DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTION OF SUSTAINABILITY AND PURCHASE INTENTION OF THE FASHION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Background: The fashion industry plays a crucial role in global GDP but faces significant environmental challenges, including CO2 emissions, microplastic pollution, and textile waste. Sustainability has emerged as a critical trend in addressing these issues.

Purpose: This study investigates the differences in perceptions of sustainability and purchase intention in the fashion industry across genders and generations using a quantitative approach.

Design/methodology/approach: Primary data were collected from 153 respondents from Generation Z and Millenials via a questionnaire, and hypotheses were tested through T-tests. The survey is distributed digitally via Google Form using the Likert scale method.

Findings/Results: The results revealed significant gender differences in reactions to sustainability, with females exhibiting higher awareness and involvement. However, no significant differences were observed in purchase intention across genders or between Generation Z and Millennials. The findings suggest that while gender influences sustainability awareness, purchasing decisions are shaped by broader factors like education and societal norms.

Conclusion: The study highlights that while gender significantly influences sustainability awareness in the fashion industry, purchase intentions remain consistent across genders and generations, shaped by broader social and educational factors.

Originality/value (state of the art): By examining gender and generational differences in sustainability perceptions within the Indonesian fashion industry, this research provides unique insights into localized consumer behavior, challenging global assumptions and offering practical implications for inclusive marketing strategies.

Keywords: sustainability, fashion industry, generational differences, gender differences, t-test

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INTRODUCTION

The global fashion industry is a significant part that contributes heavily towards the world GDP or gross domestic product and has a total economy of approximately 3 trillion USD with roles in designing, producing, and marketing garments. This industry does not only focus on that but also has multiple, diverse sectors, which could include raw material fabrication, clothes manufactured by designers, commercializing those products, and communication through marketing (Akram et al. 2022). It is a tough industry as the competitiveness is quite high with the need for constant refreshments in terms of product range (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Due to changes in competition, varying rates of demand growth, as well as increase in incomes of certain countries, fashion companies have since expanded their strategy in this rapidly changing environment to obtain a competitive edge over others (Gonda et al. 2020). Transformations are motivated due to the fourth industrial revolution which means that these companies are starting to become more digitized with incorporation of new technologies and interconnectivity via the internet which allows the industry to continuously grow and innovate (Bertola & Teunissen, 2018).

As consumer demand based on their preferences and taste is dynamic in nature, thus their expectations change over time, meaning that fashion companies must be able to tend to a variety of different people through both their product and service (Nenni et al. 2013). Thus, large players in the fashion industry have started to expand their product range in order to fit all genders as well as generations (Kulaga & Cedrola, 2021). However due to instability in the global economy which is mainly brought to by the COVID-19 pandemic, because consumers are less willing to spend money on clothes because it is not considered to be a need, aside from that they also face problems in terms of their supply chain and also raw materials where it would impact the cost, price, and also availability of their products (Milewska, 2022).

This industry has come to face major backlash due to the lack of concern regarding environmental issues as it has a large part in CO2 emissions, microplastic pollution, and big generator of textile waste as well as overuse of water (Akram et al. 2022). As the second most polluting sector worldwide, the demand as well as interest in sustainable fashion arises (Daukantienė,

2023). Efforts towards sustainability does not only focus on production but also through its supply chain, where it is essential to reduce emissions and waste by enhancing their operations towards a greener initiative, but also to their product and store operations, which implies that the business is able to conserve energy, reduce waste, recycle, and promote sales of green product (Yang et al. 2017). However, it has proved to be quite the challenge as the changes necessary were too far difficult for most companies (Andersen, 2017). Nevertheless, the interest in sustainability has become an important trend with mixed perception from consumers towards this matter, thus this research would like to further elucidate how differences in between genders and generations would lead to divergent reactions towards sustainable businesses in the fashion industry and how that difference could also apply in the purchase intention regarding sustainable fashion.

Sustainability is defined as a concept where businesses can still cater to their consumers' needs without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their needs. This means that it implies the long-term implications of current operations and management in order to sustain both social and environmental causes (Caniato et al. 2012). To help clarify the specific goals needed, the United Nations provided a clear construct of the connection between economic, environmental, and social development for sustainability, this is mostly known as SDGs or Sustainable Development Goals (Leal Filho et al. 2019). It is crucial for the fashion industry sector in achieving SDG goals 9, 12, and 13 which in summary would mean sustainable industrialization, consumption, and contribute towards the fight against climate change (Akram et al. 2022). Thus, sustainability in fashion means that it is part of the developing slow fashion movement which was done through the demand of consumers that are more aware of environmental impacts. It is often said as the opposite of fast fashion where the process is slower as this is centered around sustainability values with increasing importance as awareness for this matter remains low, thus much research have been done previously focusing on consumer perception and the effect of this towards purchasing behavior (Henninger et al. 2016).

Generation is a group of people that was born during similar times who share comparable life stages and age, this means that these people are shaped based on the same trends, developments, as well as events

(McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009). In this study, the main focus would be on millennials and generation Z. Millennials are people born between the 1980s to early 2000s, they are shaped by the industrial revolution which means that they are more capable and equipped with skills and equipment needed to tackle the world (Stein, 2013). While on the other hand, generation Z are those born after the year 1995, they are mostly known as those growing up with changes in the internet and development of current technological advances, making them able to switch easily between virtual and real world realities (Dolot, 2018). Having these differences in terms of how they were raised and the culture surrounding them, it could be said that it would mean they have different perceptions and reception regarding certain matters. Through the expansion of knowledge in the world of psychology and also literature, there seems to be a much bigger difference between men and women in terms of attitude and thinking patterns (Marianne, 2011).

Purchase intention can be defined as a part of the decision-making process that is part of what motivates a consumer to purchase a certain product or the tendency of a customer in certain conditions to buy a specific product (Mirabi et al. 2015). This usually occurs before a purchase is made which reflects well on the consumer behavior in the later stages (Peña-García et al. 2020). Due to the strong demand for green products, this could directly manifest into one's purchase intention, thus it is significant to conduct studies of this behavior (Zhuang et al. 2021).

Clothing is often seen as something used to define the differences between men and women (Crane, 2012). Differences between genders in regard to fashion could be clearly seen as a study done by Cho et al. (2015) shows that women are more conscious regarding fashion in general as well as ecologically motivated consumption. This was supported by Mandarić et al. in the year 2021 who also found that women are more aware in terms of sustainable fashion. While in terms of sustainability in general, it is common to think that women are more aware of these issues, however more literature has supported the claim that despite the differences, men have grown to show interest in this matter. It is important to highlight that a lot of factors would influence their knowledge as well as preferences towards sustainability, and one of those include gender roles (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2014). Thus,

it could be simplified that both men and women would have different views and behavior towards fashion and also sustainability in general.

Because generations have different upbringings, it reflects towards how they relate in terms of sustainable practices, where it was found that Millennials interpret this as making conscious choices when consuming while Generation Z have higher knowledge in ecological awareness thus, they oftentimes identify themselves as green consumers (Diprose et al. 2019). Younger generations tend to find sustainability important compared to older people, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic where people started to see sustainable consumption in a different light which might result in favorable attitudes (Nichols & Holt, 2023). A study done by Palomo-Lovinski in 2021 showed that there are differences between generational cohorts regarding their views on sustainable fashion practices.

A study done showed that men are more prone to purchasing a product based on feelings while women were based on the need to conform towards current fashion trends (Koca & Koc, 2016). This was supported by research done by Varshneya and Das in the year 2016 where gender acted as a moderator between purchase intention for green clothing, value, as well as ecological behavior. Previously, it was thought that women have higher purchase intentions compared to male, this was because both genders have different reasons for purchasing a certain product and receptivity towards certain information (Liang et al. 2013).

In prior research, Generation Z are shown to be more responsible in consumption with increased awareness towards sustainability (Dabija et al. 2022). But previous findings do note that even with the increase in awareness, they are not prone to take preventive actions (Naderi & Van Steenburg, 2018). This was also seen in a study done where older generations are more likely to consume environmentally friendly products (Ham et al. 2022).

Gen Z and millenials are becoming a major consumer with strong spending power in the worldwide fashion industry. The perspective of those consumers is crucial (Wang, 2021). Based on prior research on the phenomena of fashion shopping behavior, a study that connects this purchasing behavior to sustainability challenges must be carried out. If there are behavioral variations between genders and ages, this study will examine them.

METHODS

This research uses quantitative data types and data sources come from primary and secondary data. The primary data comes from the results of surveys directly to respondents, while secondary data is taken through freely available references. The unit of analysis is individual, namely the millennial generation and gen Z.

Primary research data would be obtained using a questionnaire developed from the operational definitions of each variable adapted to questions surrounding fashion sustainability. The survey will be handed out digitally through Google Form using the Likert scale method where the sections will be divided based on their answers of gender and age, forming data specifically confined towards each gender and age group. There are a total of 15 questions or statements that surround different indicators of each variable. Operationalization of variables in Table 1. Secondary data will be obtained from previous journals and literatures to support the findings found from the primary data.

Table 1. Operationalization of variables

Variable	Definition	Indicator	Adapted Questions	References
Reaction about business sustainability in fashion (R)	Consumer perception, attitude, and experience regarding sustainability in the fashion industry	Cognitive knowlede regarding sustainability issues	R1a - How aware are yoy of environmental issues (excessive waste and pollution production) associated with the fashion industry? R1b - How aware are you regarding the different sustainability issues/aspects associated with the fashion industry? - Eco-materials - Green Enery - Waste manufacturing - Ethical manufacturing - Up-cycling - Corporate social responsibility	Gazolla et al. (2020); Hur & Cassidy (2019); Zhang et al. (2019); Zhang et al. (2021)
		Concern regarding environmental sustainability in the fashion industry	R2 - How concerned are you in regards to sustainability issues in the fashion industry?	
		Interest in sustainable fashion	R3a - How interested are you in sustainable fashion?	
			R3b - How knowledgeable are you of sustainable fashion products or stores available in the market?	
		Involvement level in sustainability for the fashion industry	R4 - How involved are you in propmoting sustainable fashion?	
Purchase Intention (PI)	The intnet of likelihood of a consumer to decide to purchase a certain item	Purchase intention for sustainable products	PI1a - I consider purchase sustainable clothing items PI1b - I intend to purchase sustainable clothing items instead of conventional clothes in the future PI1c - I might possibly purchase sustainable clothes in the future PI1d - I would consider purchase sustainable clothing itmes when I see them in a store or online	Rausch & Kopplin (2021); Wijaya Paramita (2021)
		Willingness to pay	PI2 - Im willing to pay a higher price for sustainable clothing items	
		Continuous purchase	PI3 - I might continuously purchase a clithing item if it is sustainable	
		Feelings after purchase	PI4 - I feel more satisfied and positive after purchasing a sustainable piece of clothing item	

The samples will be taken from a population of fashion consumers or fashion enthusiast from millennial or Z Generation. Non-probability sampling will be used to reduce bias and to better represent the whole population. The people chosen as many as 153 respondents would be given the questionnaire through either direct interaction with the person in question or through various messaging apps and social media platforms.

The data analysis would include firstly a descriptive analysis to summarize key points found from the data as well as the T-test with a significance value of 0.05 to find out if there is significant differences or not. This is well suited as the research aims to find if there is significant difference between each gender and generational age group. The framework for this research as seen in Figure 1. Based on previous research, the hypotheses ini this study are:

H1: There is significant difference between genders in reactions towards business sustainability in the fashion industry

H2: There is significant difference between generations in reactions towards business sustainability in the fashion industry

H3: There is significant difference between genders in purchase intention towards sustainable fashion

H4: There is significant difference between generations in purchase intention towards sustainable fashion

RESULTS

Respondent Profile Based on Gender and Generation

Majority of the respondents were male (58.8%) and belonged to generation Z (67.3%). The overall results from the respondents show that the majority of all genders and age groups had awareness and positive purchase intention towards sustainable fashion. Typically, the answers are all above the score of 3 (neutral), with very little portion pertaining to below that value. After a t-test was conducted to test if there are significant differences between the two constructs in terms of reaction towards fashion sustainability and purchase intention. There is said to be a significant difference when the significance value for two-tailed is below 0.05. Profile of respondents in Table 2.

Gender and Reaction Towards Fashion Sustainability

Group statistics for gender and reaction towards fashion sustainability in Table 3. The independent sample T-Test for gender and reaction towards fashion sustainability as shown in Table 4. The significant value (2-tailed) is 0.007 which is smaller than 0.05, which means that there are significant differences in reactions towards fashion sustainability between males and females.

Gender and Reaction Towards Purchase Intention

The group statistics for gender and purchase intention as described in Table 5, while the independent sample T-tes for gender and purchase intention in Table 6. From Table 6, the value of significance (2-tailed) is 0.540 which is higher than 0.05, which means that there is no significant difference in purchase intention towards sustainable fashion items for males and females.

Figure 1. Research Framework
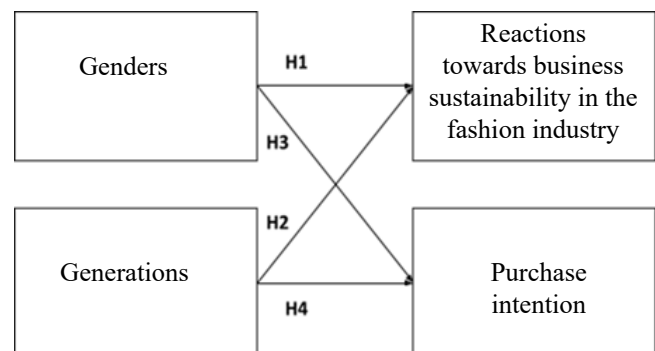
Table 2. Profile of respondents

Profile	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	90	58.8
Female	63	41.2
Generation		
Generation Z	103	67.3
Millennials	50	32.7

Table 3. Group statistics for gender and reaction towards fashion sustainability

	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
Reaction Towards Fashion Sustain ability	Male	90	35.2	10.625	1.12
	Female	63	39.8	10.008	1.261

Table 4. Independent Sample T-Test for gender and reaction towards fashion sustainability

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means							
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. Error		Lower	Upper
Reactions (R)	Equal variances assumed	0.805	0.371	-2.724	151	0.007	-4.643	1.704		-8.01	-1.275
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.753	138.4	0.007	-4.643	1.686		-7.977	-1.308

Table 5. The group statistics for gender and purchase intention

	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
Purchase Intention	Male	90	24.64	7.229	0.762
	Female	63	25.33	6.201	0.781

Table 6. Independent Sample T-Test for gender and purchase intention

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means							
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. Error		Lower	Upper
Purchase Intention (PI)	Equal variances assumed	5.077	0.026	-0.614	151	0.54	-0.689	1.121		-2.904	1.526
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.631	144.8	0.529	-0.689	1.091		-2.846	1.468

Age Groups and Reaction Towards Fashion Sustainability

The group statistics for age groups and reaction towards fashion sustainability as shown in Table 7. The independent sample T-test for age groups and reaction towards fashion sustainability in Table 8. From the results obtained in Table 8, the significance value (2-tailed) is 0.967 which is larger than 0.05, meaning that there is no significant difference between the age groups in terms of reaction towards fashion sustainability.

Age Groups and Reactions Towards Purchase Intention The group statistics for age groups and purchase intention and the independent sample T-test for age groups and purchase intention as shown in Table 9 and Table 10. Lastly, from the Table 10, the significance value (2-tailed) is 0.242 which is larger than 0.05, indicating that there is no significant differences in purchase intention between Generation Z and Millennials.

Table 7. Group statistics for age groups and reaction towards fashion sustainability

	Age Groups	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
Reaction Towards Fashion Sustainability	Gen-Z	103	39.04	11.188	1.102
	Millennials	50	38.96	10.256	1.45

Table 8. Independent sample T-test for age groups and reaction towards fashion sustainability

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. Error		Lower	Upper
Reactions (R)	Equal variances assumed	0.808	0.37	0.042	151	0.967	0.079	1.878		-3.631	3.789
	Equal variances not assumed			0.043	105.1	0.966	0.079	1.822		-3.533	3.691

Table 9. The group statistics for age groups and purchase intention

	Age Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
Purchase Intention	Gen-Z	103	25.38	6.719	0.662
	Millennials	50	24	6.975	0.986

Table 10. Independent Sample T-Test for gender and purchase intention

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. Error		Lower	Upper
Reactions (R)	Equal variances assumed	0.189	0.664	1.176	151	0.242	1.379	1.173		-0.938	3.695
	Equal variances not assumed			1.16	93.92	0.249	1.379	1.188		-0.98	3.737

From the results that were obtained, it is observed that only gender has significant differences in terms of their reaction towards fashion sustainability. Gender did not play a role in the purchase intentions and age groups did not affect both reaction and purchase intention towards sustainable fashion. Similar findings were found by Zhang et al. (2021) and Shen et al. (2013) where the researchers indicated that gender and age had no role in purchasing sustainable fashion products. It is said that their individual perceptions regarding these products are dependent on design, quality, and price are moderators for their purchase intention (Tjokrosoeharto & Paramita, 2021). However it is also important to note that gender perceptions are not only based on gender alone, but it is shaped by culture and society, which may reflect differently in other areas. Prior norms could also shape this behavior where traditionally women are more attracted to fashion-related items, thus making them more aware of sustainability problems in this specific industry (Hageman et al. 2023). Education could also play a role in shaping the differences in understanding or awareness of these specific issues because knowledge is key in accepting or being aware of current topics, with sustainability rising in popularity (Saricam et al. 2017). While for the case of purchasing intention, both men and women might share similar values to sustainability with an increase of awareness towards these issues. Gender roles are also changing, where men are more concerned with their appearances, thus having similar intentions to purchase these products (Gupta & Gentry, 2016).

Age had no differences between dependent variables with t-values above 0.05. These findings were also supported by research by Csomay in 2023. This could be attributed to the advancements of one's perception and general awareness to sustainability issues with wider access to information that was not accessible in the past, thus everyone regardless of age is able to search up these problems on their own, increasing personal knowledge and also shapes their intentions to purchase certain products (Preuit & Yan, 2016).

Managerial Impications

The results from this study give implications both for the company, and for the consumers as well. For the company, brands may need to develop gender-specific marketing strategies. If one gender shows more concern towards fashion sustainability, brands can tailor their communication to emphasize sustainable practices to resonate more with that segment. Companies might consider designing products that appeal specifically to the gender more concerned about sustainability, potentially increasing the range of eco-friendly options available or highlighting sustainable aspects in products targeted towards that gender. To bridge the gap, brands and environmental organizations might invest in educational campaigns that raise awareness about the importance of fashion sustainability among the less concerned gender, influencing long-term purchasing behavior. Last but not least, collaborations with influencers or organizations that appeal to the gender more interested in sustainability could be leveraged to enhance brand image and create a stronger connection with sustainability-conscious consumers.

For the consumers, consumers may become more aware of sustainability issues in fashion if brands emphasize these traits to target gender-specific audiences. This could lead to more informed purchasing decisions. With a greater emphasis on sustainability, consumers might feel more empowered to make purchases that align with their personal values and beliefs, particularly if they are part of the gender more concerned about these issues. Overall, these implications can foster a shift in the consumer mindset towards more sustainable and thoughtful fashion consumption, which can drive broader change in industry practices over time.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Fashion sustainability is a rising issue due to the industry contributing towards negative environmental effects from production or sales. This newfound interest has mixed perceptions, and the research aims to investigate further the differences between gender and age towards awareness and purchase intention of these products. It is thought that from traditional gender roles and differences in generation, there would be significant differences towards these two aspects, however the results only supported that there is significant difference between genders in terms of their reaction towards fashion sustainability, which includes awareness, cognitive knowledge, interest, and also involvement. This is thought because prior norms and education contribute towards these differences, while for purchasing intention due to similar values and changing gender roles, both genders have similar motivations and intentions to purchase sustainable fashion products. In terms of age, there were no differences found thought to be supported by the widespread information accessible in today's age.

Recommendations

The recommendation for further research is to elucidate more clearly the factors that influence these results and that generalization of these aspects are also shaped not only by gender and age but also by culture and society.

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