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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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FACTORS DETERMINING FASHION CLOTHING INTEREST AND PURCHASE INTENTION: A STUDY OF GENERATION Z CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

The globalization effect, technological innovations and the tremendous emergence of social media platforms have led to dramatic changes in the fashion sector. Generation Z is a contemporary cohort which plays an important role in shaping the buying behavior of consumers with respect to the fashion industry. The group of individuals we know as Generation Z is those who were born from 1997 till 2012, hence the members of this cohort are referred to as "digital natives." Generation Z individuals are skilled users of the Internet, mobile telephones, and social networks. The decisions made by Generation Z consumers in terms of their purchasing of clothes are influenced by a variety of sources of information on the Internet, as well as by the opinions of celebrities and information from their friends. Therefore, it is vital to gain insight on the factors which contribute to the generation Z consumers' interest in fashion clothes. This research serves as a conceptual exploration of the factors affecting the decisions regarding fashion apparel made by members of generation Z. It looks into previous works done by other researchers and academics in the area of consumer behavior, engagement with fashion, brand image and influence of social media, electronic word of mouth, perceived quality and price sensitivity, sustainability and self-expression. This paper brings all elements together in a conceptual framework that explains their effects on the consumers' purchase intention. The research concludes that the interest in the fashion industry is complicated and driven by psychology, socio-economic conditions, and technological development. It is found that social media platforms such as Instagram and Youtube represent the most influential marketing channels. Similarly, the availability of brand image, product quality, affordability, and sustainability are other important elements of the purchasing process. This paper has also some theoretical contributions for the future research and managerial recommendations for fashion companies targeting generation Z consumer.

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, fashion is one of the most rapidly-changing industries in the world, thus consistently adjusting to the changes in the ways of lives and consumer preferences. Clothes shift from being a basic necessity to a major channel for self-expression. Thanks to the emergence of fast fashion, e-commerce and social media, consumers' ways to search, assess and buy fashion products have greatly transformed. One of the main players in the fashion industry includes Generation Z, which is very well-connected via the Internet and has virtually unlimited access to fashion news around the globe. They actively participate in the lives of fashion lifestyle celebrities, bloggers, brands, and communities on social networks.

Generation Z is particularly interested in fashion clothes due to their impact on the lifestyle, social identity, culture, and emotions of the young. They are looking for fashion to express themselves and be accepted by others. Researchers have defined purchase intention as the chance of a consumer opting for one of the options available after comparing different products. Several elements contributing to purchase intention include product properties, brand equity, price, social influence, availability, environmental issues, and marketing communication. Generation Z consumers are known for considering all input at once. Identifying elements that shape purchase intention is crucial because Generation Z is recognized as a vigorous consumer category that exerts influence on markets and trends.

The firms that are able to capture the features as well as preferences of the consumers belong to successful companies creating effective and victorious marketing campaigns resulting in satisfied customers. The present conceptual paper considers the available literature with the aim to discover the main forces that determine the interest of the customers of Generation Z in the fashion products and their intention to make purchases.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media became one of the strongest drivers of fashion interest among the Generation Z members. Platforms like Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, and YouTube keep presenting fashion to consumers. Influencers, celebrities, and fashion bloggers create an aspirational lifestyle for their fans, who are, therefore, willing to make purchases. Influencer marketing is very successful because consumers believe the influencers who are just ordinary people instead of any corporate marketing tool. Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) increases the likelihood of purchase by providing access to reviews, ratings, and recommendations by other customers. Positive reviews help reduce doubts while negative reviews may prevent consumers from making a purchase. Generation Z shopping for fashion-related products puts emphasis on online reviews. Brand image plays an important role in purchasing behavior when it comes to fashion. Fashion brands have a strong association with certain characteristics. Famous brands evoke strong emotions in people such as their trust and pattern of consumption. Luxury goods serve the purpose of demonstrating the fact of success to the society.

Quality is another critical factor influencing consumer behavior. Consumers think about clothing in terms of many factors including product characteristics, such as materials, durability, comfort, and design. Knowing this, consumers tend to form connections between their experience in shopping; the higher the perceived quality is, the happier customers will be. Variations regarding price sensitivity exist between the members of Generation Z, with some individuals being highly preoccupied with the cost of the goods. Very often this happens due to their financial issues, which do not allow them to overspend, while there are also some people for whom the price of the products is not a matter of concern. Overall, sustainable development is one of the key factors that have started influencing consumer behavior in the fast fashion business. The awareness of the environmental problems has led to the emergence of a number of environmentally-friendly brands that operate in accordance with sustainable production principles and use fair labor in their operations. Thus, while price plays a significant role in consumer choice, consumers tend to be more inclined to patronize brands that share their values. Psychological aspects such as self-expression, self-esteem, personal traits, and emotional satisfaction are also significant factors affecting consumers' interest in fashion. Clothing is widely used as a means of identity, self-confidence, and individuality expressions.

Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of this conceptual research paper are:

- To examine the concept of fashion clothing interest among Generation Z consumers.
- To identify the major determinants influencing fashion clothing purchase intention.
- To review existing theories explaining consumer purchase behaviour.
- To analyse the influence of social media and electronic word of mouth on fashion consumption.
- To propose a conceptual framework for future empirical research.
- To provide managerial implications for fashion marketers and retailers.

Research Gap: There may have been numerous studies conducted regarding the behavior of fashion consumers, but there are still some gaps in the literature pertaining to the behavior of consumers from Generation Z. Earlier studies primarily focused on the studies of the Millennials or on general consumers without examining closely the peculiarities related to Generation Z as a generation of digital natives that is known to make purchases differently compared to previous generations. Moreover, previous studies have often examined some particular factors like brand image, prices, or social media separately making it impossible to see that the intention to buy is a multidimensional phenomenon that depends not only on a single factor but on a mix of many psychological, social, economic, and technological factors that interact with each other. Last but not least is the sustainability issue. While the awareness in terms of the environment has grown among young consumers, the relationship between the sustainable choices and buying behavior is still ambiguous since some studies claim that buyers show positive attitudes to purchasing sustainable products but do not carry on buying them. In addition, many studies have already been done in industrialized countries, but countries like India provide different cultural, social, and economical environments and factors. With technology advancing so fast in internet usage, smartphones, and e-commerce, the consumption of fashion is changing drastically among Generation Z. Thus, it is essential to do more research based on India and its consumers.

Theoretical Foundations: Consumer purchase behavior has been explained through several established theories in marketing, psychology, and sociology. These theories provide the foundation for understanding fashion clothing interest and purchase intention among Generation Z consumers.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior, proposed by Icek Ajzen (1991), suggests that an individual's intention to perform a behavior is determined by three major components:

- Attitude toward the behavior
- Subjective norms
- Perceived behavioral control

In the realm of fashion, positive thoughts about trendy clothing result in the increased readiness of shoppers to buy clothes. Subjective norms are the term used to describe the input of various people like friends, family, celebrities, and communities on social media. Also the idea of perceived behavioral control indicates the fact that consumers feel capable enough of paying for and having access to fashionable

items based on their perception of what is affordable and available. The theory of planned behavior is one of the most popular theories when it comes to the explanation of such behaviors as online shopping and intention to purchase fashion items.

Consumer Decision-Making Process

The consumer decision-making model explains purchasing behavior through five sequential stages:

- Need recognition
- Information search
- Evaluation of alternatives
- Purchase decision
- Post-purchase evaluation

Talking about fashion, good feelings toward trendy garments give rise to a bigger willingness to buy clothes for shoppers. Subjective norms imply that different people i.e. family, friends, celebrities, and community members take part in shaping consumer's behavior by means of social media. Perceived behavioral control also points to the fact that consumers feel capable of paying for and having fashionable items in their possession because they are aware of affordability and availability. Theory of planned behavior is widely used in explaining such behaviors as online shopping and purchasing.

Self-Congruity Theory: Self-Congruity Theory proposes that consumers prefer brands that match their self-image or desired identity. Fashion clothing allows individuals to communicate their personality, values, and social identity.

Generation Z frequently purchases clothing that reflects:

- Individuality
- Creativity
- Confidence
- Modern lifestyle
- Social belonging

Fashion brands that successfully align with consumers' identities generally experience stronger customer loyalty and higher purchase intentions.

Major Determinants of Fashion Clothing Interest and Purchase Intention

Fashion Consciousness

Fashion consciousness refers to an individual's awareness of current fashion trends and willingness to remain fashionable. Highly fashion-conscious consumers:

- Follow new clothing trends regularly.
- Purchase new collections frequently.
- Spend more on apparel.
- Value personal appearance.
- Seek uniqueness in clothing styles.

Research consistently demonstrates a positive relationship between fashion consciousness and purchase intention.

Social Media Influence: Social media has transformed fashion marketing by creating direct communication between brands and consumers.

Popular platforms include:

- Instagram
- TikTok
- Pinterest
- YouTube
- Snapchat

Social media affects consumers by

- Introducing new fashion trends
- Increasing brand awareness
- Encouraging impulse buying
- Providing style inspiration
- Building online fashion communities

Generation Z spends several hours daily on these platforms, making them highly susceptible to digital marketing efforts.

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM): Electronic Word of Mouth refers to consumer-generated opinions shared through digital platforms.

Sources include:

- Online reviews
- Product ratings
- Customer testimonials
- Social media comments
- Fashion discussion forums

Positive eWOM:

- Builds trust
- Reduces purchase risk
- Improves brand credibility
- Enhances purchase intention

Negative eWOM

- Creates uncertainty
- Damages brand reputation
- Decreases consumer confidence
- Reduces purchase intention

Because Generation Z values peer recommendations more than traditional advertising, eWOM has become one of the strongest predictors of fashion purchases.

Brand Image

Brand image refers to consumers' overall perception of a fashion brand. Strong brand image relates to the presence of:

- Ultra quality
- Prestige
- Reliability
- Innovation
- Exclusivity

Well-known brands have emotional effects that increase customer loyalty.

Perceived Quality

The quality of clothing is determined through the following methods:

- The material of the item
- The sewing of the product
- Holding and reliability
- Comfort and ease of use
- Appearance
- Fitting
- Life span of the item

With the perceived quality increasing consumer satisfaction and influencing future buying. Generation Z likes quality along with price, rather than buying based solely on brand.

Price Sensitivity: Price continues to be one of the most important drivers of fashion purchase intention.

Consumers from Generation Z are accustomed to evaluating:

- Prices
- Discounts
- Promotional offers
- Cashback opportunities
- Online vouchers

Students and young professionals tend to have a very limited budget, which is why price-based strategies are effective. Nevertheless, premium pricing can be effective as well in case the customer thinks that the product is of high quality, exclusive, or environmentally friendly.

Sustainability and Ethical Fashion: The consciousness about the ecological problems has a big impact on contemporary fashion spending. Generation Z prefers purchasing goods from brands that adhere to principles such as:

- Eco-friendly production
- Use of organic fibers
- Use of recycled materials
- Respectful employment practices
- Prevention of carbon footprint

Despite the fact that eco-friendly products usually have higher costs, many people of the younger generation still ensure compatibility of the companies they buy from with their values.

Proposed Conceptual Framework: The conceptual framework illustrates the relationships between independent variables and purchase intention.

Independent Variables

- Fashion Consciousness
- Social Media Influence
- Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)
- Brand Image
- Perceived Quality

- Price Sensitivity
- Sustainability
- Self-Expression
- Influencer Endorsement
- Perceived Value
- Online Shopping Convenience
- Peer Influence

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Mediating Variable

Fashion Clothing Interest

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Dependent Variable

Purchase Intention

The framework proposes that the independent variables positively influence consumers' interest in fashion clothing, which subsequently enhances their intention to purchase fashion apparel.

Managerial Implications: The study has various implications for marketers and fashion retailers. Firstly, firms must give precedence to their digital marketing efforts considering that members of Generation Z spend considerable amount of time on social media. They should create captivating visual content, short videos, and engage in influencer marketing. Secondly, fashion companies must focus on creating strong brand identities that focus on innovation, quality, and authenticity. A reliable brand image will help to create a customer's trust. Thirdly, for many Generation Z consumers, affordable prices are important. Fashion brands need to provide their customers with competitively priced goods, seasonal discounts, loyalty programs and promotions offered to students while keeping the high quality of the product. Fourthly, companies must integrate sustainability into their marketing efforts. Businesses that embrace ethical sourcing, environmentally friendly production, and sustainable packaging are likely to attract eco-friendly customers. Fifthly, the shopping experience needs to be enhanced through efficient websites, mobile apps, personalized recommendations, effective payment systems, and timely customer support. Lastly, marketers should promote positive electronic word of mouth and provide their customers with high-quality products and memorable experiences.

Future Research Directions

Future researchers might elaborate on the proposed model in various ways.

- Conduct empirical research involving primary data collection from Generation Z consumers in various parts of India.
- Assess whether urban consumers differ from rural consumers in their buying behaviors.
- Investigate gender differences with regard to fashion purchase intentions.
- Study the impact of artificial intelligence and recommendation systems on online fashion shopping.
- Apply augmented reality and virtual fitting technologies to the processes of online purchase of clothes.
- Analyze cultural factors affecting the behavior of Generation Z in terms of fashion.
- Study areas of sustainable fashion through longitudinal research studies.

Future researchers can also apply advanced statistical techniques, including Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), for verification of the proposed model.

CONCLUSION

The rapid changes in the fashion industry are being driven by technological progress, globalization, and shifts in consumer choice. At present, Generation Z plays one of the most significant roles in shaping the fashion trends as they use digital technologies to make an informed decision on what to purchase. This article presents the research study in question that aims at understanding the motives of Generation Z consumers. The review of the literature uncovered various sources of literature that illustrate the way in which fashion consciousness, brand image, quality perception, price sensitivity, sustainability, self-expression, social media influence, convenience of internet shopping, peer influences, perceived value, and influencer endorsement affect consumers' choices.

The suggested framework represents a conceptual structure that brings together the elements discussed before and the mediating variable of fashion consciousness. This framework will serve as the ground for future empirical research and provide guidance for direct marketing practitioners in their struggle to win the favor of Generation Z. Considering the stiff rivalry existing in the clothing industry, it is vital for companies to have insight into the constantly changing needs of the newest generation consuming products in that field. Organizations applying quality, affordable prices, sustainability, authenticity, and engaging online experience will be able to enhance their chances of success in the aforementioned field.

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