for the study. The survey will be shared via social media accounts of the authors to unsure anonymity. Following the creation of the questionnaire the author will generate a post in WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook accounts with the link. The social network, in which the author is part of, will visualize the post and decide whether to answer the survey or not. In the eventuality of the data collected being minimal, another method of expanding the survey will then be devised.

Regarding the secondary sources the author will be referring to reliable data found on online server, LUT library, documentaries and previous scientific researches.

2   Theoretical Framework

2.1   Generations division

The author is talking about generations to outline the dreams, aspirations, ways of thinking and acting of categories of people united by the fact that they were born in a certain period. In fact, age, together with sex and economic conditions, is one of the factors that immediately and simply allow us to provide useful clues for general classifications. When it comes to socio-cultural and market trends, the concept of generations helps us to understand people's behaviors and attitudes. (Iberdrola 2022.)

The fact of being born in a certain historical moment, in fact, has a decisive influence on one's way of thinking, acting, communicating and significantly affects the habits, memories and tastes of the person during their natural life. Each generation has its peculiarities and aspirations derived by the social construct of the moment they live in on this planet. These are generalizations, but it helps to build useful models for certain purposes (be they scientific, social, or marketing).

2.1.1   Millennials

That of the Millennials is the generation of those born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s. With a good approximation, therefore, by 2022 they are between 26 and 41 years old. From consumption to expectations regarding the world of work, studies and research have drawn portraits of Millennials over time, often helping to create false myths.

One of the first factors of confusion is the time range within which to frame the generation of Millennials. Different demographers, in fact, have set very different years as critics to define who is a Millennial. To clarify, more recently, a study by the Pew Research Center that defines Millennials as anyone born between 1981 and 1996. The two years of reference are not accidental, but arise from a series of political considerations, social, economical. In all of the different studies one peculiar factor for Millennials never change, and that is how old they were on 11 September 2001: considering the criterion used by the research institute as valid, the Millennials had been between 5 and 20 years old; this means that they were big enough - continue from the Pew - to understand the historical significance of the event they were experiencing. (Dimock 2019.)

Millennials, however, is not the only expression used to refer to those born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s. For the scientific world above all, in fact, they are members of Generation Y (or, in short, Gen Y): the previous and subsequent generations are cataloged respectively as generation x and generation z. Especially the journalistic world, however,

has often referred to Millennials using the expression Generation Me to underline how they are more assertive and have more self-confidence than previous generations. (Stein 2013.)

As mentioned, it is not easy to draw a portrait of the Millennials without risking running into distortions and false myths, especially as the characteristics of the members of these generation change considerably from country to country. It can be said for sure, however, that the average education level of Millennials is higher than that of earlier generations, which affects their expectations regarding the workplace and information access. Additionally, due to historical and social circumstances, Millennials are the most culturally diverse generation and are the first to be fully comfortable with digital technologies and environments. (Dimock 2019.)

2.1.2 Consumption Characteristics

Although with a lower income than their peers of the previous generation (they are sometimes referred to as the Eternal Interns), Generation Y has a considerable amount of money to spend and makes up a significant portion of consumers. Their preferences and behaviors are very different from those of previous generations, and they have a notable impact on current market trends. (Mandhlazi, et al., 2013.)

Millennials have affirmed the Consumer Power: they are experienced and demanding buyers, who do not hesitate to take the initiative, often unable to wait; every consumption practice must be built around the person, tailored to his or her personality and desires, so the product / brand must be functional to the affirmation of oneself in the world and with others.

The consumption behavior of Generation Y is in fact distinguished by a significant "nomadism of choices", linked to individual personal evaluations and hardly to the fashion of the moment or to loyalty to a brand.

From travel to clothes, online shopping has become the norm for them: speed, access to products from all over the world, discounted prices, comparison possibilities. Platforms like Amazon and Zalando have revolutionized the approach to shopping. Driven by the desire of uniqueness; not only is creativity their main characteristic, but it is also what they look for most in a brand: their favorite brands are those that adopt creative, smart, innovative, and transparent communication. (Inside Marketing 2022.)

A "distinctive consumption style" has been increasingly affirmed in this generation, which creates an original mash up of materials from different periods and cultural contexts: we are faced with more attentive consumers, able to choose specific contents and formats with

competence , also through the selective recovery of the past, in a creative way. There is an exaltation of the uniqueness of the products and their originality.

Some of the key resources of this generation are the ability to adapt easily and quickly to any type of change and an open and flexible mindset: for this reason, Millennials are no longer looking for just a product, but an experience. This research, carried out mainly in the travel and events sector, also extends to other fields, for example that of catering. Suffice it to say that riding this wave, a successful reality like Airbnb has reinvented itself by also dedicating itself to experiences for its customers. (Inside Marketing 2022.)

Creativity, creating relationships and the need for continuous connection are all factors that combine to define personal identity. The choices of this generation are almost never random, but most of the time they respond to the need to fight isolation and tell others around them.

2.1.3 Gen Z

Generation z, in short Gen Z, is the generation that encompasses people born between 1997 and 2012. Currently, in 2023 they are between 11 and 26 years old, and the first generation to not have experience the world before technology which it cannot help but influence how they live their daily lives, consume, and view work. (Dimock 2019.)

The first expression with which the journalistic world especially addressed these very young people born today was Homeland Generation. Growing up in the aftermath of the September 11 attack on the Twin Towers and in a climate of fear and distrust, it was initially believed that they might be members of a generation less inclined to travel and that they considered staying at home safer. Later, other more suitable expressions were sought to better describe the generation following that of the Millennials: for this reason, adopting a simple progressive order, we began to address the very young people born between the second half of the 90s and the 10s of the 2000s. as Generation Z or, for short, Gen Z. (Inside Marketing 2022.)

Alternatively, it began to refer to today's teenagers as, simply, post-millennials: only later, with the emergence of a new generation following Gen Z, the so-called alpha generation , the term became an umbrella term to refer, more generically, to all generations following that of the Millennials. In the meantime, someone had already coined the expression iGeneration (in short iGen) to emphasize the familiarity of these digital natives with high-tech devices. (Inside Marketing 2022.)

It is an undeniable fact that Generation Z is the first generation born after the invention of the internet. Thus, for Gen Z, the possession of a smartphone often represents the true rite of passage from youth to adulthood. According to the Pew Research Center, nearly three-quarters of today's teenagers own a cell phone, with only 12% not owning one. It is difficult to imagine that any of these tweens' daily activities do not involve the technologies that they carry with them all day: the iGeneration would be the first for whom the distinction among online and offline, between reality and virtual life, has lost meaning, and the first to constantly live in the virtual world. (Meola 2022.)

On more than one occasion, the experts questioned the risks that came from this dependence of the little ones on digital technologies and environments and the effects that this state of constant connection could have on perceived happiness and satisfaction, if not on the mental health of teenagers. The results were different, not always in perfect agreement, except when it came to showing precisely how for the very young of Gen Z it was impossible to distinguish their online life from what happens as soon as they disconnected.

Any portrayal of Generation Z that limits itself to describing its relationship with technology, however, cannot be said to be complete. There are so many other factors that should be taken into consideration. Like the fact that being raised as children of Gen X in an era of profound economic crisis, the one that followed September 11, would have made them more responsible, determined, even more thrifty individuals than the immediately preceding generation.

More generally, today's adolescents would be more informed and less inclined to take risks: this is demonstrated, for example, by a markedly decline in alcohol consumption today compared to the 1990s. In a school system like the American one, then, Gen Z would also be the one most concerned with looking for school loans that allow them to complete the chosen study path. We cannot fail to consider that, like that of Millennials, it is undoubtedly a decidedly multi-cultural generation with political ideas that cannot ignore support for same-sex marriages, LGTBQ rights and gender equality. Although few of them have already entered the job market, some traits already seem to distinguish the Gen Z career approach from that of other generations: more open to considering their careers globally, in the choice of company or business to work for, its members do not consider salary aspects as priorities as much as aspects related to personal satisfaction and opportunities for growth. (Meola 2022.)

2.1.4   Consumption Characteristics

With or without Greta Thunberg, the people took to the streets to protest against climate change. They have brought upcycling back into fashion and teach mothers, fathers, and perennials how to use online platforms for buying and selling vintage clothing, bags, and shoes. Yet, with great probability, they are also the same ones who buy low-cost clothes from fast fashion giants. And that they are not to blame, if they do, because they are the 20-year-old girls and boys of Gen-Z. And because sustainable fashion has a big problem, which must also be solved soon: it is too expensive. (Twigg 2022.)

There are many fast fashion brands where it is possible to grab a dress that mimics those seen on the catwalks of the known names in fashion. It is possible to buy a T-shirt for less than 5 euros, a dress for less than 10, but sustainability, in these brands, is not taken into account.

20-year-olds must be given many merits that previous generations do not belong. Gen Z has contributed to the incrementation of upcycling practices and the gain in popularity of thrift shopping. The fact that Gen-Z loves using garment-buying applications and accessories online is indicative of them having metabolized the concept of the circular economy. In this instance, it would be proof they know that buying used in excellent condition is one of the most sustainable ways to shop. (Twigg 2022.)

2.2   Consumerism

Consumerism is defined as an economic-social phenomenon typical of industrialized societies, consisting in the indiscriminate purchase of consumer goods, incited, and exasperated by the publication of modern advertising strategies, which make fictitious needs appear as real, in order to continuously expand production. It is the root of modern society and at its core lies the belief that material objects are the source of happiness, which is the pursuit of many. The concept of achieving happiness and wellbeing through the consumption of goods and services and creating the illusion of dependance on the materialistic aspect of life is called consumerism (Hayes 2021).

Consumerism is the premise of this thesis. The topic focuses on the consumeristic trait that the latest generations have exhibited and drawn attention to, in recent years during the global pandemic through social media.

2.2.1 Customer Perception

Customer perception is at the base of every consuming act, leading the buyer in choosing one company that has attracted their attention rather than a company they have never heard of, when it concerns a purchase. Customer perception is how customer feels about your product and brand (Chambers 2023).

According to its definition, customer perception is a marketing term in which is encompassed the apprehension or awareness in the context of the sensitive experience or the possibilities or availability of a customer's intuition about a company or its services. The customer's perception is the overall opinion, thought and feelings about a company and its commodities. The way a customer perceives a brand or product is based on the customer's individual selection, organization, and interpretation of the information they take in. This process happens in various stages. (Team 2021.)

The consumer forms an understanding of the commodity based on the information they have gathered, creating a mental image. This is formed when they see commercials, social media feedback, customer reviews, promotions, and so on. The entire process begins when a consumer sees or learns about a particular commodity. The cycle is repeated until the consumer sets on an opinion.

Everything a company does, has an influence on how customers perceive it. Every single interaction the company has with the outside world and the market influences the client perception, moreover, it includes how items are displayed at the point of sale, the visual impact of the brand, the commercials created, and the discounts provided. A happy customer is one who is content with the purchasing experience. (Team 2021.)

Consumer perception can have extreme repercussions on a scale from positive to negative on a brand. The purchasing steps the consumer passes create the perception that they will have, for example receiving the products that reflect the exact specified details as advertised, or the timing of the delivery, if it was conducted quickly or it took longer than stated. In the instance the company demonstrates effort into respecting what they advertise the customer perception will navigate towards the positive side of the scale. (Chambers 2023.)

The scale navigates towards a negative perception on the opposite case. The business does not provide the buyer with an enjoyable experience, for example the bough products are defective, the return policy is scarce or not provided at all, the customer service does not uphold the standards, or the advertisement was false, and so on. To maintain positive

customer perception, your brand can't settle with a mediocre or poor customer service operation. Strengthen your customer support with a combination of tactics. (Inabo 2023.)

Customers get a poor opinion of a brand when they have an unpleasant experience, such as defective products, no returns, no after-sales assistance, etc. The perception of the customer would improve, in the instance the organization tries to nourish the connection between customers and the company itself allowing them the creating of a competitive advantage. (Inabo 2023.)

In this sub-chapter the concept of the so called "influencers" is added. An influencer is someone with authority, knowledge, or a following in a specific niche who can affect the purchasing decisions of others. They typically interact with their audience on a regular basis and can have a significant impact on what people buy. The size of the following depends on the importance of the topic in the modern day society, and the size of the niche. (Geyser 2023.)

2.2.2 Consumer Behavior

According to some studies conducted in recent years in the field of marketing, it has been shown that analyzing consumer behavior can bring concrete and lasting gains over time for your business, if done properly. Analyzing customer behavior allows businesses to better understand their customers and identify preferences, needs, and motivations. With this data, businesses can effectively tailor products and services to meet their customer's base. (Schneider 2023.)

This type of study consists in analyzing and understanding what, where and why consumers buy the various products both online and in a physical store. Therefore, aiming individually and collectively by investigating the purchasing, research, and consumption habits of each individual to identify the trends of the diverse types of customers.

Consumer behavior is the study of how consumers choose, use, and dispose of products and services. It includes understanding how consumers' emotional, mental, and behavioral responses affect their choices. (Radu 2021).

Consumer behavior, also referred to as purchasing behavior, is the set of reasons that push the consumer to purchase any product/service offered by a company. The main factors affecting consumer behavior are often of a cultural, social, personal, and psychological nature origins. It is widely taken advantage of by organizations that desire to engage the clientele into a loyal relationship with the brand, to evoke an emotional response at the sight

of the brand itself. The loyalty of the clientele brings forth a desire of consuming their products and assessing the latest ones. (Decker 2018).

2.3 Fast Fashion

Fast fashion is a concept created in the last decades; it is a trend in the fashion industry that causes the styles considered fashionable to be on and out of trend in as short as a week. To adapt to this trend the manufacturing industry creates garments at a fast pace and low quality, to satisfy the needs of the marketplace. The retailers involved have revolutionized the more traditional way of Fashion. Traditionally fashion trends were seasonal and introduced twice a year for summer/spring and autumn/winter, but currently to these trends more and more are added on a weekly schedule. (Stanton 2021.)

What fast fashion is can be described as an involvement of different processes among which design, marketing and manufacturing can be found, to work towards the creation of substantial amount of clothing. It all is possible due to the low-quality material used in this process, making it possible to break into the market quickly and offering trendy clothes inexpensively, satisfying a substantial portion of the demand. (Stanton 2021.)

At the base of this industry movement there is a highly effective supply chain management that creates the conditions for the garments to be designed, created, and transported to the retailer store in an exceptionally brief amount of time. Thanks to the supply chain the retail stores are always stoked with the latest fashion, which ensures the return of the consumers leading to a raise in sales and subsistence of the industry.

Fast fashion shops have had to gain a deeper understanding of their target market in order to quickly manufacture a product that is cost-effective and reacts to ever-changing consumer demands. The designers have created a commodity that resembles the high fashion trends, but can be found at conveniently low price, making it accessible at a much larger scale of consumers that do not possess the means to purchase form luxurious fashion brands. Moreover, to keep the prices at the lowest they can be, outsourcing is taken advantage of, and garments are produced in developing countries where the regulations are different, and the labor cost is tremendously low.

Considering the younger generations, the pressure they feel to always have the latest fashion and be trendy, cost is a key factor of their purchases. In fact, cost of living has increased exponentially for Millennials and Gen Z, making quick and easy purchases from the fast fashion world an incredibly attractive option. (Gecseg 2020.)

2.4   Green Marketing

Green Marketing is defined as the promotion of commodities using as leverage or point of attraction for the customer its eco-friendly way of being produced or the environmentally safe features it has (Ward 2020.).

Planet Earth, form the industrialization onward, has been subjected to pollution in every element it is made of, water pollution, earth and air, damage created by humanity itself. From the 90's the connection between the increasing levels of pollution and the industrial sector has been made. This has led many companies nowadays to reconsider their manufacturing processes and act into making the operations sustainable in time without negative externalities, such as toxic waste or leakages of chemicals into the environment. Furthermore, buyers are becoming increasingly aware of the environmental damage that companies have always hidden due to regulations and show a preference for eco-friendly products. (Pulse 2021.)

2.4.1   Greenwashing

Greenwashing is the consequence of environmentally conscious consumers willing to purchase exclusively sustainable and eco-friendly products and companies that are not willing to lose their customers nor investing into creating an actual environmentally friendly product. It is a technique of advertising intended to deceit consumers into buying a product positively promoted, while the environmental impact is minimized. (Corcione 2021.)

As the world progresses, more and more people are interested in being eco-friendly which means that they will only purchase products that will not harm the environment. Taking this into notice, companies around the globe are utilizing greenwashing as their technique or tactic into appearing as more of a sustainable company, when in reality it is an incorrect representation to what they really are.

The Greenwashing term has been about since the sixties, however only after the American environmentalist Jay Westerveld used the term in a 1986 essay it became popular. At its core, the term is intended to reflect the act of suffusing a "green" layer on top of the product, to cover with environmentally friendly terms a product that does not possess such features. (Team G. Q. 2021.)

Greenwashing is a widespread practice in the fashion industry, where false advertisement and ambiguity are used to reach costumers and hold their interest. Employing this technique, brands and organizations state their allegations without facts, enabling them to

continue vending their goods in absence of factual change in their product or manufacturing process never impacting the environmental change. (Mehar 2021.)

2.4.2 Climate Change

In 2021 a report conducted by the World Economic Forum revealed that the fashion industry, including its supply chain, are at the third place on the rank of the planet's largest polluters, with a 5% emission of the world's greenhouse gases alone. The fashion industry has registered the equivalent of 1.2 billion tons of CO_2 into the atmosphere alone, which is more than the aviation and shipping industries combined. (Climate Council 2021.)

The global consumption of clothes, as of 2019, has reached 62 million metric tons of fabric as shown in the latest report. Although it appeases the economy the pace the apparel is being purchased and tossed has sped up. The lifecycle of a single clothing item has been reduced to few washing cycles due to the low quality to maintain low costs. The level of clothing consumed in the latest decades has skyrocketed creating a secondary issue. Over time, due to the fact that the end of the life cycle for most of the low-quality items is a landfill, these tend to accumulate creating a situation of discomfort for the community settled around it. The inhabitants of these areas are forced to dispose of the toxic waste, toxic substances and navigate in the landfills surrounded by poisonous gases. (Le 2020).

Water consumption is revealed to be another topic linked to the fashion industry, in fact 79 trillion liters per year are utilized. Circa 30% of the microplastic pollution in the oceans comes mostly from the textile industry. It happens from the discharge of the polluted water from the factories generated during the dyeing treatment of the textiles. Furthermore, copious amounts of textile waste are produced adding to the, before mentioned, landfill problem or is burnt altogether with the created but not sold products. (Niinimäki, et al. 2020).

The fast fashion industry is causing substantial damage to the planet due to its current size and shows no sign of decrease. The value of the fast fashion market globally is estimated at $68'634.9 million as of 2020 and so far, shows no sign of regression, but keeps increasing. (PR Newswire 2021).

2.5 Influencers

An influencer, is a person who inspires or guides the action of others. An individual who holds the authority to affect the opinions or spending behaviors of other subjects due to his own publicity, position, and influence in relation to a reference public. It is critical to emphasize that these individuals are not simply means of interaction, but rather creators of

interpersonal relationships that the companies with whom they collaborate tend to exploit for a fee in order to achieve their marketing and, thus, sales objectives. (Geyser 2023.)

Industry leaders gain authority by virtue of their experience, culture, position, skills, or qualifications with respect to a specific topic. Usually, the authority of Influencers increases based on their position, office or esteem they enjoy. Until recently, established celebrities were the types of Influencers - also known as Testimonials - most used by companies for their advertising campaigns. Despite the fact that they still have an important market share in the sector, their role as Influencer is flanked and, often, surpassed by other figures who may be even less known, especially for the less young generations. (Geyser 2023.)

In general, the term Influencer identifies a user of Social Network platforms who owns

- a large number of followers (followers)
- consolidated credibility
- in terms of effectiveness for the client company, high rates of social engagement, or the ability to involve their users in the interaction or sharing of their content. (Geyser 2023.)

2.5.1 Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is a branch of marketing which, through interactive communication strategies, aims to generate visibility on digital media defined as social, due to their ability to involve large audiences of diverse types (LocaliQ, 2022).

The main goal that a company seeks to accomplish with the use of Social Media Marketing in general, is to engage with potential customers and share information regarding its products or services, through the publication of content, in order to increase brand or product awareness.

Currently, Social Media Marketing is one of the most effective tools that companies have at their disposal to try to retain, first of all, their regular or potential customers and, subsequently, to increase the sales of their products or services. In fact, after an appropriate analysis of the target and potential objectives based on marketing strategies, the experts of communication and digital marketing can develop for example Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter accounts, trying to promote particular goods and services and, therefore, to generate new business contacts (the so-called leads) or, also, to increase traffic to the website. (LocaliQ 2022.)

To operate in the most effective way possible, organizations and companies try to establish more or less lasting relationships with various categories of users depending on the sector,

so that they can share the same corporate interests transmitted in the various social media with them. Influencers are the keystone of this process, as they function as intermediaries between companies or brands and followers. (Geyser 2023.)

The mechanic of the relationship between influencer and brands is the following: two ways they can get in contact. The first, and more traditional way for small influencers, the creator will get in contact with a company of which product is interested in and show their platform to the organization. If the company is interested in promoting their products on the platform of the creator the following interactions are more detailed and aimed at the satisfaction of both parties, usually leading to a signed contract.

The second option occurs when a company is introduced to the influencer via social media due to the big platform and social engagement that a specific influencer has in a specific niche. In this case the company offers free products to the creator and either pays for a good review or rewards the creator for it by gifting the products, showcased on the page of the influencer will then create a positive impression on the followers and components of the niche, generating traction and sales for the company. (Geyser 2023.)

The most common case is that of clothes or accessories provided by brands to Influencers, sometimes even on loan, so that they can wear them and publish posts accompanied by photos, videos, or hashtags.

If managed correctly, social interaction with an increasingly vast audience of users can increase customer loyalty and social media advocacy, (Gomez 2021) i.e. the positive word of mouth that is created on Social Networks through comments, shares, likes, hashtags, which in turn can lead to an increase in followers and, ultimately, customers of the company or organization.

2.5.2 Role of an Influencer

The influencer has become a key figure in marketing and digital communication, considering his notoriety and his ability to influence the public which, consequently, constitutes the reference audience for an effective dissemination of information on products, services, topics, etc. For his communication, the influencer can use all social tools - blog, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube channel, Twitter - or just someone in particular, keeping his activity on these networks constant. Among others, for example, the following can be cited as integral parts of the role of the Influencer in digital communication

- The activities of opinion leaders, where they express their opinions on assorted topics.

- Explorer activities, where they communicate their experiences after trying products or using services.
- Broadcaster activity, where they announce news or amplify messages.

3 Empirical Research and Data Collection

Empirical research is defined as a study paper that follows a rigid structure beginning with the research question, observation and recording of the data needed and analyzation of the information gathered in order to achieve knowledge. Empirical research is defined as any study whose conclusions are exclusively derived from concrete, verifiable evidence. The term empirical basically means that it is guided by scientific experimentation and/or evidence. Likewise, a study is empirical when it uses real-world evidence in investigating its assertions. (Bouchrika 2023.)

To gather the information needed for the study and research the method that was used is quantitative method.

3.1 Methods of collection

It was previously stated that the method chosen for this research to attain the data needed is a survey, which has been designed for the specific goal to procure information regarding fast fashion, shopping habits and environment awareness. The results of the intended data collection method will be elaborated to identify a general trend, if so, is the case, or the lack of thereof.

Based on the theoretical part of this thesis, the survey questions were created. The survey consists of 22 questions, 6 multiple choice 3 linear scale, and the rest open answer questions. Question number 1 aims to identify which generation the respondent belongs to, while the rest of the questions aimed to assess the awareness of the respondents, such as their recognition against sustainable fashion and the environment, fast fashion and the issues that come along with it, respondents shopping habits, and the last question refers to greenwashing, whether or not respondents are conscious about this topic.

The survey was created using the platform Google Forms, where the questions were then spread throughout social media platforms such as, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. This was executed by posting in different groups such as Beauty & Style, Nordic Style & Beauty and Sustainable Fashion Collective in Facebook, the authors personal post on Instagram and the authors friends and family through WhatsApp. The objective of the posts through different social media platforms was to reach as many generations as possible from different parts of Finland. A total of 48 people answered the survey during a 2-week period.

The results of the survey will be analyzed as well as explained throughout this section of the thesis. In the Appendix 1 part, the survey questions will be revealed.

3.2   Data analysis

The survey has an array of questions with two different aims. The fist group of questions will identify the respondents, and the second will assess their awareness towards Fast Fashion and its sustainability. The order in which the questions were inserted in the survey is not relevant to the objective of collecting responses.

Respondents' information

The first question's aim is to identify the generation the respondents are from. This question was inserted in the survey to determine whether the target group for this survey was reached. As shown in Figure 1, the majority of the answers were delivered by Millennials and Gen Z, reaching the goal.

The following questions were inserted in the survey to further identify the targeted demographic and its preferences.

Please select the generation that you belong to
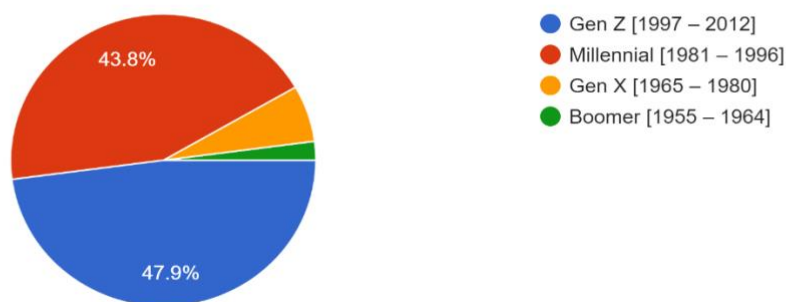48 responses

Figure 1 Respondents generation

As shown in Figure 2 and 3 the vast majority of the respondents prefer to invest in quality clothing. This investment is sustained due to the fact that one article of clothing that costs more money is expected to have a longer life expectancy. A long life expectancy for clothing is considered to be five years.

The life cycle of clothes is determined as well by the care and usage of the owner. However, in some cases, people outgrow their clothes and in Figure 3 it is shown the majority prefer to donate the clothes. By donating clothes people ensure that the articles of clothing continue their life cycle, avoiding waste.
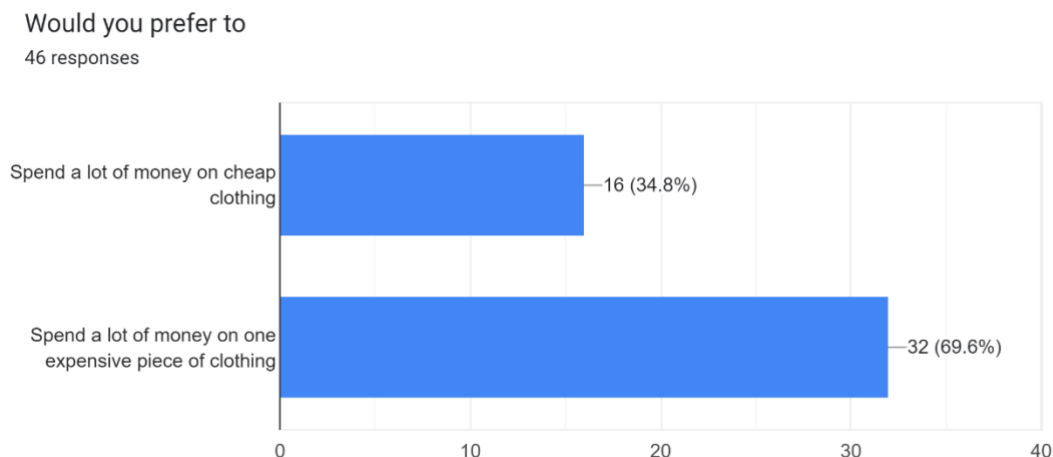
Would you prefer to
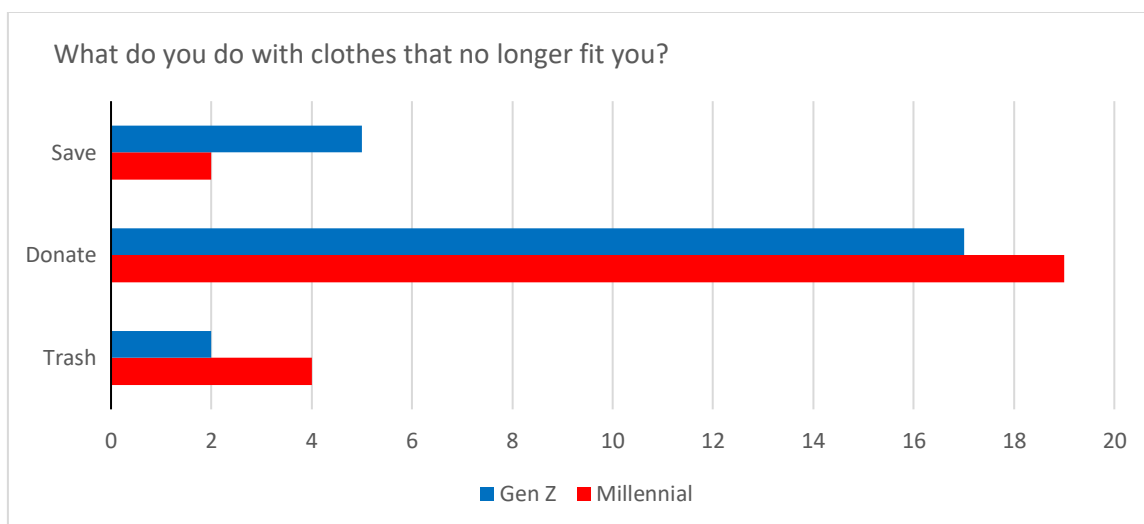46 responses

Figure 2 Purchasing preference.

Figure 3 Graph representing the life cycle of clothes.

In Figure 4 it is possible to see the recycling habits of the respondents. It is interesting to see that almost all of Gen Z responding to the survey do recycle, with the expect of one single person that does not. It is more common to not recycle between the respondents pertaining to Millennials, with one of them writing in the survey that they feel it is a scam.

It is important to note the remark made in the survey, as it shows the level of awareness of how recycling works and why it is implemented in households, is quite low. To this day some people belonging to older generations remain convinced that dividing their waste in order for it to be correctly disposed of is a futile effort.
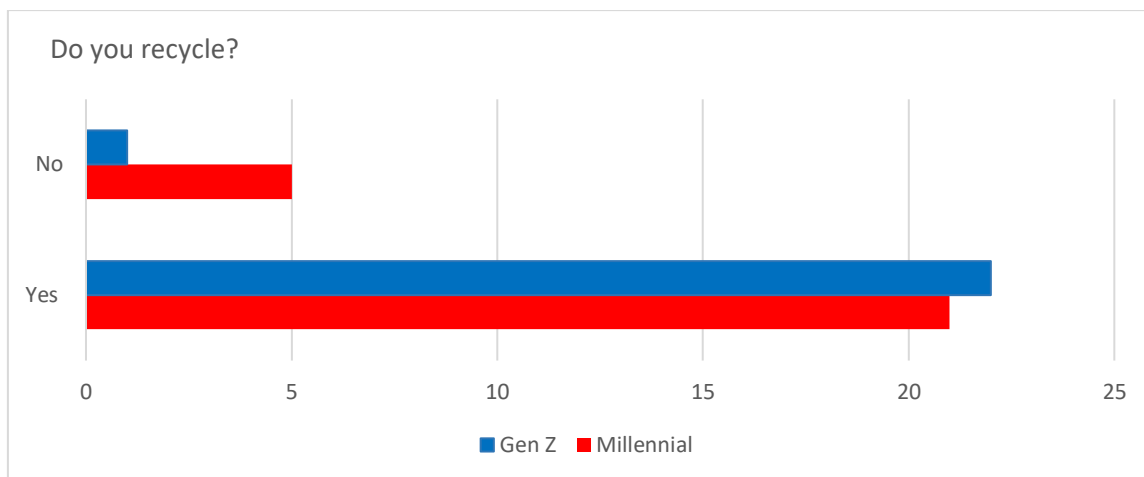
Figure 4 Recycling habits

Awareness level

The second group of questions in the survey were designed to assess the level of awareness regarding Fast Fashion and its consequences to the environment.

The first question in this category is shown in Figure 5, it begins questioning the awareness of the respondents to the term "Fast Fashion". The vast majority know its concept. However, 18.4% are not familiar with the idea of what Fast Fashion is.
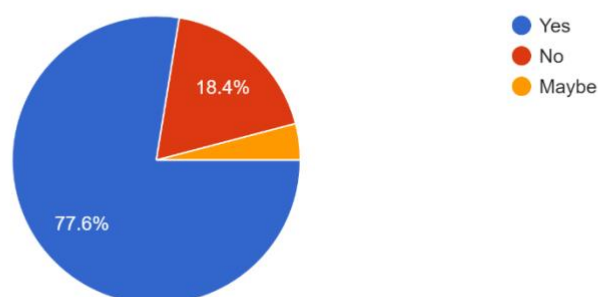

Figure 5 Fast Fashion awareness

To follow up the respondents were inquired regarding their knowledge of the terms "Sustainability" or "Environmentally Friendly" (Figure 6). It is possible to see that of the targeted demographic 83.7% knows the meaning of the topic discussed in this thesis.

Do you know the meaning of "Sustainability" or "Environmentally Friendly"?
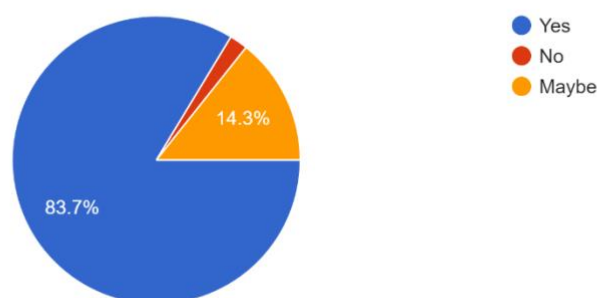49 responses

Figure 6 Awareness level of the concept of Sustainability and Environmentally Friendly

To better understand the knowledge the respondents have regarding the Fast Fashion industry, it was inserted into the survey the question below (Figure 7). It was asked their opinion regarding the impact of Fast Fashion on the environment, whether it is possible or negative.

Do you think fast fashion has a negative or positive impact on the environment? Or does it have an impact at all? Please explain
49 responses

Figure 7 Question number 9

The responses received all stated, to some degree, the impact is negative. One respondent stated

> *Negative impact on environment. Mass production of cotton or production of synthetic materials use too many resources than the environment can regenerate and microplastics are being spread on environments decreasing general health of living beings.*

Fast Fashion brands, due to their nature to mass production, tend to use resources without proper management of them. It leads to major waste and fast consumption of natural resources, faster than the planet can naturally produce them. This is the reason why it is talked about sustainability, to find a method to produce what is consumed by people sustainable for long periods of time.

The poorly made clothing articles that are bought through Fast Fashion brands will soon end their short life cycle in the landfill, as the quality of most of them will not allow the wear for many years.

In Figure 8 it is possible to see the life expectancy of clothes acquired from Fast Fashion brands. In the scale 1 represents one week and 10 represents more than two years of wear and tear.

On average how long did the clothes purchased by Fast Fashion brands last to you?
45 responses
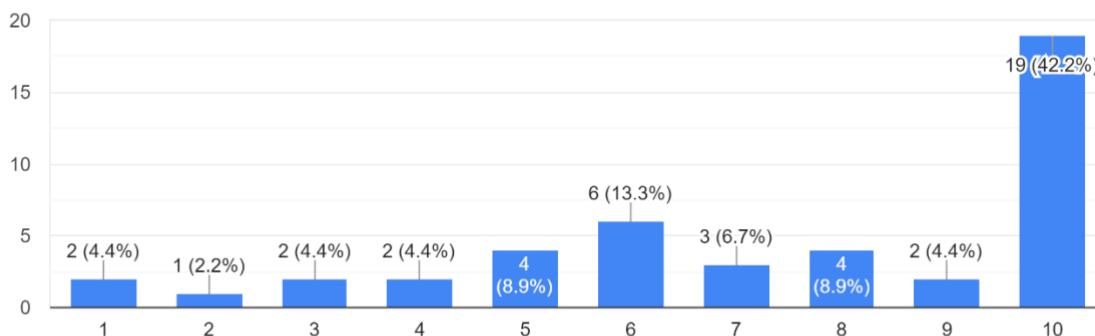
Figure 8 Life expectancy of Fast Fashion clothing.

In the figure below (Figure 9) the respondents rated the quality of the clothes they have purchased from Fast Fashion clothing brands. In the scale 1 represents very poor quality and 5 awesome qualities. In this graph it is possible to understand how Fast Fashion works. It is a practice that lingers in the middle area, not exactly good, but at the same time, not bad. The industry thrives in the middle zone where the price is affordable to most and the quality is acceptable.

How would you rate the quality of fast fashion clothing brands?
48 responses

Figure 9 Quality of Fast Fashion clothing

Question 22 and 13 are linked. In figures 10 and 11 it is possible to examine the two questions referred to. They respectively are inquiring the respondents if they are aware of "Greenwashing" a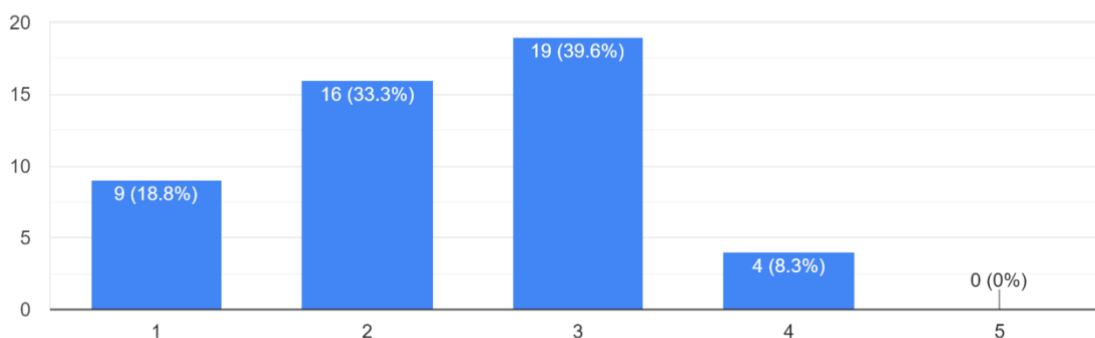nd if they read the labels on the clothing purchased. The reason why they are linked is because most of the greenwashing happens on the labels of clothing.

Brands use strategy more and more lately, inserting information that is circumstantially correct. Most of them state the use of recycled materials to produce the garment, using clever wording to suggest it, however, most times the recycled materials were only used to print the label.

People aware of greenwashing pay attention to the label that is on the actual garment and not the tags hung on them.

Most of the respondents to the survey stated they are aware of the concept of greenwashing, one commented

> *Yes, it's a strategy of appealing to consumers by saying 'our products/methods are sustainable', while not providing or even faking proof.*

Do you ever read the labels attached to your clothing when you purchase them?
49 responses

- Yes, all the time
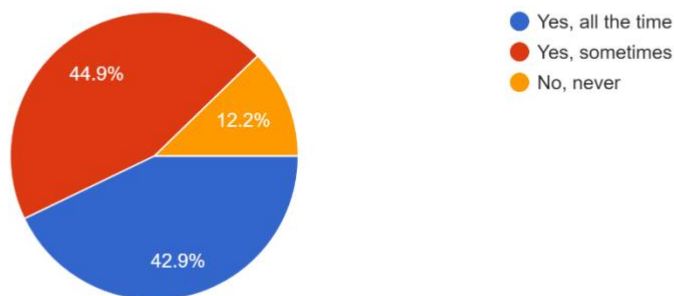- Yes, sometimes
- No, never

44.9%
12.2%
42.9%

Figure 10 Pie chart of question 13 showing if the respondents read the labels in the clothing

Are you aware of "Greenwashing"? If yes, please explain.
47 responses

Figure 11 Question 22

4   Conclusion

4.1   Answer to the research question

How do Millennials and Gen Z perceive fast fashion and how their shopping habits impact the environment?

To answer the main research question of this thesis, 3 sub-questions were composed

What is fast fashion?
According to the survey, all the respondents replied in the same manner. Fast fashion is considered to be a fast and accessible way to obtain articles of trendy clothing at an affordable rate.

Buy expensive and durable or cheap and short-lived?
To answer this question, the survey revealed that 69,6% of the respondents prefer to spend more on luxury articles of clothing ensuring a long life cycle rather than to purchase continuously poorly made cheap clothing.

How is fast fashion damaging the environment?
Based on the survey responses, it is clearly indicated that the majority of respondents acknowledge the massively negative effects fast fashion has in the environment. Several recurring themes and conclusions can be derived from these responses such as, excessive waste production, environmental impact, textile waste, exploitative practices, consumerism and overconsumption. In conclusion, fast fashion industry's unsustainable methods have extensive repercussions on the environment, impacting both natural ecosystems and people's overall welfare.

The research findings shed light on how Millennials and Gen Z perceive fast fashion and the consequential impact of their shopping habits on the environment. Respondents uniformly defined fast fashion as a swift and accessible means of acquiring fashionable clothing at an affordable rate. In terms of shopping preferences, a notable 69.6% of participants expressed a inclination toward investing in expensive yet durable clothing with an extended life cycle, steering away from continuously purchasing inexpensive, short-lived items. The survey responses collectively underscore a profound awareness among Millennials and Gen Z regarding the detrimental effects of fast fashion on the environment. Themes such as excessive waste production, environmental degradation, textile waste, exploitative practices, consumerism, and overconsumption consistently emerged in the

responses. Consequently, the study concludes that the unsustainable practices of the fast fashion industry have far-reaching repercussions, impacting both the natural environment and the overall well-being of individuals.

4.2   Validity and Reliability

This thesis emphasizes the importance of validity and reliability in conducting research. By using primary sources, in this case surveys, the study ensures that the content is valid and empirical, aligning with its objectives. The survey's design prioritizes internal consistency and test-retest reliability to minimize ambiguity and enhance the instrument's reliability. Sampling validity is addressed by targeting social media accounts that represent the intended population for the study, while measures are taken to maintain anonymity and ensure response authenticity, contributing to overall data validity.

The study also acknowledges potential limitations in external validity, with alternative methods planned if initial data collection proves insufficient. This approach aims to make the survey findings more generalizable to a broader audience, enhancing external validity. Additionally, reliable secondary sources such as online studies, LUT library, documentaries and previous scientific researches are included to strengthen the credibility of this thesis, drawing on reputable references that have undergone scrutiny. These sources contribute to the overall reliability and robustness of the study.

In summary, this thesis demonstrates a methodologically rigorous approach through its integration of validity and reliability considerations. It not only provides sound research but also contributes meaningfully to academic discourse on the chosen topic by being trustworthy and well-founded.

4.3   Recommendations for future research

To guide future research on behaviors towards fast fashion, several strategic recommendations emerge. These suggestions aim to broaden and deepen the study in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

One important recommendation is to engage a global audience by surpassing demographic boundaries. The survey mainly focused in 2 countries, Finland and Indonesia, however focusing research efforts on Millennials and Gen Z across diverse markets, such as the United Stated and various European countries, can provide a more nuanced comprehension on fast fashion behaviors. Additionally, leveraging social media platforms to involve participant from different cultural backgrounds adds depth and breadth to the exploration.

The survey targeted Beauty & Style, Nordic Style & Beauty and Sustainable Fashion Collective groups on Facebook, nevertheless, another recommendation suggests diversifying social media engagement beyond traditional fashion groups. Researchers are encouraged to reach out to communities related to lifestyle, sustainability, environmental awareness and consumer behavior. This approach offers a multifaceted view of how attitudes towards fast fashion vary across different interests and demographics, revealing connections between personal lifestyle choices and fashion preferences.

Engaging with non-fashion groups can also bring unexpected insights from cross-disciplinary perspectives. Interacting with communities focused on environmental issues, ethical living, or minimalist lifestyles uncovers intersections between sustainable choices and fashion among Millennials and Gen Z.

A comparative analysis across regions is another recommendation strategy. By delving into different regions such as the United States and various European countries, researchers can uncover regional nuances in behaviors towards fast fashion. Cultural disparities and varying levels of awareness about sustainable practices deserve exploration for a better understanding of the global landscape.

Lastly, incorporating longitudinal studies introduces a temporal element into the research paradigm. Tracking changes in attitudes over time provides insights into evolving consumer behaviors, the impact of awareness campaigns, and effectiveness of sustainable fashion initiatives. Longitudinal studies offer a dynamic lens through which shifting attitudes and behaviors within target demographic can be observed.

In conclusion, these recommendations advocate for a strategic, inclusive, and temporally aware approach to the future research on behaviors towards fast fashion. By implementing these strategies, researchers can unravel deeper layers of understanding and contribute meaningfully to the discourse surrounding fast fashion in contemporary society.

5 Summary

This thesis aims to explore how Millennials and Gen Z contribute to environmental damage through their shopping habits on the fashion industry. The goal is to establish a clear connection between these generational behaviors and the harm caused by fast fashion manufacturing. The author emphasizes the urgency for sustainable practices and highlights the impact of even small purchases on the environment.

The main research question focuses on understanding how Millennials and Gen Z perceive fast fashion and how their shopping habits directly affect the environment. Sub-questions delve into defining fast fashion, comparing preferences for expensive and durable items versus cheap and short-lives ones, and examining the environmental consequences of fast fashion practices.

The thesis begins with the theoretical framework, discussing generational divisions, consumerism, fast fashion and the influence of social media influencers. The third chapter, empirical research and data collection, talks through the methods of collection and analyzes survey questions shared on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp.

Chapter 4, conclusion, answers the main research questions as well as the sub-questions based on the results of the survey, it also addresses the validity and reliability of the study and provides recommendations for future research.

This thesis uncovers the complex relationship between Millennials, Gen Z and the fast fashion industry while highlighting the environmental consequences of their shopping choices. It emphasizes the need for suppressed practices and suggests further research to address challenges in the landscape.

In the upcoming chapters of fashion's future, sustainability takes on a leading role, completely changing an industry that was once driven by excessive consumption. As people become more aware of environmental issues, both designers and consumers are creating a new narrative that values eco-friendly practices and responsible sourcing. Sustainability is not just a passing trend, it is a powerful force that is transforming the very essence of fashion.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Survey

1.

Please select the generation that you belong to

1. Gen Z [1997 – 2012]

2. Millennial [1981 – 1996]

3. Gen X [1965 – 1980]

4. Boomer [1955 – 1964]

2.

Have you ever heard of "Fast Fashion"?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Maybe

3.

What does fast fashion mean to you?

Long answer text

4.

What is your favorite clothing brand?

Short answer text

5.

How often do you buy clothing from fast fashion brands?

○ At least twice a month

○ Once a month

○ One big purchase every six months

○ Other...

6.

What do you do with clothes that no longer fit you?

Long answer text

7.

Would you prefer to

☐ Spend a lot of money on cheap clothing

☐ Spend a lot of money on one expensive piece of clothing

8.

How would you rate the quality of fast fashion clothing brands?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very poor quality	○	○	○	○	○	Awesome Quality

9.

Do you think fast fashion has a negative or positive impact on the environment? Or does it have an impact at all? Please explain

Long answer text

10.

Would you say that one of the major causes of global warming is fast fashion waste?

Long answer text

11.

Do you recycle? If not, why?

Long answer text

12.

Why do you think fast fashion brands are so popular?

Long answer text

13.

Do you ever read the labels attached to your clothing when you purchase them?

○ Yes, all the time

○ Yes, sometimes

○ No, never

14.

Do you know the meaning of "Sustainability" or "Environmentally Friendly"?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Maybe

15.

How important is the environment surrounding you in your opinion?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very important

16.

What is your opinion regarding sustainability? More specifically Sustainable Fashior

Long answer text

17.

In your opinion, how much water is consumed by the fast fashion industry?

Short answer text

18.

Do you know any Sustainable Fashion brand? If yes, please name some.

Short answer text

19.

Have you ever bought from Sustainable Fashion Brands? If yes, how would you rate the quality?

Long answer text

20.

On average how long did the clothes purchased by Fast Fashion brands last to you?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1 Week	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More than 2 years

21.

Do you know what happens when you throw away clothes? If yes, please explain.

Long answer text

22.

Are you aware of "Greenwashing"? If yes, please explain.

Long answer text