

Fast Fashion Consumer Behavior in Millennial Generation

A Comparison Between Genres

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Abstract

Over the last few decades the fashion industry has been revolutionized by the fast fashion business model with the incentive to place on the market trendy, affordable garments with a reduced life cycle. This new phenomenon, has democratized fashion by making it accessible to most consumers. This study aims to understand consumer behavior towards the fast fashion, and the differences in this behavior between genders, trying to understand if the behavior that both adopt varies according to the roles they play in society. It is intended to investigate the behavior of the generation Millennials, demarcated as immune to advertising tactics and more thoughtful at the time of purchase. In order to obtain answers, a qualitative exploratory study was carried out, performed through the execution of the focus groups with male and female Millennials. The results showed that Millennials are extremely active in the fast fashion market and that behavioral differences between genders are significant. Findings emphasize that the females have a greater knowledge about the model, a lower preponderance at the moment of purchase and a greater autonomy at the moment of decision. While the male consumer, although opting for a more rational purchase, is more dependent on the opinion of others at the time of the decision.

1. Introduction

Lately the fast fashion phenomenon has been recognized in the fashion industry as a strategic model for the success of any apparel retailer, since it combines reduced production time with trendy pieces in order to meet the uncertain consumer demand (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Cachon & Swinney, 2011). According to Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2010), “fast fashion is a concept by which companies guide their business strategies in order to reduce the time of introducing products in stores, working in a season system, so that the ranges constantly updated throughout the seasons” (p.761). A fast fashion model combines at least two components: low production and distribution times, thus allowing matching between supply and uncertain demand; and products with trendy designs achieved through careful monitoring of consumer tastes and industry news (Cachon & Swinney, 2011). Fast fashion trends are created with consumers' street style and life style inspired by couture collections, celebrity looks, and the desire for novelty (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010). Fast fashion brands have the ability to respond to consumer demand by offering, for limited periods of time, trendy products at very affordable prices (Cook & Yurchisin, 2017). This model leads to an unconventional consumption, since the permanence of

the products for a limited time in the store incites the consumer to buy because he fears that they will go out of stock, whereas the trendy design allied to a low price, is perceived by the consumer as an advantage and an advantageous business opportunity (Cachon & Swinney, 2011).

Due to the cyclical nature of fashion, the clothing industry has always had a limited life cycle (Cook & Yurchisin, 2017). However, a decline in product lifespan has been noted, since fast fashion companies take about two weeks from designing a piece to placing it in the store, placing increasing pressure on other companies (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010, Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009).

Currently, the fast fashion concept is particularly developed in Europe, since it is the seat of brands such as Zara, H & M and Mango (Choi et al., 2010). For Bruce and Daly (2006), Zara is the best example of a fast fashion retailer. Created in 1975, ZARA, belongs to the Spanish group Inditex, which in less than 30 years has become in a global company, currently owning six other clothing brands: Kiddy's Class, Pull and Bear, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, Stradivarius and Oysho (Lopez & Fan, 2009).

Given the success and impact that fast fashion brands, such as Zara and H&M, have have in the apparel industry, there has been a growing academic interest in the phenomenon (Cachon & Swinney, 2011). However, most of the conducted studies focus on the supply chain, ignoring the events occurring after in-store delivery (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010). There is thus a gap in the studies with respect to fast fashion consumer behavior as it may differ from the traditional fashion behaviour (Gabrielli, Baghi & Codeluppi, 2013), due to the fact that fast fashion model is based in the sense of scarcity with a rapid flow and renewal of stock. Therefore, it becomes relevant to study the behavior of consumers considering fast fashion.

Fast fashion consumers

Fast fashion consumers tend to keep their clothes for short periods of time because of their lack of quality, the emergence of new trends, and because they often buy clothes for the purpose of using them only on a specific occasion (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). These consumers, who constantly seek to be fashionable, tend to buy even more when they feel that the supply of the products is scarce (Cook & Yurchisin, 2017).

Most fast fashion consumers are young adults fitting into Millennial consumer generation (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). This generation has at its disposal a panoply of options to choose from when looking for a product, thus leading to the purchase act as a leisure moment (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003).

Although fast fashion products are most sought after by female consumers (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009), the supply has grown for the male audience that has become increasingly involved in the fashion world. Men and women, when confronted with the consumption of fast fashion products, tend to adopt different behaviors in order to meet the roles expected by the society they play (Gupta & Gentry, 2016). Thus, a more detailed study of the distinct behaviors adopted by both genders is beneficial to both academic and practical levels.

In this sense, the objective of this research is to study the behavior of the fast fashion consumer in the Millennial generation and to trace the difference of this same behavior between genders.

This study intends to deepen not only the knowledge of the phenomenon of the fast fashion model, but also the knowledge of the different attitudes of masculine and feminine gender in Millennial generation in relation to the phenomenon.

2. Discussion of the adapted conceptual model

Grounded in the constructionist and interactionist perspectives found in sociology, consuming is viewed in this research as a type of social action in which people make use of consumption objects in a variety of ways (Simmel, 1950). We use the typology of consumption practices proposed previously by Holt (1995), that embodies the variety of ways in which consumers interact with consumption objects. The author (Holt, 1995) grounds his study on distinct metaphors for consuming that have previously emerged in this literature, each attending to a particular dimension of how people consume and proposes four distinct types of consumption: 1) consuming as experience, 2) consuming as integration, 3) consuming as play and 4) consuming as classification.

The consuming-as-experience metaphor underlies research examining consumers' subjective, emotional reactions to consumption objects and tends to view consuming as a psychological phenomenon from a phenomenological perspective, emphasizing the emotional states arising during consumption. Research relying on the consuming-as-integration metaphor describes how consumers acquire and manipulate object meanings. Consequently, consumers are able to integrate self and object, thereby allowing themselves access to the object's symbolic properties. The consuming-as-classification metaphor undergirds research that views consuming as a process in which objects-viewed as vessels of cultural and personal meanings act to classify their consumers. The consuming-as-play describes how people use consumption objects to play and develops the relationship between this aspect of consuming and the other three dimensions.

In Holt's model (1995) the structure of action is divided into: 1) object actions, where consumption is included as experience and as integration and where the focus of an action is directed to the object of consumption; 2) interpersonal actions: consumption as representation and consumption as classification, where the focus of the action is directed to other individuals and the object of consumption serves only as a resource. As it comes to the purpose of the action, it can be: 1) autotelic, as in the case of consumption as experience and as representation, where consumption itself is the main objective of action; 2) instrumental, as in the case of consumption as integration and as classification, where the action of consumption is used to achieve purposes other than the consumption itself.

This study adapts the consumption matrix proposed by Holt (1995), and tested by Gabrielli, Baghi and Codeluppi (2012), to investigate the consumer buying behavior of fast fashion in the store environment (see Figure 1).

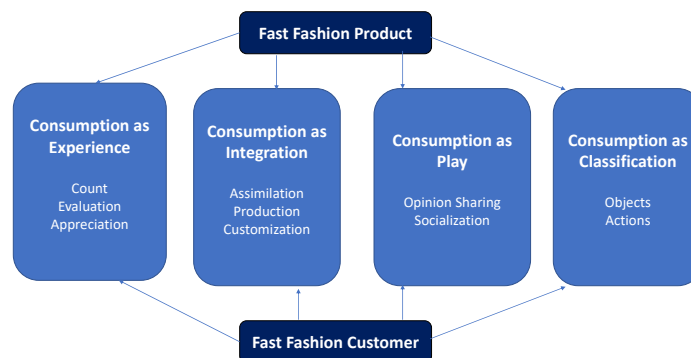


Figure 1. Fast Fashion Conceptual Model

2.1. Consumption as an Experience

Consumption as experience examines all the dynamics through which the consumer attributes meaning to the shopping experience, focusing on different phases of the consumer approach to the phenomenon that progressively evolve from a cognitive perspective to an emotional perspective: 1st stage: counting - refers to the identification, by the consumer, of different traits that allow him to recognize and distinguish the phenomenon. In this way, one must understand how consumers identify the phenomenon and the object of fast fashion consumption; 2nd stage: assessment - consumers evaluate through comparisons and based on various standards and expectations. Thus, we intend to understand how the fast fashion model is evaluated and what terms are used as a comparison; 3rd stage: appreciation - at this stage consumers react to a phenomenon through emotions induced by situations, people actions and objects. It is intended to ascertain those emotional reactions induced by the fast fashion model that can be both negative and positive.

2.2. Consumption as Integration

Consumption as integration examines how consumers use their objects as means to an end and what methods they use to increase the perception that the object is a constituent element of their identity. In consumption as an integration a piece of clothing becomes a tool through which the individual transmits his identity through tactics that reduce the distance between the consumer and the object of consumption, through: 1) assimilation: the habits that consumers adopt in order to participate and go against the fast fashion phenomenon; 2) production: methods that consumers use to increase the perception that they are significantly involved in the consumption of fast fashion products, that is, how consumers incorporate the products to their personality and personal taste; 3) customization: similar to the practice of production, the practice of personalization implies that the individual exerts influence on the fast fashion model, however, in personalization the consumer modifies the products in some way.

2.3. Consumption as Play

In consumption as play (representation), consumers use the fast fashion model as a resource to interact with other consumers. Consumption becomes a social act that involves interaction between various individuals and even the possible development of communities and new vocabularies. We claim that consumption as representation can be expressed by: 1) opinion sharing: consumers share how they experience the consumer object and the fast fashion phenomenon; 2) socialization: consumers use their experience with the phenomenon and object of fast fashion consumption to entertain other individuals.

2.4. Consumption as Classification

In consumption as a classification, the act of consumption is used as an element for the individual to classify others socially and himself. Thus, consumption practices serve to distinguish and, consequently, to affiliate individuals through: 1) objects: individuals classify others through possession of fast fashion products; 2) actions: individuals classify themselves through the way they interact with the fast fashion consumer object.

3. Procedures for collecting data

In order to study fast fashion consumer buying behavior, this study is grounded on a qualitative research that allows the researcher to obtain patterns of behavior, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, motivations and feelings of the study sample, taking into account the context and object of study. The data collection was carried out through two focus groups and through semi-structured interviews. During the focus groups, a short presentation occurred in the beginning of each session, covering the main topics to be addressed. Also, a brief questionnaire was distributed, mainly with the aim to collect the demographic data, but also delivering the introductory questions that served to integrate the members and using techniques of complementation of phrases and personification. All the answers given by the participants in the questionnaire were then discussed in a group. Both focus groups were recorded, transcribed and analyzed using the coding software MaxQda to test and validate the conceptual model.

Sample characterization

Considering that it was intended to study differences in gender behavior in the consumption of fast fashion products, two focus groups were conducted: one composed by females and the other by males. Both groups were composed only of participants belonging to the Millennial generation. The defined sample was chosen in a non-probabilistic convenience manner, since the elements of both groups were selected deliberately and defined a priori.

Table I – Characterization of female sample

	Age	Residence	Education	Occupation	Style
Female participant 1	27	Lisbon	Post-graduation	Customer Support Assistant	Casual
Female participant 2	28	Lisbon	Master's	Human Resources Manager	Casual minimalist
Female participant 3	23	Lisbon	Bachelor's	Unemployed	Sportive
Female participant 4	25	Lisbon	Bachelor's	Student	Classical e <i>High Low</i>
Female participant 5	26	Lisbon	Master's	Administrative	Does not follow any style
Female participant 6	23	Sintra	Bachelor's	Student	Dresses what she likes without thinking about style
Female participant 7	25	Lisbon	Master's	Researcher	Clássical

Table II - Characterization of male sample

	Age	Residence	Education	Occupation	Style
Male participant 1	30	Lisbon	Bachelor's	Clerk	Casual <i>Chic</i>
Male participant 2	30	Lisbon	12th year	Analyst	Business Casual
Male participant 3	28	Lisbon	12th year	Customer Service Assistant	Casual
Male participant 4	31	Lisbon	Master's	Designer	Casual
Male participant 5	23	Lisbon	Master's	Barista	Casual
Male participant 6	30	Lisbon	Bachelor's	Engineer of Informatics	Simple
Male participant 7	28	Lisbon	Bachelor's	Software Developer	Casual

The female focus group had the participation of 7 female members aged 23 to 28 and lasted approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes (see Table I). The male focus group counted with the participation of seven male elements between the ages of 23 and 31 and lasted approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes (see Table II).

4. Results

4.1. Consumption as an Experience

Score

Both groups were asked if they knew what the fast fashion model was, and the female participants were able to identify and describe the model quite clearly, while the male participants, although they did know what the phenomenon was, presented a greater difficulty in describing it. However, both groups characterized the model in a similar way, with the main characteristics pointed to the lack of quality of the products and their short lifespan, the affordable prices allied to trend designs and the prominent mess, confusion and noise in the stores large size features of the fast fashion model.

Evaluation

During the focus group the participants made several comparisons between the fast fashion model and the traditional fashion models, with both groups making mostly negative comparisons, stating that the quality of the fabrics is inferior, the clothes are more lush, the stores are more confused, enlightened and messed up and the support from the employees and much smaller and sometimes almost nonexistent.

Appreciation

When asked about their feelings during the times they are in fast fashion stores, both participants reported mostly negative feelings. Female participants, while saying they feel anxious and enthusiastic about going shopping, also say that when they enter the shops they often feel irritated, confused, stressed and bored. While the male participants, although they do most of their shopping in these shops, claim that they go to them out of obligation and sacrifice, and that once inside they feel muffled, hurried and confused, trying to counteract these negative feelings by focusing in what they want to buy and carry out their purchases in the shortest possible time. Regarding post-purchase feelings, most female participants claim to feel momentary satisfaction and pride when they buy only what is needed but regretted when they buy on impulse and when they spend on top of their possibilities. Male participants say they feel relieved and satisfied, saying that most of the time they buy only what they need.

4.2. Consumption as Integration

Assimilation

Both participants reported that they change their habits in fast fashion shops, feeling more at ease, less observed, taking more products to the tasters, being less careful in the arrangement of articles and even more independent, since they do not order the assistance of the employees. Female participants, when they do not go with the intention of buying something, prefer to go with them to the stores, however, when they go with the intention of buying several articles they prefer to go alone, saying that they need time and calm to choose. The male participants reported that they preferred to go alone or accompanied by someone who was quick and although some participants initially stated that they did not like to go with a female

company, later in the focus group they ended up contradicting themselves, saying that they almost always went with their girlfriends.

Production

Both participants stated that they did not adopt behaviors different from those they adopt with other traditional fashion models, when incorporating fast fashion products into their personality and personal taste. Female participants demonstrated a greater influence on social networks when deciding how to combine fast fashion products. While the male participants stated they did not worry too much about the way they conjugated the pieces of clothing. In relation to the combination of fast fashion brands with other types of brands, all the participants said to be something common in their day-to-day. However, the female participants reported feeling some discomfort and a sense of exhibitionism when they choose to wear only higher priced clothes, and that same discomfort was not reported by male participants.

Customization

When asked if they used fast fashion modification practices, most of the participants, both male and female, stated that they rarely physically altered pieces of clothing or accessories, however, it was found that the few times they did it were fast fashion, due to their reduced prices.

4.3. Consumption as Play

Throughout the focus group, it was possible to understand that both male and female consumers avoid contact with other customers in stores. However, both participants develop social interactions with close individuals, such as friends and family, as they go to these stores together. Female participants, although they prefer to go it alone, claim to like a second opinion from a female friend or family member, but avoid shopping with males. While the male participants, although they like a second opinion at the time of decision, said they did not like to interact with girlfriends or mothers in fast fashion stores. However, the committed participants eventually admitted that they always went shopping with girlfriends, something that did not happen in single participants. When asked if their parents followed the same behaviors as themselves, all participants in the male group reported that mothers moved to fast fashion to buy clothes for their parents.

Socialization

The findings show that outside the shop environment, female participants use fast fashion items as a way to interact with friends and/or family members, displaying the items they have purchased, and taking pride in what they have bought. However, when they feel that they have exceeded their financial limits, most participants prefer to omit their purchases from the closest people so that they do not feel judged. Male participants reported that it is rare for them to talk to other individuals about products purchased at fast fashion stores, further asserting that fast-fashion assumption and fashion in general were rarely the subject of conversation for them. However, they said they felt comfortable talking about it when approached by other individuals. Both genders reported that the topic of the relation quality/price is something about which they talk openly with more individuals. However, when dealing with a more formal environment, they are more constrained in approaching this subject.

4.4. Consumption as Classification

Through objects

Throughout the focus group all participants stated that the consumption of fast fashion products is a common practice among elements of their generation and that they feel completely comfortable to use products bought in fast fashion stores. Women, while acknowledging they would like to be financially able to consume in more expensive stores, say they do not judge others by the brands of clothing they wear, but by the way they match them. In the male focus group opinions were divided. While some have contended that a person can dress well regardless of the type of clothing he or she is wearing (fast fashion or not), others disagree, claiming that although they feel comfortable using fast fashion clothes, they know they would be better seen by society if they had the financial capacity to buy in other types of expensive stores. Finally, only one male element in the total sample, admitted that he considers fast fashion consumers irresponsible, as it is one of the most polluting industries. The other participants, when confronted with this statement, argued that it was a matter of which they were aware, but that they did not lose much time to reflect on it, since they felt that they alone did not have the capacity to fight against this industry.

Through Actions

By classifying others through how they interact with the object of fast fashion consumption, female and male focus group members described the typical fast-fashion consumer in a relatively similar way. Female participants described the typical fast fashion consumer as someone young, female, with little buying power, who likes to follow the trends and who sometimes buys on impulse. However, again, female participants said that the type of fast fashion “crowd” varied from store to store. Male participants described the typical fast fashion consumer, in much the same way as female participants, yet they resorted to pejorative adjectives (such as narcissistic, overly concerned with image, futile, among others) to do so.

Conclusions

This study was carried out with the main purpose of studying the fast fashion consumer behavior in Millennial generation and the difference of this behavior between genders. Throughout the qualitative analysis, it was possible to verify that the behaviors between consumers and can vary substantially. Although both genres perceive the fast fashion model in a similar way, the female consumers present a greater ease in defining the concept and in characterizing it in a more detailed way. Interestingly, for both genres the fast fashion phenomenon is perceived as a situation where the main features are: the low quality of garments, affordable products and trendy design. Regarding the feelings perceived by fast fashion consumers, female consumers claim they often feel enthusiastic about visiting stores, but once inside they feel irritated, confused and stressed, while male consumers move to these stores. shops by obligation and feel rushed within them, thus proving that men in looking for products traditionally created for female consumption feel some tension and end up completing their purchases in the shortest possible time (Gupta & Gentry, 2016). Regarding post-purchase feelings, male consumers perceive feelings of relief and happiness referred also by Cachon and Swinney (2011) as sensations perceived by consumers who come in the fast fashion model as an advantageous business opportunity. While female consumers often perceive feelings of post-purchase guilt due to reckless consumption caused by the feeling of scarcity (Cachon & Swinney, 2011). Interestingly, both genres of the Millennials adopt behaviors in relation to the fast fashion model that they do not adopt in the traditional fashion model.

Commonly, both genders adopt a more relaxed, carefree and less selective attitude in fast fashion stores, and this behavior may be related to the fact that this generation is reluctant to buy expensive products and prefer brands that offer better value for money (Goldman Sachs, 2017). However, female consumers end up consuming fast fashion products more impulsively, thus contradicting Gupta and Gentry (2016). Regarding the incorporation of fast fashion products in their closets, the female consumers, unlike the male consumers, feel some influence on the part of the media and social networks in the conjugation of looks, as referred by Dolbec and Fischer (2015). Although both consumers felt comfortable combining fast fashion with other brands, female consumers, unlike male consumers, exhibit some discomfort and a sense of exhibitionism by using only expensive branded parts. The fast fashion consumer model generates several distinct social interactions among consumers. The female consumers like to go to these stores accompanied, since according to Gupta and Gentry (2016) tend to adopt an attitude of leisure and relaxation during shopping in fast fashion stores, however at the time of decision they prefer to be alone. Female consumers also use fast fashion consumer goods outside the store environment as a means of interacting with other individuals and exhibiting themselves, as reported by Solomon et al. (2010). While male consumers seldom use the fast fashion subject as a topic of conversation, however, within the shop environment they adopt different behaviors according to their marital status, since committed consumers, unlike singles, always go to fast fashion stores with the girlfriends, eventually deciding on the basis of their opinion. The same does not happen with female consumers who avoid being accompanied by the masculine gender for fast fashion stores. Based on the fast fashion consumer product, both types of consumers classify others in a similar way, and the typical fast fashion consumer is described according to Morgan and Birtwistle (2009) as someone young, female and buying with some frequency.

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