

Fashion and Sustainability: Increasing Knowledge About Slow Fashion Through an Educational Module

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Introduction Many consumers are unaware of the environmental impacts when they purchase low quality, inexpensive apparel items, sometimes referred to as “fast fashion.” The “slow fashion” business model, an emerging and more sustainable alternative, focuses on production of quality garments and encourages consumers to hold onto them longer. Research on slow fashion has been limited with a few exceptions (e.g., Jung & Jin, 2014). The purpose of this study was to understand whether exposure to education about slow fashion regarding its environmental benefits would influence consumers’ knowledge, attitudes, and purchase intentions toward slow fashion apparel.

Literature Review The fast fashion business model is based upon inexpensive, low-quality garments, quick production and sale, and high consumption, which has drawn criticism as much of the fast fashion clothing often ends up in the landfill (Flynn, 2014). Originated from the slow food movement, the slow fashion business model emphasizes on quality, durability, and long-term investment and values the relationship between the consumer and the environment. Research has shown that consumers did not feel that they had enough knowledge about slow fashion to make an informed purchase intention (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). There is evidence to show that educational modules help raise awareness and change attitudes among different consumer groups (Dimopoulos, Paraskevopoulos, & Pantis, 2009). Thus, this study proposed two hypotheses examining the effects of an educational module featuring slow fashion on young adult consumers’ knowledge, attitudes, and purchase intentions toward slow fashion products.

H1: Young adult consumers’ a) objective knowledge and b) subjective knowledge about slow fashion will increase after being exposed to the educational module of slow fashion.

H2: Young adult consumers’ a) attitudes and b) purchase intentions toward slow fashion will increase after being exposed to the educational module of slow fashion.

Method College-aged students were recruited for this study as they were the target market of fast fashion retailers (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). A mixed-method approach with three phases of data collection was implemented. *Phase I:* A preliminary focus group was conducted to allow the researchers to gain more insights into consumers’ understanding of concepts and to inform the survey development. *Phase II:* A pre-educational survey was given to undergraduate students in two different classes at a large western university; immediately after this survey was completed, the researchers presented an educational module lasting approximately 30 minutes in which information regarding the concept of slow fashion and the environmental benefits of purchasing slow fashion products as opposed to fast fashion products was highlighted. *Phase III:*

The post-educational survey in the online format was emailed to all participants from phase II after two weeks of the module completion. Both pre- and post-educational surveys included measures such as subjective knowledge and objective knowledge about slow fashion, attitude and purchase intention toward slow fashion, and demographic items. All items were measured on a seven-point Likert Type Scale except that objective knowledge was measured asking eight true/false questions. Cronbach's alpha for all multi-item measures ranged from 0.76 to 0.96. Paired-sample t-tests were conducted to test the hypotheses.

Results A total of 163 participants (89% of females with a mean age of 19.76 years) participated in both the pre- and post-educational phases of data collection. On average, participants reported that they spent \$101.63 a month on apparel. Paired-sample t-tests showed that the educational module significantly improved the participants' objective knowledge and subjective knowledge about slow fashion ($M_{pre} = 7.21$ vs. $M_{post} = 7.60$, $t = -4.14$ $p < 0.001$; $M_{pre} = 4.39$ vs. $M_{post} = 5.96$, $t = -11.27$ $p < 0.001$, respectively). Thus, H1 was supported. The module also significantly improved the participants' attitudes towards slow fashion ($M_{pre} = 4.71$ vs. $M_{post} = 5.40$, $t = -5.40$, $p < 0.001$); however, purchase intention toward slow fashion did not change as a result of the module ($M_{pre} = 4.74$ vs. $M_{post} = 4.78$, $t = -0.40$, $p > 0.05$). Thus, H2 was partially supported.

Discussion and Conclusions This study expanded the slow fashion research by incorporating consumer knowledge and attitude literature. Findings have suggested that a 30 minute educational module consisting of mostly text-based information with supplementary images made a significant, positive impact on young adult consumers' knowledge of and attitudes toward slow fashion. Unexpectedly, purchase intentions toward slow fashion among the participants did not increase. Financial restrictions experienced by university students could have minimized their purchase intentions toward slow fashion apparel which tends to be more expensive than fast fashion. The sample of the study was restricted to college students based on a mixed-method data collection approach. It is suggested that more diverse consumer groups such as high-school aged consumers can be further studied.

References

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