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Generation Y's Perceptions of Sustainable Brand Extensions of Fast

Fashion Retailers

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Generation Y's Perceptions of Sustainable Brand Extensions of Fast Fashion Retailers

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Abstract

Generation Y's Perceptions of Sustainable Brand Extensions of Fast Fashion Retailers

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Fast fashion retailers bring apparel products to market much more quickly than in traditional apparel retailing. Fast fashion retailers are able to respond quickly to both fashion trends and consumer demand. Yet the emphasis on speed has quickened the consumption of fast fashion apparel products, which are produced with low quality and thus have short product lifespans. Critics of fast fashion cite these negatives, combined with chemicals, water and energy used in production, among other issues, as detrimental to the environment. However, some fast fashion retailers have implemented sustainable options into their product offerings. This study analyzes consumers' perceptions of a sustainable brand extension introduced by a fast fashion retailer. The research is divided into two studies. First, an exploratory study was conducted to assess consumer knowledge of sustainability and fast fashion and to uncover potential factors for the model of the second study. Findings show a low level of knowledge of the holistic principle of sustainability and specific adverse effects of the apparel industry and of the concept of fast fashion. Despite some skepticism, participants feel steps must be taken

towards sustainability and that every effort helps. The second part of the research tested consumer perceptions of a potential sustainable line extension introduced by a specific fast fashion retailer. Following brand extension theory, study two tests the influence of brand knowledge and affect on both the perceptions of brand-cause fit and brand-extension fit and the influence of cause knowledge and involvement on the perceptions of fit between brand and cause. The influence of brand-extension fit and brand-cause fit on attitude toward the extension was also analyzed. An online self-administrated survey using the written scenario approach resulted in 598 responses. Findings show the influence of brand knowledge and affect on brand-extension fit and brand-cause fit and cause knowledge and involvement on cause-brand fit. Implications for retailers include leveraging consumers' past knowledge and affect of the brand through marketing of the sustainable product. Overall the study shows that consumers do view sustainable products as fitting with fast fashion retailers, based on their previous knowledge and affect of the brand and cause.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Sustainability and its elements of social, environmental and economic preservation, is a common topic in popular culture, academic and industry literature and the marketplace. Specifically, concern for the environment has been acknowledged for decades (Beard, 2008; Koch & Domina, 1997). The "green movement" that begun in the 1970s initiated earth day and endangered species lists. However, application of environmental concern to the practices of businesses and consumers was limited to either radical actions or vague concern (Butler & Francis, 1997). Environmental concern was prompted by awareness of negative impacts of manufacturing, transportation and disposal of product consumption, evidenced by filling landfills and climate change (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Despite concern for negative impacts, knowledge and implementation of reactions to neutralize and prevent future degradation existed mostly outside the realm of the marketplace (Jayson, 2006). Despite predictions that the green movement would gain traction in the 1980s and 1990s, significant consideration for such issues is only currently beginning to reach substantial popularity (Straughan & Roberts, 1999).

This history of concern and yet inconsistent actions has created both momentum and challenges. Today, many companies have initiated sustainability efforts. However, these actions have not received full support in the marketplace. Consumers often think of themselves as concerned for the environment, and yet report limited actual behaviors reflecting this stance (Sheth, Sethia & Srinivas 2011; Zimmer, Stafford & Stafford, 1994). However, despite consumers' confusion and companies' slow implementation, the problem of environmental degradation is still pertinent. The apparel industry has specific negative impacts on the environment through all stages of the apparel product

life cycle (Allwood, Laursen, DeRodriguez and Bocken, 2006; Claudio, 2007; Fulton & Lee, 2010; Shaw, Hogg, Wilson, Shui, & Hassan, 2006; Walker, 2008; Winge, 2008).

Many issues may prevent consumers from translating environmental concern into actions. Consumers may be confused by the variety of information in the marketplace (Peattie & Crane, 2005; Thomas, 2008) and may be disenfranchised by awareness of the past claims of environmental degradation that they have yet to experience (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Consumers have low levels of knowledge concerning the environmental effects of apparel production and selling (Dickson, 2000; Kim and Damhorst, 1998; Phau & Ong, 2007), which is often lower than their knowledge of the impact of other product categories (Stephens, 1985). Concern for the environment is also lower when considering the effects of apparel purchases than in general (Butler and Francis, 1997). Sustainable apparel products are often difficult to find and may have different levels of style, quality and price than unsustainable apparel products (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Joergens, 2006). Even concerned consumers will ultimately choose the product that meets their style, fit, quality and price desires (Joergens, 2006). Consumers are skeptical of marketing campaigns providing sustainability information, thinking companies are using this cause as a means to make more money. Some companies advertise products as green or organic, when only one element of the production actually fulfills that claim (Lipke, 2008; Nagappan, 2009), causing future skepticism (Beard, 2008; Lipke, 2008; Zimmer et al., 1994).

Despite low levels of purchases of sustainable apparel products, some consumers are beginning to question the impact of their apparel purchases (Lipke, 2008; Mintel, 2009; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Thus retailers should provide easy access to both sustainable products and information about the sustainable impact, in a transparent fashion. However, these products should be of relatively similar style, fit, quality and

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price to ease consumer decision making and encourage sustainable purchases (Niinimäki, 2009). However, creating sustainable clothing manufacturing, production, and retailing is a long and difficult process for companies. In addition to the technical changes that need to be made, the opinions and attitudes of consumers need to be taken into consideration, as they make purchases that keep companies in business (Tyler, Heeley & Bhamra, 2006; Speer, 2009).

Consumers and companies need to work together to overcome these barriers to achieving sustainability goals. Realizing this need, Sheth *et al.* (2011) suggested a consumer centered approach to sustainability, in which companies consider consumers as crucial in the marketplace, embracing sustainability through their purchases, and thus companies tailor products and marketing accordingly. Consumers have the power to approve or disapprove of a company's actions through purchases (Shaw et al., 2006). Although consumers claim to be concerned for the environment, they continue to purchase conventional products (Blake, 1999; Shrum, McCarty, & Lowery, 1995). Companies have been unable to design and produce sustainable products that consumers will choose over conventional alternatives. The apparel industry has had an especially difficult time integrating sustainability into products that consumers in the mass market will purchase. Thus companies need to more accurately understand the consumer's position concerning sustainability in order to develop products that will be better embraced by the marketplace.

Fast fashion apparel retailers are especially detrimental to the environment, as they produce low quality garments with short and quick lifecycles (Claudio, 2007; Fletcher, 2007; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009; Walker, 2008). Fast fashion has changed the traditional fashion calendar by adding seasons towards a more continuous flow of new merchandise attuned and responsive to consumer wants expressed through purchases

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(Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Doeringer & Crean, 2006; Sull & Turconi, 2008). Utilizing this control over manufacturing coupled with information technology, fast fashion retailers are able to shorten production lead times. Short lead times and small production batches allow companies to provide new products to stimulate demand with relatively low risk (Birtwistle, Siddiqui & Fiorito, 2003; Mattila, King & Oiala, 2002).

Generation Y, the main target market for sustainable fashion, enjoys the quick trends presented by fast fashion retailers (Martin & Bush, 2000). However, they are also concerned for sustainability issues and value socially responsible actions of companies (Yan, 2003). Generation Y consumers make up a large market segment, and are characterized by information empowerment, causing both increased awareness of environmental, social, and economic ills and skepticism of marketer's claims to aid such issues (Cone Inc., 2006; Jayson, 2006; Yan, 2003).

Specifically, fast fashion retailers have a unique position to target Generation Y consumers with sustainable products. Although some fast fashion retailers have begun to implement sustainability through a few product lines (H&M, 2011; Zara, 2010), these companies could leverage their structure to both read and stimulate consumer demand for sustainable apparel products. If sustainable garments are sold in fast fashion retailers, the styles must appeal to the fast fashion consumer, who is trendy, fashion forward and young (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Fast fashion retailers have experience targeting and designing for the Generation Y consumer. Knowledge of this group's purchasing habits may enable fast fashion retailers to produce sustainable garments with similar levels of trend. Additionally, younger consumers are more likely to be fashion leaders (Goldsmith & Clark, 2009; Summers, 1970). Thus targeting this group with sustainable product could quicken the dissemination of sustainability ideas as fashion trends through fashion leaders. Although some studies have analyzed young consumers perceptions of fast

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fashion (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009) more research is needed (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006).

RESEARCH JUSTIFICATION

As companies begin to offer more sustainable options, they may be able to gain a larger share of the Generation Y market. However, identification of the factors influencing consumers' evaluations of sustainable product merits research. One barrier to sustainable apparel purchases is the lack of available options (Hiller Connell, 2010). As companies work to provide more sustainable options, the consumers' perceptions of sustainable products in comparison to similar conventional offerings needs to be considered. However, little research studies consumers' perceptions of fast fashion and sustainability (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009), or the generation Y consumers' perceptions of sustainability. Thus research is needed to identify consumers' perceptions of sustainable actions of fast fashion retailers.

Although fast fashion has been targeted as especially unsustainable, the business model and integrated supply chain set up of these retailers may allow fast fashion retailers to better sense the consumer's response to the introduction of a sustainable product. Small production batches and thus small inventory holdings as well as flexibility in planning lend to more sustainable production by reducing the waste of overproduction (Doeringer & Crean, 2006; King, 2009). Information technology systems integrated into fast fashion retailers may allow for advanced analysis of consumer purchases. Flexibility in merchandise planning provides fast fashion retailers with the ability to tweak product designs to better match consumer demand. Additionally, low risk of small production batches (Birtwistle et al., 2003; Mattila et al., 2002) reduces the risk of introducing a sustainable product.

Fast fashion retailers also have the unique position of being closer to consumers, as their business model and supply chain is driven by consumer demand (Birtwistle et al, 2003). Therefore the opinions of consumers concerning sustainability will be very important to these companies. These companies will also be able to more quickly respond to the consumers' demands for sustainable products. The use of advanced sales tracking technology will show the companies the consumer response to sustainable product offering, allowing them to respond quickly by adjusting future product development accordingly. Thus, the structure of fast fashion retailers and their use of demand sensing IT in production decisions provide a good opportunity to implement sustainability through the introduction of environmentally friendly products.

Brand extension literature conceptualizes the process of consumers' evaluations of a new product introduced by an existing brand, emphasizing the importance of fit between the original brand and the new product. Similarly, corporate social responsibility literature tests the fit between brands and the charitable organizations they sponsor. Thus, this study will combine elements of these two research areas to test the fit perceptions of consumers concerning a sustainable product introduced by a fast fashion retailer.

Reducing risk involved in introducing a new product to the market is important to companies (Keller & Aaker, 1992), and would be important when introducing sustainable products. Brand extensions are often used to introduce new products under an established company's name in order to reduce risk by relying on consumers' past experiences with the brand to influence evaluation of the new product (Aaker & Keller, 1990). Several fast fashion retailers have utilized brand extension techniques to introduce other lines under the parent brand name, such as menswear or childrenswear (Choi, Liu, Liu, Mak & To, 2010). Leveraging both the brand name and the associated

style, fast fashion brands extend the characteristic price and trend considerations to other product categories (Choi et al., 2010). Carefully planned brand extensions can enable companies to enter new product categories. Keller and Aaker (1992) note that if implemented gradually, brand extensions can be used to bridge two very different product categories. Thus, fast fashion retailers can use brand extension techniques as they take steps to implement sustainable products in stores.

This study seeks to consider consumers' perceptions of the introduction of a sustainable line of garments by a fast fashion retailer through the technique of brand extension. Research on brand extension from marketing literature will provide the theoretical framework for analysis of consumers' perceptions as they evaluate the sustainable brand extension. The influence of consumers' past experience with the brand, including brand knowledge and affect, on the evaluation of the brand extension will be investigated. The concept of fit between the extension product and the products of the fast fashion retailer will also be investigated. Additionally, literature examining the influence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activity on perceptions of the sponsoring brand follows a similar vein, speaking of the fit between CSR charity and the sponsoring company. Thus, the influence of the consumers' past experience with the cause of sustainability, including knowledge and involvement, will be utilized to analyze their relationships with fit perceptions.

This research adds to the brand extension literature by extending the concept of brand fit utilized in evaluation of CSR alliances to a product category that is inherently attached to a cause. As sustainable products cannot be produced without attachment of the cause of sustainability, the impact on the brand-cause fit must be considered in conjunction with the impact of the brand-extension fit. This study combines these two

types of fit with their respective cognitive and affective antecedent factors by testing the main relationships of both of these research streams together in one model.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

Study 1

Study 1 seeks to guide development of the subsequent study through the following objectives:

- to gain an understanding of the content of consumers' knowledge of sustainability in general and in the apparel industry,
- to allow consumers to define fast fashion retailing,
- to measure participants' perceptions of the quality, trend level, price and other characteristics of specific fast fashion and traditional retailers, and
- to explore consumers' perceptions of the potential and responsibility for sustainability in the apparel industry.

Study 2

The goal of Study 2 is to empirically test exploratory perceptions gained from study 1, according to the following objectives:

- to measure consumers' perception of fit between the cause of sustainability and a specific fast fashion retailer, with which they have previous experience
- to measure consumers' perception of fit between the brand of the fast fashion retailer and a proposed sustainable line extension,
- to examine the influence of cause-brand fit and brand-extension fit on participatns' attitude toward the extension

- to further understand the perceptions of fit by considering the influence of consumers' existing knowledge and affect towards the brand, and

- to gain insight into the influence of knowledge and involvement with the cause of sustainability on the evaluation of a sustainable line extension.

RESEARCH OUTLINE

The above objectives will be accomplished through the development and execution of two separate research studies. The first will be conducted as a foundational study of the second. The remainder of the thesis explains the previous literature on sustainability and fast fashion as well as Generation Y consumers, which supports the development of the two studies. Next, the methods and combined results and discussion of Study 1 are presented. Conceptual framework and hypotheses development sections then outline the specific basis for Study 2. The methods and measures of Study 2, developed based on the findings of the first study, are then described. Next, results of statistical tests of the hypothesized model are reported and discussed. Implications for both academia and industry are discussed. Finally, limitations and suggestions for future research conclude the second study.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Sustainability has been a popular topic in various forms in popular culture and academic and industry literature, brought to light by issues of environmental degrigation and poor treatment of laborers (Dickson, Loker & Eckman, 2009). In 1987 the United Nations sponsored the World Commission on Environmental Development (WCED) to address the global need for environmental development, which developments in globalization have created. The conference conceptualized the notion of sustainable development into a widely cited guiding definition: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p.43). In broad application, this definition balances the present with the future, attempting to balance consuming with conservation. Three main areas of concern were identified: economic, social and environmental. It was suggested that companies and governments make considerations for these three areas, yet further implementation direction was left unspecified.

Subsequently, companies have implemented economic, social and environmental considerations in a variety of ways through product development, marketing, consumer education, and advertising (Sheth et al., 2011). However, these actions often lack cohesion within and among companies, creating a somewhat chaotic implementation of sustainability in the marketplace (Bell & Morse, 2003; Lubin & Etsy, 2010). As interest in sustainability increases, a more holistic approach is necessary to increase potential impact by enabling consumers and companies to work together by providing clear direction and understanding (Sheth et al., 2011). Although the goals of sustainability favor a holistic application, the transition from unsustainable practices engrained in many

companies to a holistic integration of sustainability into business practices, culture, and products may be challenging.

Despite the variety of sustainability initiatives undertaken by many companies, some have applied sustainability to their business practices in a holistic way through the concept of the triple bottom line (Lubin & Etsy, 2010). Companies committed to the triple bottom line balance considerations for the three areas of sustainability, making social considerations for the health and working conditions of employees, and environmental considerations for the impact of their products, along with traditional considerations for economic health of the business (Lubin & Etsy, 2010). Balancing economic interest within the three is crucial, in that businesses must maintain good economic standing to continue operations, providing for growth in both the present and future (Bell & Morse, 2003).

Implementations of sustainability goals are often in the form of corporate social responsibility actions (Jones, Comfort & Hillier, 2007; Sheth et al., 2011). Companies often partner with a charitable organization to sponsor a social cause (Jones et al., 2007; Zdravkovic, Magnusson & Stanley, 2010). CSR activity can increase sales and reputation for the sponsoring company (Zdravkovic et al., 2010), improve the company's position in the community (Jones et al., 2007) and may increase customer loyalty (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004). Integration of CSR into company practices becomes an element in the company's brand image, adding a unique point of differentiation (Cui Trent, Sullivan & Matiru, 2003; Jones et al., 2007). These actions, if implemented appropriately, can improve a company's favor in the eyes of consumers (Ellen, Mohr & Webb, 1997). As participation in CSR and sustainability initiatives in the marketplace increases, companies that implement such activity will gain competitive advantage (Crewe & Davenport, 1992; Yan, 2003).

Although CSR actions may be representative of an overall commitment to social considerations, they are often short-term commitments and are not fully integrated into business practices (Jones et al., 2007; Lubin & Etsy, 2010; Sheth et al., 2011). However, CSR is a step in the transition to more holistic sustainability considerations, and companies that gain benefits from CSR actions may move to further integrate these goals into business practices (Sheth et al., 2011).

TRANSITION TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

However, there are clear challenges to holistic implementation of sustainable business practices. At the foundational level, businesses have little guidance as to how to apply sustainable initiatives to actual business decisions. Although companies may know how products are made, they may have little knowledge of the full environmental impact or sustainable alternatives. Additionally, the supply chains of many industries are complex leaving many companies without much influence over supplier decisions (Beard, 2008). Thus, implementation of sustainable business practices may mean choosing new suppliers, a challenging and potentially expensive sourcing endeavor (Fulton, 2010).

Once sustainable products have been developed, consumer reactions are uncertain. Industry press reports that businesses have and should consider consumers as beginning to care about the source of products (Silverman & Conti, 2009). However, when implemented into products, research and market statistics show consumers may not follow their predicted, and in some cases stated, intentions to purchase sustainable products (Butler & Francis, 1997). Although consumers may appreciate the consideration for sustainability, a myriad of other factors influencing decision making may cause them to choose the unsustainable option (Bamberg & Moser, 2007; Blake,

1999), providing mixed messages to companies and undercutting sustainable efforts (Titus & Bradford, 1996). Further, positioning sustainable products may be difficult as profiling of concerned consumers has returned mixed results, providing only weak links between demographic information and specific segments along the spectrum of concern (Connolly & Prothero, 2003; McDonald & Oates, 2006; Straughan & Roberts, 1999). Companies may need to overcome the barriers that consumers hold to purchasing sustainable products, by working to reduce consumers' low levels of awareness of sustainability, consumer confusion and skepticism.

Many consumers have a low level of awareness of sustainability concepts. Consumers may be unaware of the negative impacts of consumption, and thus may never consider such consequences in purchasing decisions. Consumers may find it difficult to obtain information about the sustainable impact of products. One study found 56.7% agreed with this difficulty, while an additional 36.3% agreed somewhat (Niinimäki, 2009). Consumers do not want to be inconvenienced to search for such information (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001).

This low level of awareness combined with past knowledge and experience may inhibit consumers' participation in sustainable purchases. The introduction of a sustainable product alongside a non-sustainable offering may cause confusion in consumers or may cannibalize either of the offerings (Niinimäki, 2009). Additionally, the mix of messages provided by companies through product offerings and marketing create a jumble of confusing terms (Mintel, 2009; Thomas, 2008; Zimmer et al., 1994).

On the other hand, consumers may be skeptical of companies that make claims about sustainability or environmentally friendly products (Laroche, 2001; Peattie & Crane, 2005). Consumers generally distrust marketing and have been specifically betrayed in regards to green marketing (Bonini & Oppenheim, 2008; Thomas, 2008).

Government regulation on sustainable marketing is limited and thus companies often make unsubstantiated claims (Beard, 2008; Hiller Connell, 2010; Nagappan, 2009). "Greenwashing" occurs when companies offer claims about the sustainability of their products, which later are shown to be less than true (Lipke, 2008; Thomas, 2008). Some companies advertise products as green or organic, when only one element of the production actually fulfills that claim (Lipke, 2008; Nagappan, 2009). This causes the consumer to become skeptical of future claims, and makes it difficult to compare products (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Additionally, consumers may doubt companies' motives in socially responsible actions, seeing it as an emotional ploy (Beard, 2008; Jones et al., 2007; Lipke, 2008; Mintel, 2009; Phau & Ong, 2007). Consumers may also be unwilling to pay increased prices for sustainable goods (Jones et al., 2007; Laroche et al., 2001). Due to this skepticism, companies must remain transparent and build sustainability goals into their vision and mission, creating more meaningful claims (Lipke, 2008; Mintel 2009).

Thus, companies should take caution when designing and marketing sustainable products to ensure their motives and meanings are expressed correctly (Yan, 2003). Consumers value what they feel are authentic socially responsible actions by companies (Yan, 2003). Consumers appreciate long term commitments to CSR (Cui et al., 2003). Long term integration of CSR with the business model could illustrate a company's authentic commitment to CSR (Jones et al., 2007), which consumers may come to expect (Lipke, 2008). Transparency in sustainability reporting thus becomes important to improve consumers' perceptions and work to build trust (Mintel, 2009; Nagappan, 2009).

Some research supports the influence of knowledge on increasing environmental concern (see Hines, Hungerford & Tomera, 1986 and Bamberg & Moser, 2007 for reviews). Thus, providing consumers with information in a transparent way could lead to

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knowledge and concern for the environment. Educating consumers on the environmental impact of products may also help reduce confusion (Cui et al., 2003; Domina & Koch, 1998; Hiller Connell, 2011; Joergens, 2006). Consumers learn about sustainability through marketing information. Many companies produce reports to inform consumers of their sustainability practices. For example, Marks & Spencer, a prominent retailer in the UK, outlines its 5 and 10 year plans to implement sustainable changes on its website (Jones et al., 2007). Such education may reduce consumer skepticism, as they learn more about the companies practices (Joergens, 2006). However, increased information may make consumers more skeptical of claims to environmentalism (Lipke, 2008), yet it could allow them to make better decisions (Hiller Connell, 2011). Thus providing information for consumers reinforces the need for transparency.

However, consumers may not take the time and effort to access such information. Labeling provides a quick way for consumers to understand, at the point of purchase, the sustainability of production (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; McDonald & Oates, 2006; Thomas, 2008). Wal-Mart plans to report the environmental footprint on products it sells (Rosenbloom, 2009; Silverman & Conti, 2009). Additionally, consumers favor products with environmentally friendly print advertisements (Phau & Ong, 2007). Although this may not always translate to behavior (Blake, 1999; Shrum et al., 1995), providing information at the point of purchase may influence consumer purchase (McDonald & Oates, 2006).

Companies can influence consumers' purchases through product offering and marketing. Yet, companies must accurately measure consumer demand, as consumers have the ability to collectively approve or reject a company's actions through purchasing power (Shaw et al., 2006). Even amongst consumers that are concerned for sustainability or would be concerned, the limited availability of products and information hinders their

purchases (Hiller Connell, 2010; Shaw et al., 2006), making accurate perception of consumer demand difficult.

Thus companies should work to implement and provide information about CSR strategies in authentic ways that consumers will appreciate (Cui et al., 2003). Yet, the specific roles of consumers and companies in the collaboration towards improved sustainability are unclear (Bell & Morse, 2003). As the goals of sustainability encompass both production and consumption actions, companies and consumers must work together (Sheth et al., 2011). Consumers have expectations for the social actions of companies (Jones et al., 2007). To meet these expectations, Sheth *et al*. (2011) advocate a customer centered sustainability that considers the consumers critical position in enacting sustainability by purchasing available sustainable products, to both have a positive impact on sustainability and reinforce the company's actions.

SUSTAINABILITY IN THE APPAREL INDUSTRY

The apparel industry has been subject to much criticism concerning sustainability in both the areas of labor practices and environmental impacts. Producing apparel on a global scale increases sourcing options which allows manufacturers to increasingly compete on low prices (Rivoli, 2009). The focus on the price of labor leaves little consideration for working conditions of employees (Dickson et al., 2009). Consumer concerns for the poor working conditions of laborers have raised protests, some resulting in boycotts against companies such as Nike (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Although such consumer awareness and petitioning have led to positive changes, the apparel industry has many more steps that need to be taken to reach a more sustainable industry (Dickson et al., 2009).

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The environmental impact of clothing has also caused consumer concern. From fiber growth and manufacturing to fabric production and garment finishing all require large amounts of chemicals and water (Allwood et al., 2006; Myers & Stolton, 1999). Many non-sustainable materials go into making clothing. Most synthetic fibers are made from petroleum, a non-renewable resource. Natural fibers are renewable, but they too involve processes harmful to the environment (Fulton, 2010). Many chemicals are used during production of fibers and dyeing and finishing processes (Allwood et al., 2006). Specialty chemicals may be added to the fabric to make it fire-retardant, waterproof or shiny (Black, 2008). After processing, these chemicals are discarded to the earth. Additionally, the fabric retains some of these chemicals, which may affect the wearer.

Negative environmental impacts extend past product purchase. Aggregate water and energy consumption utilized in the lifetime of garment care is also a major impact (Allwood et al., 2006; Beard, 2008). Additionally at the end of a garment's life (or before it is worn out), it must be disposed of. Synthetic materials are not easily recyclable (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Garments made of natural fibers may be covered with a dye or finish that is non-biodegradable (Allwood et al., 2006). Although many garments are donated to clothing centers, many are sent to landfills where those made of synthetic material will never biodegrade (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009).

Within the apparel industry, some companies have integrated sustainability holistically, while some have implemented single sustainable collections or products. While usually well received, the contrast between these two applications shows the complexities of implementing sustainability into the apparel industry.

Some companies have integrated sustainability into their business goals at the company policy level, allowing implementation of sustainability to trickle through all aspects of the business. For example, Patagonia strives to integrate sustainability into

every aspect of production, from producing fibers from recycled plastic bottles to collecting old fleece garments for recycling (Lipke, 2008). Marks & Spencer has implemented an ambitious plan for greening its products and production that includes completely eliminating landfill waste, having a carbon neutral footprint, extending sustainable sourcing and building environmentally friendly factories by 2012 (Beard, 2008). Wal-Mart's goals include creating no waste, use only renewable energy, and provide products that don't negatively impact the environment or abuse resources (Stern & Ander, 2008). Additionally, Wal-Mart has initiated a sustainability index project to rate products on their environmental impact (McGinn, 2009).

Apparel companies have implemented sustainable actions throughout the production process. Many independent clothing designers exist to design sustainable clothing (Jones, Hillier, Comfort & Eastwood, 2005). Most commonly, sustainable retailers focus on environmentally friendly fibers, mainly organic cotton (Fulton & Lee, 2010). Many companies also utilize recycled materials in packing and shipping materials (Fulton & Lee, 2010). Nordstrom, Target and Wal-Mart have worked with their suppliers to reduce plastic and cardboard used in shipment (Stern & Ander, 2008). Reduction in transportation emissions and packaging are implemented less often.

In apparel retailing, several companies have achieved Leader ship in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) status, a government certification for green buildings (Fulton & Lee, 2010; Stern & Ander, 2008). Wal-Mart has created two green-flagship stores to test new green practices such as energy-reduction through utilizing daylight from skylights to light the store when possible, wind energy, using water for heating and cooling, LED use in displays and refrigeration (Stern & Ander, 2008). Target has also opened stores in accordance with LEED and Low Impact Development guidelines (Stern

& Ander, 2008). Ballenciaga and Kohls have both created eco-friendly stores that rely on green building materials and energy sources (Lone, 2009).

On the other hand, many companies have highlighted sustainability through short-term actions. Several mainstream designers have recently debuted sustainable lines for a single season, including Stella McCartney , the Gap, American Apparel, Guess Jeans, and Levis (Black, 2008; Lee & Sevier, 2008; Lipke, 2008). Barney's New York has started a green luxury campaign, which has been well received by consumers who expressed interested in green themed window displays (Lee & Savier, 2008). Although these represent a very small portion of the overall market (Beard, 2008), every effort helps the sustainable fashion marketplace advance (Lipke, 2008).

Apparel retailers have met many of the same challenges encountered by other companies when implementing sustainability into business practices. Again, although consumers think considering the environment is important in apparel purchases, they report not taking this into consideration when actually making purchases (Butler & Francis, 1997; Hiller Connell, 2010). Even consumers that make green purchases in other product categories may not transfer this consideration to clothing purchases (Koch & Domina, 1997). Garment fit and style further complicate apparel purchasing decisions (Butler & Francis, 1997). Few options for sustainable clothing exist in traditional retailing outlets (Fulton, 2010; Hiller Connell, 2010). Consumers instead rely on catalogues and website to find sustainable clothing, despite the extra time and effort required to locate and shop these outlets (Hiller Connell, 2011). Style options also provide another limiting factor on the availability of garments. Consumers perceive eco-fashion as less trendy than regular apparel and cited this as a reason for refusal to purchase (Hiller Connell, 2010). Consumers accustomed to low priced clothing may not be willing to pay increased prices to purchase sustainable apparel (Gilhar, 2007).

To overcome these barriers, sustainable fashion is encouraged to develop more up-to-date styles (Beard, 2008; Hiller Connell, 2010) and provide more information to consumers through labeling (Haight, 2009; Hiller Connell, 2010). Labeling of sustainable garments through hang-tags that present information about the specific elements of sustainability implemented in the garment could raise awareness by giving shoppers more information on the possibility and application of sustainability to apparel (Thomas, 2008). However, there is not an industry wide regulatory organization to provide consistent standards (Beard, 2008; Hiller Connell, 2010). A few organizations do offer certifications, such as fair trade and organic fibers (Thomas, 2008). However, consumers are often unaware of these certifications and their corresponding labeling information, limiting marketing and educational impact (Nagappan, 2009). Eco-fashion shows work to improve consumer awareness of the environmental impact of clothing (Black, 2008). Research suggests the media could play an important role in this process, as many consumers read fashion magazines for information about clothing trends (Morgan & Birthwistle, 2009; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Several fashion magazines, including Vogue and Vanity Fair, produce annual "green issues" (Winge, 2008).

Integrating sustainability with fashionable trends also faces a positioning challenge. Eco-fashion is currently a niche market, targeting environmentally concerned consumers with products designed to fit their lifestyle. Segmenting research shows that lifestyle profiles are better means to differentiate green consumers than demographics (Connolly & Prothero, 2003; McDonald & Oates, 2006; Straughan & Roberts, 1999). Zimmer *et al.* (1994) found consumer concern for the environment to include: concern for waste, wildlife, and the biosphere, product labeling, climate change, concern for health, and energy awareness. However, despite such research on the environmentally friendly consumer, positioning of a green product to the mass market is difficult.

Sustainable apparel offers an added value that could become a competitive advantage (Crewe & Davenport, 1992; Yan, 2003). Even within sustainable apparel retailers, the opportunity exists for competitive advantage by focusing on sustainable actions that are seldom currently utilized, such as recycled fibers and transportation emissions (Fulton & Lee, 2010). Thus sustainable apparel offers a market opportunity for companies wishing to improve their value to consumers, reputation and competitive advantage.

In addition to the physical environmental detriment caused by garment production, the structure of the apparel industry increases the negative impact through both stimulating consumer consumption and overproducing for consumer demand (Dickson et al., 2009). The fashion industry as a whole encourages increased consumption through its trend-driving production calendar (Dickson et al., 2009). Additionally, the structure of the industry creates industry overstock, as consumer demand is not always accurately forecasted (Dickson, et al., 2009). Fast fashion reduces the risk of over production and subsequent markdowns by producing garments quickly and thus closer to consumer's demands (Mattila et al., 2002).

However, the constant consumerism of fashion has left people tired of constantly trying to keep up and worried about the effects such a tiring cycle may have on the earth (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Gillhar, 2007). The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development said "the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries" (United Nations, 2009). The UN places changing consumption patterns as a high priority (United Nations, 2009).

FAST FASHION

Criticisms of the sustainability of the apparel industry are often magnified when pointed towards fast fashion retailers. Fast fashion is often credited with intensifying the increasing pace of consumption, by providing easy access to desired trends with low cost and low quality (Brosdahl, 2007; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Attitudes toward the cheap and ever changing styles create a more disposable view of clothing (Claudio, 2007). The garments are produced with the lowest cost possible, utilizing low quality fabrics and low priced labor. As companies strive to reduce prices and increase sales and profits, they pass the burden of producing cheap products to manufacturers, fabric manufactures and fiber producers, which ultimately gets passed to the earth (Fletcher, 2007). However, the earth cannot support the production and disposal of fast fashion in the long run (Winge, 2008). Natural resources are depleting and landfills are filling (Claudio, 2007; Walker, 2008). Consumers are purchasing more clothing than in previous years, and consequently they also dispose of more clothing (Lee & Sevier, 2008). This fast, cheap fashion occupies a large market share and its production is now taking a toll on the world's natural resources and landfills (Brosdahl, 2007; Morgan & Birthwistle, 2009).

The fast fashion sector of the apparel industry is made up of companies operating with an innovative business structure, allowing them to capitalize on the markets' demand for faster consumption and to stimulate existing consumer demand for more easily accessible trends. This retailing model is in response to deficiencies in the apparel production and selling system developed over the past century (Crewe & Davenport, 1992) and has the potential to change retailing forever (Stern & Ander, 2008).

The fast fashion model utilizes innovative technology and supply chain organization to produce merchandise quickly and at a low cost (Birtwistle et al, 2003).

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Fast fashion retailers have more control over their supply chains, through full vertical integration (Birtwistle et al., 2003; Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006) or close relationships with suppliers (Birtwistle et al., 2003). This increased influence over the supply chain allows for lower priced production (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). Advanced, in-store IT allows for a real-time analysis of sales (Doeringer & Crean, 2006). Styles are produced in small batches, often made of fabrics produced local to garment manufacturing, which decreases production time (Doeringer & Crean, 2006; Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). Replenishment needs are known immediately, and requests can be quickly fulfilled due to the short lead times (Birtwistle et al, 2003; Sull & Turconi, 2008).

The fast fashion production model reduces risk traditionally associated with producing products in accordance with forecasts made far in advance (Birtwistle et al., 2003; Mattila et al. 2002). Traditional retailers plan merchandise beginning years ahead, hoping that consumers will embrace styles as planned in the future selling season (Matatila et al., 2002). This traditional push-based calendar runs on four to six selling seasons in which merchandise is pushed to stores based on preplanned assortments (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Doeringer & Crean, 2006; Sull & Turconi, 2008). Fast fashion has changed the traditional fashion calendar by increasing the number of seasons from six to 12 or 20, towards a more continuous flow of new merchandise attuned and responsive to consumer wants expressed through purchases (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Doeringer & Crean, 2006; Sull & Turconi, 2008). Merchandise is sent to stores almost continuously, closely based on actual sales (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). New styles can be designed and produced within two weeks and can be replenished quickly (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Retailers receive new merchandise everyday, the assortments are quickly adjusted according to market demand (Sull & Turconi, 2008).

For example, fast fashion retailer Zara orders only 20% of its budget before the season starts, allowing 80% to be ordered and produced in a quick response manner, produced in factories owned by Zara's parent company, Inditex (Birtwistle et al, 2003). Through this innovative retailing strategy, product design forecasting is able to more closely read the nuances of consumer demand (Doeringer & Crean, 2006). Fast fashion retailers respond to consumer purchases in determining future product mixes.

Zara has been identified by many authors as the leader in fast fashion retailing (Birtwistle et al, 2003; Doeringer & Crean, 2006; Ghemawat & Nueno, 2003). New merchandise is placed in stores every three weeks, orders of which are contingent on consumer spending in the recent past.

The garments sold by fast fashion retailers are characterized by relatively low price and quality, yet are highly trendy (Ghemawat & Nueno, 2003). The short lead time allows fast fashion retailers to knock off runway trends quickly. Cheap prices encourage increased consumption and impulse purchases (Birtwistle et al, 2003; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Attitudes towards the cheap and ever changing styles creates a more disposable view of clothing (Claudio, 2007), which, it seems, consumers have adopted without feeling guilt (Beard, 2008; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009) or consideration for the environmental impacts (Fulton, 2010). Morgan and Birtwistle (2009) found that young consumers purchase apparel products often: 20% purchased once a week and 10% purchased more than one item weekly, with another 20% purchasing every two weeks. However, participants in the same study reported not considering the environmental impact of the disposal of their clothing.

Fast fashion targets young consumers interested in quickly changing trends. These young consumers may not have much money to spend on long lasting garments and instead favor low priced clothing (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Although few studies

have reported on the consumer's perceptions of fast fashion retailers a few studies explore consumer's views (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009; Choi et al., 2010). Research shows consumers perceive the high level of trend and variety of fast fashion retailers (Choi et al., 2010). Morgan and Birtwistle (2009) report that some consumers are concerned with the increased pace of consumption encouraged by fast fashion.

GENERATION Y CONSUMERS

Generation Y consumers, born between 1977 and 1994, are socially concerned and aware of many global issues (Jayson, 2006; Nayyar 2001; Paul, 2001). Growing up with the Internet has enabled Generation Y to be aware of wide variety of natural and human initiated disasters, solidifying their concern for the social problems of the world (Cone Inc., 2006; Yan, 2003).

The impact of technology on the paradigm of Generation Y is clear. Easily accessible information via the Internet has enabled Generation Y to be aware of wide variety of natural and human initiated disasters, on a global scale, solidifying their concern for the social problems of the world (Cone Inc., 2006; Yan, 2003). However, information technology also separates these consumers from direct experiences through computer mediated presentations of the information which may be less effective in generating concern than direct experiences with social problems (Takàcs-Sànta, 2007). Additionally, the instantaneous nature of digital technology has created a bent for immediate action in these consumers (Yan, 2003). The ability to easily find large amounts of information that can be used to verify companies' claims has caused Generation Y consumers to feel empowered (Yan, 2003). Confidence in this empowerment has also caused these consumers to be highly skeptical of both large companies in general and the messages they present (Yan, 2003). Generation Y is also

aware of the ability of technology to make anything seem real, causing consumers to question the truth of claims made by marketing material, and appreciate those companies they feel are truly authentic (Lewis, 2001). However, the increased power and knowledge offered by technology does not necessarily translate into more ethical or sustainable purchases (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001).

When considering sustainable behavior, it seems that although Generation Y consumers are concerned, their level of knowledge of sustainability (Dickson, 2000; Carew and Mitchell, 2002; Kagawa, 2007) and consideration for sustainability in purchasing decisions are low (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Kagawa (2007) found that 91.8% of young Generation Y participants were either highly involved with (20.3%) or favorably supported sustainability, regardless of their self-reported level of familiarity, whereas only the remaining participants thought sustainability was unworthy or unnecessary. However, Generation Y consumers do appreciate CSR activities of companies and prefer to purchase from companies who are working to make a difference in society (Cone, 2006).

This young group of consumers is also a large and powerful consumer segment with a long future of potential consumer decisions (Cui et al., 2003). As these consumers will live on to see the implications of sustainability efforts (or lack thereof), their understanding of sustainability issues is especially important.

Generation Y consumers enjoy fast fashion (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007) as they are interested in fast moving tends (Martin & Bush, 2000), and prefer to buy lower-priced clothing (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). However, these consumers do shop or browse frequently, up to three times per week (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007). Young consumers in one study reported shopping at H&M, TopShop, and Zara, all fast fashion retailers, most frequently (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007).

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STUDY ONE

Chapter 3: Method

The questionnaire, seeking to understand consumers' perceptions of sustainability and fast fashion, combined open-ended questions and quantitative questions. Specifically, participants were first asked, by an open-ended question, to define sustainability in general (Carew and Mitchell, 2002) and to further describe its application in the apparel and retailing industries and the importance of the movement in the future, including possibly attaching responsibility to apparel companies. Questions concerning environmental issues followed, allowing consumers to describe their opinions on: the general impact of their clothing purchases on the environment, knowledge and opinions of specific practices implemented by apparel companies, and their perceptions of the most important environmental issue. To prevent influencing responses no introductory information or definitions were provided (Kagawa, 2007), aside from the categorical headings of sustainability, environmental concern, and sustainable fashion.

Additional questions asked participants to rate a list of 17 specific sustainable practices employed by "sustainable apparel retailers", used in previous literature to measure sustainable practices of apparel retailers (Fulton & Lee, 2010). These were to be rated as a top-five most important issues, or bottom-five least important issues. The same list was also used to assess the participant's presence or absence of knowledge of each item.

Perceptions of fast fashion retailers were also measured through both open-ended and quantitative questions. First participants were asked if they have heard of "fast fashion". The subsequent questions, for those who had knowledge of fast fashion, asked

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participants to define fast fashion and list examples of such retailers. Then the survey asked both those who had and had not heard of fast fashion to list retailers that they felt had quickly changing merchandise. Additional questions asked about price and quality perception of low priced clothing. The quantitative section listed nine retailers, both fast fashion and traditional retailers, that target the Generation Y consumer, at a variety of price and quality points, and asked the same series of questions about each. Participants were asked to rate, on a seven point Likert scale, the speed of merchandise changes and price, quality, and trend level of the garments. They were also asked how important price was in considering purchases at this store and how disposable they viewed clothing from the retailer to be. Consumers could then write in their opinions of the retailer.

SAMPLE

Collection of a paper survey resulted in 80 responses. The sample consisted of female students aged 18-25, concentrating in textiles and apparel at a large university in the U.S.

DATA ANALYSIS

A coding guide was developed based on the responses of the first 25 surveys. Responses were then coded according to this thematic coding guide by two independent coders. Three additional items were included based on subsequent responses. Interrater reliability between coders was calculated at 91.75% agreement. Frequency test of the most and least important data were based on categorical division rather than sequential ranking, in an attempt to capture the variety of sentiment by not limiting the selection to a single most important practice.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

DEFINITIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY

Participants were asked to define the term "sustainability" in general and in terms of the apparel industry. Analysis of consumer supplied definitions provided three themes: 1) long product life, 2) conservation and preservation and 3) environmental considerations. Results in the first theme show 58.75% participants defined sustainability as relating to creating durable products that are long lasting.

Durable products create value for both the consumer and the company, highlighting the consumers' consideration of their own benefits in the processing of sustainable options (Hustvedt & Dickson, 2009). Long lasting products do contribute to the efforts of sustainability by preventing direct replacement of products (Hiller Connell, 2011). A total of 19% emphasized acting in a way that would preserve the value of the earth's resources for future generations, in line with the WCED (1987) definition. 13.75% of participants described environmentally friendly ideas and practices. Some of respondents addressed sustainability as: *"I think sustainability involves being "green", not polluting when making things, recycling, etc."* and *"Sustainability is keeping the Earth in its greenest and healthiest condition by all means possible, with our support"*.

However, the other two aspects of sustainability, economic longevity and social responsibility related to labor practices or human health, were not directly thematically present.

SUSTAINABILITY AND APPAREL

When considering apparel specifically, emerging themes were similar to those of general sustainability. Foremost emphasis remained on creating durable products (33%), although this was mentioned less frequently than when considering general sustainability.

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In contrast to participants' general sustainability ideas, 22.5% felt sustainability was related to practices and products that would benefit the future economic position of the business. Participants commented on the need to create products that consumers will like to increase sales and correctly target the intended market. In contrast, many consumers mentioned the incompatibility of apparel with the ideas of sustainability. Again, general concern for the environment or use of resources (30%) emerged as a theme.

When considering the environmental impact of clothing, the most common response was related to not knowing or believing there is no impact (28.75%): *"I'm not sure how all of my clothing is made so I don't know how it affects the environment"* and *"I have never thought about how my purchase affects the environment until 'green' clothing began to appear. Even then, I still don't think about it and I have no idea how it affects the environment. I guess I am ill informed"*.

Following closely (27.75%) is an acknowledgment of an impact. However, under half of these mentions of effecting the environment labeled it as negative. Examples of specific negative impacts, including synthetic fibers (11.25%), pollution (12.5%), use of natural resources (8.75%), toxic dyes and chemicals (8.75%), and waste (8.75%), were each specifically listed by a few participants. These findings support previous studies that found consumers have merely a broad awareness of environmental issues (Carew & Mitchell, 2002), lacking knowledge specific to the apparel industry (Hiller Connell, 2010). In contrast to the negative impacts, 13.75% mentioned lessening the impact by purchasing green or eco-friendly products.

Concerning participants overall sentiments of sustainable apparel, 47.5% of participants responded positively, reporting that sustainability is a good idea, something they support, or at least a step in the right direction. However, again many participants expressed concerns in actual implementation. Despite consumers low level of specific

knowledge regarding the negative impact of the apparel industry or the resulting environmental degradation, they still believe the ideas of sustainability do not fit with the apparel industry (Hiller Connell, 2010; Kim & Damhorst, 1998). Consumers said: *"I think it's improbable, yet important for environmental sustainability"* and *"If it was more trendy I would buy more of these types of clothing"*.

ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY PRODUCTS AND PRACTICES

To solicit more specific information about participants' awareness, we asked them to list and provide their opinions of companies they viewed as sustainable. A total of 60% mentioned general favor and support towards brands they listed. Additionally 7.5% also specified that they though these companies were taking a good step in the right direction towards changing consumer viewpoints. Findings confirm the perception of higher prices as a barrier to purchasing environmentally friendly apparel (Hiller Connell, 2010). Close to one fifth of participants (18.75%) noted the products were more expensive.

Other responses included 6.25% of participants who conveyed skepticism, questioning misleading information from these companies, supporting the notion that consumers have been subject to "greenwashing" through negative experiences with previous false claims (Thomas, 2008; Stisser, 1994). Participants noted greenwashing: *"I don't think most of them are as 'green' as companies claim, but I think they're better than most products"* and *"Overpriced and not necessarily environmentally friendly"*.

Many of the same practices were mentioned when participants were asked to provide examples of sustainable apparel retailing practices, including reduction in chemical use (25%) and environmentally friendly materials such as recycled, organic, bamboo or natural fibers (23.75%). Many participants listed reusable bags and/or

packaging (12.5%). This shows that consumers are aware of the sustainable practices utilized by retailers (Fulton & Lee, 2010).

SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN THE APPAREL INDUSTRY

Participants were asked to choose, from a list of specific environmentally practices, previously utilized by Fulton and Lee (2010) to analyze the practices of current sustainable retailers, the five items they consider most and least important in preserving the earth. At least half of participants listed energy efficiency, water usage control, or reduction of fabric waste in production as an important issue in sustainable apparel production and retailing. This echoes major industry and political campaigns to promote general environmental concern such as energy use and water control (Romero & Percifield, 2010; Zimmer et al., 1994).

Concerning least important practices, information on laundering and care was listed most frequently, by 61.25% of participants, yet it was also chosen most frequently as a least important issue. This illustrates consumer confusion surrounding sustainable actions. In general, consumers are more likely to take environmentally friendly actions when they feel they will actually make an impact (Straughan & Roberts, 1999; McDonald & Oates, 2006). Apparel laundering uses much water, energy and chemicals, and yet is controlled by the consumer (Allwood et al., 2006; Beard, 2008). However, participants in this study felt laundering have little environmental impact, identifying an opportunity to educate consumers on the potential positive environmental impact within their control (Hiller Connell, 2010; Su, 2006).

A total of 58.9% of participants chose sustainability loyalty program as among the least important practices, while 48.9% selected rejection of disposable garments. One focus of implementing sustainability in the apparel industry is through encouraging

reduced consumption and rejection of low-quality garments with short life cycles and non-biodegradable materials, such as sold by fast fashion retailers (Fulton & Lee, 2010). It is also interesting that 33.9% listed garments made of organic materials as a least important action. This is in contrast to previous findings that consumers are interested in purchasing organic cotton apparel for the health benefits and the support of the organic agricultural industry (Hustved & Dickson, 2009). Some practices received mixed support, gathering similar votes as most and least important. Garments made of biodegradable materials were listed by 30.0% as most important and 28.9% as least important. Likewise, fiber growth without pesticides was chosen as most important 26.3% and least important by 25.1%.This illustrates the conflicting perceptions of consumers.

Additionally, to assess knowledge levels of sustainable practices that could be utilized by the apparel industry, participants were asked to identify any practices of which they have no knowledge. Most commonly unknown were "consumer sustainability loyalty program" (57.14%), "rejection of disposable garments" (51.02%) "sustainability as a company focus" (30.61%), "environmentally friendly building materials" (22.45%) and "environmentally friendly shipping containers" (22.45%). Several of these align with the elements chosen as least important, possibly illustrating the link between knowledge and perceived effectiveness. Information can influence the perceived value of a cause (Dickson, 2000), a relationship illustrated by the overlap of practices consumers have no knowledge of and those they feel are least important. As consumer knowledge of the potential positive impacts of specific actions increases, they may increase the perceived level of importance of such proactive measures taken by apparel companies.

FUTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY IN APPAREL

Findings show consumers agree that the apparel industry should continue to take steps toward sustainability. Overall, 62% responded that apparel retailers should do something to be more sustainable. Half of those participants emphasized the importance of small steps. However, responses were mixed as to whether retailers should be responsible for sustainability, yet 65% thought retailers should be held responsible. 26% indicated the apparel industry should do something because of its place of great influence in society and the supply chain. Participants cited both the retailers' large impact on the environment (Kim & Damhorst, 1998) and the influence it has over consumers by influencing opinions and providing options for consumers from which to choose.

FAST FASHION

Only 20% of participants reported being aware of the concept of fast fashion. Of those, 25% mentioned low price, 50% called it trendy and 25% mentioned the fast response to trends: *" I think it's stores that carry things that are resembling runway trends. I think it's a great concept because you can get the latest looks".* Among retailers listed as examples of fast fashion were Charlotte Russe, Forever 21, Gap, H&M, Target, Urban Outfitters and Zara.

Quantitative results show consumers' perceptions of specific retailers' prices, quality, level of trend and speed of merchandise changes. Mean results from quantitative questions are given in Table 1. Results show Forever 21 is seen having the fastest changing merchandise, whereas Urban Outfitters is seen as most trendy, followed by H&M and Forever 21. Forever 21 is perceived as having both the lowest price point and lowest quality. Express is perceived as most expensive and Patagonia as highest quality. Papaya is both most likely to be worn only a few times and viewed as disposable most often.

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Table 1. Perceptions of fast fashion retailers.

	Speed	Trendy	Price	Quality	Wear infrequently	Price salience	Garments disposable
H&M	5.35	5.90	3.65	4.21	3.90	4.88	4.02
Zara	5.13	5.48	4.73	4.78	3.79	4.77	3.58
Forever 21	5.72	5.72	2.72	2.82	4.36	4.80	4.37
Charlotte Russe	4.81	4.56	3.17	3.05	4.65	4.51	4.37
Patagonia	3.50	3.71	4.71	5.24	2.65	4.21	3.58
Papaya	4.66	4.38	2.72	2.51	5.06	4.52	4.44
Bebe	4.41	5.12	5.47	4.95	3.91	5.16	3.19
Express	4.64	4.93	5.74	4.96	3.53	4.96	3.28
Urban Outfitters	5.51	6.01	5.32	4.44	2.97	5.10	3.41
Mean	4.86	5.09	4.25	4.11	3.87	4.77	3.80

CONCLUSION

The results of this study were used in designing the main study. The results suggest consumers support sustainability in general, but have little knowledge or experience with specific implementations. When considering apparel, many participants had never thought about the environmental impact of their clothing purchases. Thus, more consumer education is needed, especially to inform consumers of the effects of clothing consumption on the environment. Several participants mentioned the proactive measures taken by companies to make a more positive impact. This shows that the consumers have been educated in the potential for green products to be more sustainable than their conventional counterparts. Apparel retailers have the same opportunity to educate consumers through offering products that are more environmentally friendly. The results also show that consumers are supportive of the idea of sustainability in apparel, and would be more apt to support sustainable apparel if it was trendier and more affordable. Drawing from these results the main study was set up to test consumers'

perceptions of the introduction of sustainable apparel through retailers they view as trendy and affordable through brand extension.

STUDY TWO

Chapter 5: Conceptual Framework

BRAND EXTENSION

Companies utilize established brands to ease introduction of new products into product categories not currently served by the brand (Keller & Aaker, 1992). This tactic reduces the risk of marketing a new product by allowing customers to rely on established brand associations when evaluating the new product (Aaker & Keller, 1990). This also reduces risk for consumers in purchasing new products as they can utilize past experience with the brand to generate expectations of the new product. However, to maximize the use of established brands to leverage the introduction of new products, companies must understand the cognitive process of brand extension evaluation to provide appropriate products that the consumer is comfortable associating with the parent brand. Influence on the consumer's judgment of the extension is based on his evaluation of the parent brand and his perception of the similarity or "fit" of the new product with the established brand (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991).

Keller and Aaker's (1992) tests of brand extension analyzed the impact of the consumers' perceptions of the use and production of the parent brand products to conceptualize the consumer's perception of fit. Since the original conceptualizations of brand extension (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991), research has expanded the theory to identify additional influences on extension evaluations. A brand extension can now be conceptualized as extending within the same product category as well as to new product categories. Horizontal brand extensions are used to introduce such category and line extensions, which utilize the same product category to introduce a new product to a new target market (Choi et al., 2006). Vertical brand extensions are used to create

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diffusion brands in which a lower-priced product is introduced for the mass market under a higher-priced designer brand (Liu & Choi, 2009).

PROCESS

The evaluation of a brand extension is a cognitive process involving the attitudes, including both cognitive and affective elements, towards the parent brand and knowledge of the extension product category (Czellar, 2003). Positive attitudes towards the parent brand lead to more positive evaluation of the extensions (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991). Consumers' knowledge and awareness of the parent brand are transferred to the extension in the process of evaluation (Aaker & Keller, 1990).

Cognitive processing of the extension is often studied according to the cognitive categorization theory (Boush & Loken, 1991; Park, Millberg & Lawson, 1991). Consumers evaluate new information based on existing mental categories, seeking to associate new information with existing mental categories, to which existing knowledge of brands and product categories are associated (Park et al., 1991). Categorization judgments are made based on the similarity of the new information with the established category (Boush & Loken, 1991; Czellar, 2003). Categories represent a range of similarity, yet have bounded limits (Boush & Loken, 1991). Products that are perceived as being more congruent with established categories will be processed more easily and knowledge contained in the established categories will be transferred to the extension evaluation more easily (Boush & Loken, 1991). Whereas new information that is not similar to the expected category will require more mental effort to process and therefore the transfer of information will occur less easily (Boush & Loken, 1991).

Other theories offer alternative perspectives to the processing of brand extension (Dacin & Smith, 1994). Piecemeal processing says that consumers who do not have a

clear established schema for processing the extension will instead piece together information from peripheral sources to evaluate the extension. Often this strategy is called the computed strategy, drawing from attitude formation literature (Fiske, 1982) in which the extension evaluation is the sum of all the considered attributes (Boush & Loken, 1991).

The level of knowledge and affect can influence this cognitive processing, as consumers who are more knowledgeable about a particular category will have more information with which to integrate the new information (Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994). Additionally, increased affect can also influence this process as consumers who have higher levels of emotional experience and involvement will have easier access to pertinent information (Fedorikhin, Park & Thomas, 2008).

Knowledge Transfer

Consumers' knowledge of the parent brand is often used to evaluate the extension (Czellar, 2003). The consumer will transfer knowledge of the parent brand to the extension product (Aaker and Keller, 1990). Brand knowledge is multi-faceted, consisting of functional brand knowledge, including knowledge of product features, and non-product related brand knowledge, made up of brand image and abstract features such as positioning and marketing (Keller, 1993; 1998). This transfer occurs more easily for extensions perceived as similar to the parent brand (Keller & Aaker, 1992; Park et al., 1991). Consumers with higher levels of knowledge of the parent brand tend to evaluate the extension more favorably (Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994). Expert consumers have easier access to brand information through well developed cognitive structures concerning the brand (Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994)

Affect Transfer

Similarly, the consumers' level of affective emotions toward the parent brand will influence the evaluation of the extension. Affect refers to consumers' emotion and is often measured in the form of favorability or likability towards the brand (Boush & Loken, 1991; Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994). Hem and Iverson (2003) found that increased levels of affect led to increased positive perceptions towards the extension. Fedorikhin and his colleagues (2008) tested the effects of attachment as a strong form of affect. They found that consumers with higher levels of brand attachment were more likely to view the extension as similar to the parent brand and to view the extension favorably, even in cases of moderate fit.

FIT

Perception of fit influences the consumer's evaluation of the extension. Fit is the perceived similarity of the new product to the parent brand, evaluated when the consumer has knowledge of both the parent brand and extension product category (Czellar, 2003). The level of fit is important in the evaluative processing as categorization is based on the relative fit of the new information to the existing category (Park et al., 1991). New products that are evaluated as closely fitting with the parent brand are more easily accepted (Boush & Loken, 1991). Cognitive processing of the new product based on existing knowledge schema often leads consumers to utilize cognitive categorization to attribute the new product to an existing mental category. The more similar the product category of the parent brand is to the extension, the higher fit the consumer will perceive.

Research has identified several conceptualizations of fit (Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Park et al., 1991). Park *et al.* (1991) found that perceived fit was related to both product feature fit and brand concept consistency. Product feature fit refers to the similarity between the actual features of the new product and those of the existing products of the

brand. Overall quality and other global and abstract product traits are also included in product feature fit (Park et al., 1991). Brand concept consistency refers to the fit between both the symbolic and functional brand images (Park et al., 1991). Product category fit, the similarity between the new product category of the extension and existing product categories served by the brand, positively influences extension evaluation (Bottomley & Holden, 2001; Park et al., 1991; Salinas & Pérez, 2009).

Companies utilize tactics to influence consumer's perception of fit. Distancing is often used as a positioning technique to place the extension in a market that is distant from the parent brand, by targeting a new consumer group or offering a new price point, so to dilute any reciprocal effects that may be projected back onto the parent brand (Dacin & Smith, 1994). Brand breadth could also influence the perception of brand concept consistency. Production of a wide variety of products will influence the perception of brand concept and the categorization process (Boush & Loken, 1991).

The perception of fit can both mediate and moderate the transfer of brand attitudes to the extension. Higher levels of perceived fit increase knowledge and affect transfer from parent brand to extension (Boush & Loken, 1991; Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994; Park et al., 1991).

However, other factors have been found to overcome the influence of fit on extension evaluation. Brand attachment can overcome a moderate fit, influencing consumers to favorably evaluate the extension product despite moderate levels of fit (Fedorikhin et al., 2008). Brand loyalty also affects evaluation of the extension (Choi et al., 2010).

FIT IN CSR ACTIVITIES

The perception of fit is also considered when consumers evaluate a CSR relationship. Fleck and Quester (2007) draw on both brand extension and CSR literature to delineate the concept of fit, in relation to CSR, into factors of relevancy and expectancy. They conceptualize relevancy as the similarity of new information to prior information and expectancy as the ease of understanding new information based on past information storage structures (Fleck & Quester, 2007).

Findings on the influence of fit on the evaluation of brand-cause alliances are mixed. Some studies found that, like in brand extension research, higher levels of fit increase consumers' perceptions of the alliance (Basil & Herr, 2006; Fleck & Quester, 2007; Zdravkovic et al., 2010). However, another study found brand-cause alliances with moderate levels of fit to be most favorable in consumers' eyes (Fleck & Quester, 2007). The authors attribute this to conflicting antecedents. However, some studies have also found that the fit level does not influence consumers' perceptions of the alliance (Lafferty, 2007; Phau & Ong, 2007). Basil and Herr (2006) found that negative perceptions of fit can negatively influence evaluation of the alliance.

Similarly to the brand extension process, knowledge and affect towards the cause are transferred to the brand when an alliance is made (Basil & Herr, 2006; Zdravkovic et al., 2010). Zdravkovic *et al.* (2010) found that as consumer knowledge of the cause increased, evaluation of the alliance increased, in conditions of well-fitting alliances. Conversely, if the consumer dislikes either the brand or the cause, he may negatively view the alliance (Basil & Herr, 2006).

APPAREL BRAND EXTENSIONS

Apparel brands often extend into new product categories. It is not uncommon for an apparel brand to extend to housewares (Forney, Park & Brandon, 2005). Additionally,

many designer labels utilize brand extension techniques to create lower priced lines, leveraging the designer's name to sell products to the mass market (Liu & Choi, 2009). Fast fashion brands have utilized brand extensions to enter the menswear, childrenswear and home goods markets (Choi et al., 2010).

BRAND EXTENSION AND CSR

Although CSR literature has made mention of the similarity with brand extension literature on the conceptualizations of fit, no studies have considered the combination of these two research streams. Brand extension literature has yet to examine the introduction of a product with an inherent cause. This study will address this gap in the literature by combining the fit concepts of brand extension and CSR literature, by analyzing consumer perceptions of a sustainable product, combining both the association of the brand with a cause and a new product introduction.

Chapter 6: Hypotheses Development

Cause effect

Effects of cause knowledge on brand-cause fit

Consumers' level of perceived knowledge has been found to influence consumers' attitude toward environmental behaviors (Antil 1984; Ellen, 1994). Concerning the relationship between brands and products, consumers that have more knowledge of the cause favorably view the relationship (Basil & Herr, 2006). Advance knowledge structures, developed through frequent use and storage of information about a topic, allow consumers to more easily access information (Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994). Thus consumers with higher cause knowledge will have an easier time processing the new information presented through the extension.

H1a.   Consumer knowledge of environmental issues will have a positive relationship with brand-cause fit.

Effects of cause involvement on brand-cause fit

Environmental involvement, an affective perception of the environment, influences consumers' evaluation of environmental problems (Kollmus & Agyeman, 2002; Takács-Sánta, 2007) and could also influence the purchase of sustainable products. In evaluating brand extensions, Fedorikhin *et al.* (2008) found that consumers with higher affect, in the form of attachment, more easily accessed information in the evaluation process, and were more likely to associate the extension with the parent brand. Consumers process new information about brand extensions more deeply when they are more highly motivated (Czellar, 2003). Thus consumers that have higher levels of involvement with environmental issues will more deeply process information concerning

the retailers' participation in the cause of sustainability and thus involved processing will lead to a higher fit evaluation. Lafferty (2007) found that similarity between the cause and brand had low influence on the evaluation of the partnership. He instead suggests affect towards the cause may influence the perception of the partnership, as emotions overcome cognitive evaluations. Therefore, this study proposes that affect in the form of environmental involvement will influence the perception of fit between the fast fashion brand and the cause of sustainability.

H1b. Consumer involvement with environmental issues will have a positive relationship with brand-cause fit.

Brand effect

Effects of brand knowledge on brand-cause fit

Consumer knowledge of the parent brand will influence the processing of new information (Dacin & Smith, 1994). The more knowledge a consumer has about a brand, the more complex knowledge structures associated with the brand will allow consumers to more easily access the information and integrate new information. As consumers evaluate the level of similarity between parent brand and extension, the more information the consumer holds about the parent brand will allow him to make more detailed evaluation of the extension (Park et al., 1991). Increased knowledge will allow the consumer to more accurately place the extension within their understanding of the parent brand and more easily evaluate the similarity between the two (Boush & Loken, 1991).

H2a. Consumer knowledge of the fast fashion brand will have a positive relationship with brand-cause fit.

Effects of brand affect on brand-cause fit

H2b. Consumer affect toward fast fashion brand will have a positive relationship with brand-cause fit.

Factors influencing brand-extension fit

Effects of brand knowledge on brand-extension fit

When considering the functional brand attributes, fit, style, color and fabrication are commonly used as evaluative criteria in apparel purchasing decisions (Forney et al., 2005). Thus consumers will utilize these features in examining the extension, as an apparel product. Existing knowledge of these features, as well as of the brand image of the fast fashion retailer will influence consumers' perceptions of the extension product's fit with products of the existing brand.

H3a. Consumer knowledge of fast fashion brand will have a positive relationship with brand-extension fit.

Effects of brand affect on brand-extension fit

Affect towards the parent brand influences the extension evaluation process (Boush & Loken, 1991). Fedorikhin *et al.* (2008) test the effects of attachment on the extension, finding that consumers with attachment to a brand, as a high level of affect, will be more likely to associate the extension product with the parent brand. They attribute this to the consumers' desire to maintain their mental conceptualization of the brand to which they are attached by avoiding categorizing the extension as incongruent.

H3b. Consumer affect toward fast fashion brand will have a positive relationship with brand-extension fit.

Factors influencing attitude towards extension

Influence of fit on extension evaluation

In the evaluation of a brand-cause alliance, consumers use level of perceived fit to evaluate the alliance (Basil & Herr, 2006). Zdravkovic *et al.* (2010) found that fit between the cause and supporting brand positively influences consumer's perception of the sponsoring brand. In the case of sustainable products, the cause is embedded in the extension product. Thus as higher fit increases perception of the brand, it will also increase perception of the brand extension, as a product of the brand.

H4. Brand-cause fit will have a positive influence on attitude toward brand extension.

Findings from many studies show the higher the perceived fit, the more highly the brand extension is evaluated (Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Czellar, 2003; Park et al., 1991). Perceived fit between the brand and extension has been found to facilitate knowledge and affect transfer (Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994). Bhat and Reddy (2001) found brand image fit to influence evaluation of the extension. Martin, Stewart and Matta (2005) support this by finding fit influences the transfer of knowledge and affect to the extension. In the case of fast fashion brands, brand concept consistency was found to have the most influence on consumer evaluation of the extension (Choi et al., 2006).

H5. Brand-extension fit will have a positive relationship with attitude toward brand extension.

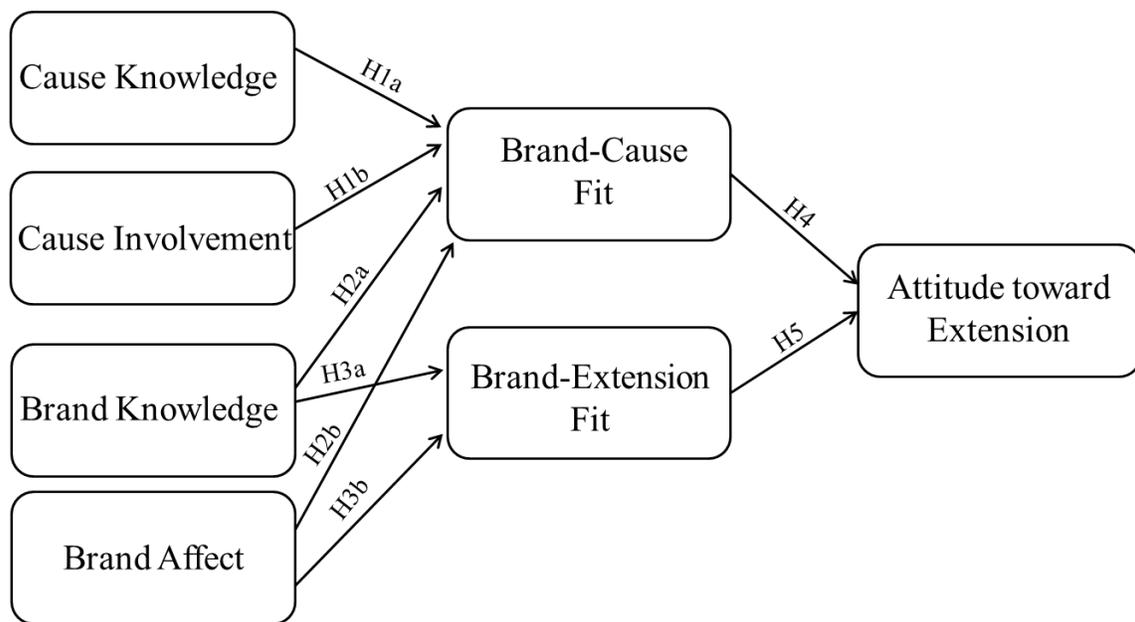The conceptual model tested in this study is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual model.

Chapter 7: Method

To test consumer' perceptions of a potential sustainable brand extension produced by a trendy, value price retailer, scenarios were developed which described a fast fashion brand introducing a line of such products to its stores. Zara and H&M were utilized in the scenarios to assess the potential for actual retailers to implement sustainable apparel products. Two separate surveys were created to test the perceptions based on each specific retailer, and participants were required to have browsing experience within the past year with the retailer in question in order to participate. Zara and H&M were chosen for their prominent place in fast fashion retailing. Zara is seen as the industry leader, and its parent company, Inditex as the archetype for fast fashion production (Birtwistle et al, 2003; Doeringer & Crean, 2006; Ghemawat & Nueno, 2003). H&M is also often seen as an exemplary fast fashion retailer (Doeringer & Crean, 2006). Previous research has found young consumers to shop at these retailers frequently (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007). Results from study 1 (Table 1) show consumers view both Zara and H&M as having trendy and fast changing merchandise. Although neither retailer is viewed as the most trendy or fastest moving, these factors were balanced with price and quality points, to consider other major features of fast fashion products. Participants view Zara and H&M at different price and quality points, yet nether is at the highest or lowest price or quality. This allows for testing of retailers of different price and quality levels, yet not choosing the highest or lowest, as perceived by consumers. Additionally, both Zara and H&M have implemented sustainability into business practices and utilize organic cotton in products (H&M, 2011; Zara, 2010).

Data was collected through a self-administered online survey. Female U.S. consumers of Generation Y, aged between 18 and 34 years, were invited to participate. Participation was limited to those with browsing experience with either Zara or H&M in the past 12 months. The sample was drawn from the top 25 most populous metropolitan areas, having populations over 2.1 million, based on the 2009 the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This population bracket was chosen based on concentration of both Zara and H&M stores in the U.S., but the entire metropolitan area was included to reduce bias. The sample was contacted through a professional research agency, using a modification of the Web survey design suggested by Dillman (2000). Email invitations were sent containing a link to either the Zara or H&M version of the survey. If consumers followed the participation URL link, they were directed to the assigned survey and presented with the screening question. Participants that did not qualify, due to lack of experience with the retailer, were not allowed to enter the survey they were attempting to participate in nor the survey concerning the other retailer.

A total of 2,292 consumers attempted to participate in the study; however, only 1,153 met the criteria of having browsing experiences with the retailer in the past 12 months. To ensure the quality of responses collected online, the data were carefully examined to prevent inclusion of computer generated responses, eliminating 84 responses. An additional 176 were removed for being incomplete. Consumer attentiveness to the survey was checked through an item that read, "If you read this item, do not respond to it" (Goldsmith & Clark, 2009). Participants who responded to this item were also excluded from the statistical analysis, eliminating another 295 respondents. As a result, 598 data were deemed complete and utilized for statistical analysis.

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The sample for this study contained only female consumers. Previous research has noted the high propensity of female consumers towards fast fashion (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Although many of the fast fashion retailers do sell men's clothing, they may not do so in every store. Additionally, research on environmentally conscious consumers has found females to be more apt to support environmental issues (Mainiery et al., 1997; Noddings, 2003) and CSR efforts of companies (Cui et al., 2003). Therefore, this study utilized data from only females to reduce potential sampling biases due to gender.

SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT

Scenarios were developed describing the consumers' hypothetical encounter with a sustainable line produced by the fast fashion retailer. The scenario describes the participant noticing the new line of apparel in the retailer. Garments of the new line are displayed together and labeled with hang tags describing the organic cotton fiber and biodegradable dye utilized in the garments and its positive impact on the environment. In the scenario, the hang tag read:

The fabric of this apparel item is made with 100% organic cotton fiber and biodegradable dye that have little chemical impact on the environment. Organic cotton fiber is grown without toxic pesticides and by using natural instead of synthetic fertilizers. This type of cotton farming releases little toxins into the soil, water, and air. Biodegradable dyes are used to color the fabric. Chemicals used in this type of dyeing, which are then released in waste water, are low impact. The cotton and dyes used in this garment will biodegrade when disposed of, leaving little physical or chemical remnants.

Organic cotton was chosen based on its current use in apparel products (Fulton & Lee, 2011; Hustvedt & Dickson, 2009; Lipke, 2008), representing a realistic situation. The tag presents only the impact of the organic cotton and biodegradable dyes highlighted. Both organic cotton and biodegradable dyes were used to highlight the use of water and chemicals, prominent issues in apparel production (Silverman & Conti,

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2009). Many marketing studies have utilized the written scenario approach (Hess Jr., Ganesan & Klein, 2007; Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988; Park, Lee & Han, 2007; Shao, Baker & Wagner, 2004; Swinyard, 1993). Scenarios were reviewed by two graduate and two undergraduate students, representing the general consumer audience, to check for wording and realism, and changes were made according to their suggestions.

PROCEDURE AND INSTRUMENT

A Web-based questionnaire was developed to gather data in the present study. When respondents clicked the URL to the survey, they were first lead to the informed consent form page. After that, participants were asked to answer two dichotomous screening questions developed by the authors. The first question asked whether they had browsing or purchasing experience at a physical store of either Zara or H&M in the past year. Only respondents who answered "yes" were lead to the next screen question. Those who answered "no" were then directed to the disqualification page. Those who checked yes were directed to answer the remainder of the survey. Questions in the two surveys were identical except for use of the retailer's name.

After the screening questions, participants were asked to evaluate knowledge about and involvement with environmental issues, followed by knowledge about and affect toward the retailer. Afterwards, all respondents were asked to read the same scenario explaining a new product line extension of the respective fast fashion retailer. After exposure to the scenarios, fast fashion retailer's fit with the cause, extension fit, attitudes toward brand extension, and intention to purchase apparel from the new product line were assessed. The questions to discern the quality of the online responses were inserted after purchase intention. The item read: "If you read this item, do not respond to it", in line with similar items used by other studies to ensure proper responses in the

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online setting (Goldsmith & Clark, 2009). Additionally a check question was utilized to measure consumers' awareness of the respective retailer's current sustainability efforts. Finally the survey asked for demographic information.

Knowledge and affect towards brand and environment issue and brand, brand-cause and brand-extension fit, and attitude toward the extension were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). To assess knowledge about environmental issue and fast fashion retailers, we adopted four items from Flynn and Goldsmith (1999), modified for both contexts (environment and brand). Items developed by Zaichkowsky (1994) were used to measure involvement with environmental issues on a bi-polar scale. Three items were used to tap retailer's cause-fit borrowed from Bhat and Ready (2001) and adopted to measure cause fit. Two of these items were also used in conjunction with three from Boush & Loken (1991) to measure brand-extension fit. Affect toward the fast fashion retailer and the extension were measured by three items from Bruner and Hensel (1996), using 7-point semantic differential scales.

PRE-TEST

Three university students and two retailing industry professionals participated in a pretest of the survey. They provided feedback on clarity of questions and instructions, as well as length and time required to complete (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2002). Revisions were made according to their suggestions prior to data collection.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analyses were conducted using SPSS 18.0. Reliability was estimated by using Cronbach's coefficient *alpha* for all multi-item scales. Descriptive statistics,

exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and multiple regression analyses were used to analyze the data.

Chapter 8: Results

To test for non-response bias of the demographics and study variables, the responses of the last 30% of participants, assumed to be similar to the non-respondents, were compared with the first 30% (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). No significant differences ($p > .5$) were found among the groups in either demographics or responses to variable questions.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The sample, consisting of Generation Y consumers, ranged in age from 18 to 35. The average age of the participants was 25.89. Over half of the sample was White or European American (55.35%), 16% were Asian American. Both the Hispanic or Latino (10.4%) and Black or African American (9.6%) ethnicity categories made up close to 10% of the sample each. A majority of the respondents had some form of higher education (90.7%). Of all participants, a little over 60% were married (63.2%), and about 80% held jobs (79.6%). The sample represents all income categories: less than $24,999 (15.7%), $25,000-$49,999 (25.8%), $50,000-$74,999 (22.8%), $75,000 -$99,999 (15.0%), and $100,000 or more (20.6%). Responses came from 24 U.S. states. Demographics of the sample are shown in Table 2.

COMPARISON DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS BETWEEN RETAILERS

We compared the demographic characteristics of H&M and Zara respondents, and found significant differences in age ($F = 5.73$, $p = < .05$), marital status ($\chi2 = 16.95$, $p = < .01$), education ($\chi2 = 22.41$, $p = < .01$), and income ($\chi2 = 14.00$, $p = < .05$). Respondents of Zara were older than those of H&M (25.5 vs. 26.3 respectively). The H&M

respondents collectively had a higher proportion of participants with a marital status of single, whereas the proportion of married persons was greater in the Zara sample. Comparing the education levels of the two samples, more of the respondents of the H&M survey had less than a high school or equivalent education, while a greater number of ZARA shoppers held Master's and Doctoral degrees. Similarly, a greater number of respondents in the H&M sample reported an income lower than $49,999, while a larger number of participants in the Zara sample reported an annual household income of greater than $75,000.

Table 2. Sample characteristics

Demographic characteristics		TOTAL		H&M		Zara		χ^2
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
Gender		594		302	50.8	292	49.2	
Marital status	Single	378	63.2	205	54.2	173	45.8	16.95**
	Married	186	31.1	80	43.0	106	57.0	
	Separated	4	.7	4	100	0	0.0	
	Divorced	9	1.5	4	44.4	5	55.6	
	Widowed	1	.2	1	100	0	0.0	
	Total			303-9		295-6		
Education	Less than high school	2	.3	0	.0	2	100.0	22.41**
	High school or GED	54	9.0	40	74.1	14	25.9	
	Some college	161	26.9	86	53.4	75	46.6	
	2 year associate degree	45	7.5	24	53.3	21	46.7	
	4 year college degree	234	39.1	113	48.3	121	51.7	
	Master's degree	74	12.4	28	37.8	46	62.2	
	Doctoral degree	23	3.8	10	43.5	13	56.5	
	Others	1	.2	1	100.0	0	.0	
Ethnicity	Asian American	104	15.9	44	42.3	60	57.7	3.52
	Black or African American	63	9.6	32	50.8	31	49.2	.00
	Hispanic or Latino	68	10.4	33	48.5	35	51.5	.14
	Native American	8	1.2	3	37.5	5	62.5	.56
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	5	0.8	1	20.0	4	80.0	1.90
	White or European	362	55.35	194	53.6	168	46.4	3.13
	Mixed/Bi-racial	31	4.9	17	54.8	14	45.2	.23
	Other	13	2.0	5	1.6	8	2.7	13.10

Table 2 (continued)

Income	Less than $10,000	35	5.9	23	65.7	12	34.3	
	$10,000 to $24,999	58	9.8	33	56.9	25	43.1	
	$25,000 to $49,999	153	25.8	90	58.8	63	41.2	
	$50,000 to $74,999	135	22.8	66	48.9	69	51.1	14.00*
	$75,000 to $99,999	89	15.0	34	38.2	55	61.8	
	$100,000 to $149,999	71	12.0	35	49.3	36	50.7	
	$150,000 and over	51	8.6	22	43.1	29	56.9	
Population	City population over 100,000	327	54.9	158	48.3	169	51.7	
	Larger town 50,000 to 100,000	159	26.7	82	51.6	77	48.4	
	Medium town 10,000 to 49,999	110	18.5	62	56.4	48	43.6	2.20
	Small town 2,500 to 9,999	0	0	0	.0	0	.0	
	A village or rural area less than 2,500	0	0	0	.0	0	.0	

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES WITH THE FAST FASHION RETAILERS

Every participant in the present study had browsing experience with the respective retailer within the past year. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics regarding the respondents' browsing and purchase with both retailers. Close to 30% of the respondents reported that they have browsed the respective fast fashion retailer at least once a month (29.1%), and once every three months (28.6%). One fifth of participants indicated that they have browsed the store at least once every six months (21.3%). In regard to purchase experiences, a majority of respondents (96.2%) had purchase experiences with fast fashion retailers within last 12 months. Nearly 30% of the respondents had purchased products from fast fashion retailers at least once every three months, followed by those that did so once every six months (26.1%). In both samples, a little over 10% reported purchasing from the retailer at least once a month (12.20%). There was no significant difference in browsing and purchasing experiences between the two fast fashion retailers ($p > .1$).

Table 3. Frequency analysis results of browsing and purchase experiences with fast fashion retailers

Browsing and purchasing experience by fast fashion retailer								
	Never *N (%)*	At least once every twelve months *N (%)*	At least once every nine months *N (%)*	At least once every six months *N (%)*	At least once every three months *N (%)*	At least once a month *N (%)*	Total *N (%)*	χ2
Browsing experience								
H&M	0(0.00)	27(39.1)	26(48.1)	68(54.4)	94(56.0)	81(47.4)	296(50.4)	7.12
Zara	0(0.00)	42 (60.9)	28(51.9)	57(45.6)	74(44.0)	90(52.6)	291(49.6)	
Total	0(0.00)	69(11.8)	54(9.2)	125(21.3)	168(28.6)	171(29.1)	587(100%)	
Purchasing experience								
H&M	7(31.8)	52(49.1)	27(43.5)	87(57.2)	95(55.9)	31(43.7)	299(51.3)	10.28
Zara	15(68.2)	54(50.9)	35(56.5)	65(42.8)	75(44.1)	40(56.3)	284(48.7)	
Total	22(3.8)	106(18.2)	62(10.6)	152(26.1)	170(29.2)	71(12.20)	583(100.0)	

PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

To assess the construct validity, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) revealed unidimensionality in each variable, evidencing construct validity (Cronbach and Meehl, 1955). Results, shown in Table 4, reveal factor loadings ranging from .67 to .90 on a single factor. These were deemed valid indicators of construct validity, as each factor loaded above .55 (Nunnally, 1967) and not higher than .30 on other factors (Kline, 1994). The Cronbach's *alpha* values for constructs tested in the present study ranged from .91 to .96, indicating acceptable internal reliability (Cronbach, 1951). As the data in Table 4 indicate, Cronbach's *alpha* for each of the scales were well above the minimally acceptable level of .70 recommended by Nunnally (1978). Thus, based on the results of preliminary analysis, we concluded that all research constructs in the proposed model have good reliability. For further data analyses, we created composite variables by averaging the items for each research construct. No significant differences were found

between H&M and Zara on any of the research constructs, and thus data from both retailers were pooled for further analysis.

Table 4. Items used for research constructs.

Dimensions	Items	Eigen values	% of variance explained	Factor loading	*alpha*
Cause knowledge	I know a lot about environmental issues. I feel very knowledgeable about environmental issues. I think I know more about environmental issues than most people. When it comes to environmental issues, I really know a lot.	3.63	11.72	.86 .87 .86 .88	.96

Cause involvement	To me, environmental issues are:
	    insignificant- significant
	    uninteresting -interesting
	    meaningless -meaningful
	    of no concern -concerns me
	    superfluous - vital
		4.32	13.92	.86
				.70
				.86
				.88
				.86
					.93

Brand Knowledge	I know a lot about H&M. I feel very knowledgeable about H&M. I think I know more about H&M than most people. When it comes to H&M, I really know a lot.	3.64	11.74	.91 .91 .86 .91	.95

Brand affect	My opinion of H&M is:
	    unfavorable- favorable
	    bad- good
	    negative- positive
		2.75	8.86	.89
				.92
				.90
					.94

Brand-cause fit	H&M's products fit with efforts to consider environmental issues:
	    very poorly - very well
	The image of H&M fits with efforts to consider environmental issues:
	    very poorly - very well
	The consumers of H&M fit with efforts to consider environmental issues:
	    very poorly - very well
		2.47	7.97	.82
				
				.82
				
				.80
					.92

Brand-extension fit	This new line fits with my idea and image of H&M. This new line conveys the same impressions as H&M. This new line and other apparel sold by H&M are very similar. This new line would be an integral part of H&M. This new line is a natural extension of H&M.	3.90	12.58	.79 .82 .80 .73 .72	.91

Attitude toward brand extension	My opinion of this new line from H&M is:
	    unfavorable- favorable
	    bad- good
	    negative- positive
		2.91	9.38	.83
				.85
				.83
					.96

Total variance explained		84.08			

HYPOTHESES TESTING: H1-H5

A series of multiple regression analyses were conducted to test Hypotheses 1-5. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 5. An examination of the Variance Inflation factors (VIF) statistic found no evidence of problematic multicollinerarity in any regression (VIF < 1.6). The standardized coefficients were used to test the hypotheses. Consumer's knowledge about and involvement with environment issue were both found to have a significant positive relationship with brand-cause fit ($\beta = .12, p < .01; \beta = .22, p < .001$, respectively), thus supporting H1a and H1b. Consumers' knowledge about and affect toward the retailer both had a positive impact perceptions of brand-cause fit ($\beta = .19, p < .001; \beta = .19, p < .001$, respectively), supporting H2a and H2b. The regression model explaining retailer's cause-fit was statistically significant ($p < .001$) with an adjusted R^2 of .22. With respect to brand extension-fit, consumer' knowledge about and affect toward retailer were statistically significant and positive ($\beta = .33, p < .001; \beta = .17, p < .001$, respectively), supporting H3a and H3b. The model estimating brand-extension fit explained by these two independent variables was found to be significant ($R^2 = .17, p < .001$). Additionally, within the model estimating attitudes toward the brand extension, brand-cause fit ($\beta = .18, p < .001$) and brand-extension fit ($\beta = .33, p < .001$) were positively related to attitudes toward brand extension, supporting H4 and H5, explaining 21% of the variance. The regression model was significant ($p < .001$).

Table 5. Results of Regression Analysis

Dependent variables Independent variables	Standardized β	df regression, residual	Adjusted R^2	F
Brand-cause fit		4,569	.22	41.58***
Environmental knowledge	.12**			
Environmental involvement	.22***			
Brand knowledge	.19***			
Brand affect	.19***			
Brand-extension fit		2,578	.17	61.93***
Brand knowledge	.33***			
Brand affect	.17***			
Attitude toward brand extension		2,581	.21	79.19***
Brand-cause fit	.18***			
Brand-extension fit	.33***			
** $p <.01$; *** $p <.001$				

Chapter 9: Discussion and Implications

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study sought to determine consumers' perceptions of a sustainable brand extension introduced by a fast fashion retailer. Following previous brand extension research, consumers' perceptions of the parent brand and its fit with the extension product influenced consumers' perceptions of the brand extension. Additionally, this study included the influence of the consumers' perceptions of the cause of sustainability and its fit with the fast fashion retailer on the perceptions of the extension product, as the introduction of an apparel line that uses environmentally-friendly production materials and methods involves both a new product and the association with a cause. Results show the positive influence of both consumer perceptions of the parent brand and the cause on the evaluation of the brand extension.

Both the perceptions of brand-extension fit and brand-cause fit and their influences on attitude towards the extension are also considered in this study. Combination of these two paths within one model illustrates the necessity of considering not only the brand features when creating a sustainable extension, but also to consider the fit of the brand with the cause of sustainability. Although sustainability should be considered by all companies when designing new products, the finding that consumers' perception of fit is influential in extension evaluation is notable. The potential for the brand to fit with the cause of sustainability should be emphasized through marketing material when introducing a sustainable product. The consumers' level of knowledge about the brand and cause should also be considered when presenting sustainability as fitting with a brand.

This study contributes to the knowledge of the sustainability perceptions of Generation Y consumers. Previous study has shown these consumers are concerned with global issues (Jayson, 2006; Yan, 2003). However, companies should take caution when trying to reach this group with CSR activities due to young consumers' high levels of skepticism (Yan, 2003). This study shows the importance of consumers' past experience with the brand in their perception formation of the new brand extension. Although these young consumers enjoy purchasing fast fashion, they are also weary of the concept of disposable clothing (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). These findings show that consumers with high knowledge of the cause would view sustainable garments sold in fast fashion retailers as fitting well with the retailer. This confirms the need to educate consumers on sustainability (Sheth et al., 2011), but also confirms the potential for young consumers to embrace sustainable fast fashion products. Additionally, fueled by the increase in cause-knowledge, as consumers become more familiar with sustainable product offerings, they may increase their appreciation for the sustainability efforts of fast fashion retailers.

Although parts of the sustainability movement have targeted fast fashion as being in opposition to sustainable consumption (Black, 2008; Claudio, 2007), this study shows consumers do view fast fashion as fitting with sustainability if they have high brand or cause knowledge or affect. This illustrates the potential for fast fashion to begin to overcome the barriers on the road to sustainability. Increased fit facilitates the transfer of positive brand affect from the parent brand to the extension (Boush & Loken, 1991), and thus as the consumer view sustainability and fast fashion as fitting well together, they positively evaluate the extension. This finding confirms the extension of brand extension literature to the introduction of a sustainable product. Both fit between cause and brand and brand and extension increase the positive evaluation of the extension.

Brand-extension fit was also influential in consumers' evaluation of the extension. Confirming brand extension literature, if the new product is seen as similar to the parent brand, the evaluation of the extension will be more favorable (Boush & Loken, 1991; Park et al., 2009). As consumers perceive the sustainable apparel as fitting well with the fast fashion retailer, they were more likely to positively evaluate the extension product. These results show the importance of the perception of sustainable products as appropriate for the brand. Although fast fashion brands are targeted as unsustainable, consumers positively evaluate the sustainable apparel products when they feel they are fit well with the retailer.

Fit between the cause and the brand was also found to have a significant influence on the consumers' evaluation of the extension. Previous literature has found this type of fit to be variably salient depending on the situation, consumer, and relationship between the brand and the cause (Basil & Herr, 2006; Zdravkovic et al., 2010). However, the fit between the fast fashion retailer and cause of sustainability was found to be influential in the consumer's evaluation of the extension in this study. As previous research has identified the length of commitment to the cause to be influential in the consumers' evaluation of the relationship (Cui et al., 2003), the implicit nature of the cause into the product may influence the consumers' perception of the relationship. The cause of sustainability may benefit from its long-term nature. Although consumers may not see immediate effects of sustainable actions, they appreciate a retailer's long-term commitment to the cause (Cui et al., 2003). Fit may play a more influential role in such a relationship where the brand is linked to the cause for as long as the product is produced.

Consumer's previous knowledge and affect with the fast fashion retailer was influential in both their perceptions of the brand-cause fit and the brand-extension fit. As consumers' knowledge and affect for the brand increased, they viewed the sustainable

apparel as fitting better with the brand. Likewise, as consumer knowledge about the cause increased, they also viewed the extension as a better match with the brand. This may be due to their more detailed cognitive structures surrounding information storage and retrieval about the brand, allowing them to more accurately and efficiently process information about the extension, which may lead to a higher perception of fit (Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994). These findings confirm those of previous brand extension literature, that explain consumers' transfer of parent brand knowledge and affective feelings to the extension (Boush & Loken, 1991; Park et al., 1991). Additionally, these findings also support the combination of brand extension and CSR literatures, providing support for the similar influence of knowledge processing on fit evaluations.

Consumer affective feelings towards the brand and cause also influenced the fit perceptions. Brand affect influenced both brand-extension fit and brand-cause fit. As consumers' have increased favorable perceptions of the brand, they may be more apt to evaluate a new product (Fedorikhin et al., 2008). Involvement with the cause of environmentalism also influenced consumers' perceptions of the fit between the brand and cause. This confirms Basil and Herr (2006)'s finding that consumers perceive the relationship between a brand and cause as stronger when they have more affective feelings towards the cause. Additionally, these findings add to the debate in sustainability literature concerning the influence of environmental concern on environmental behavior. Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) suggest that environmental concern may only indirectly influence behavior. The results of this study show that the relationship between involvement with environmental issues and attitude towards a sustainable product is influenced by perceptions of fit.

This study considers both the perceptions of brand-extension fit and brand-cause fit and their influences on extension evaluation. Combination of these two paths within

one model illustrates the necessity of considering not only the brand features when creating a sustainable extension, but also to consider the fit with the brand to the cause of sustainability. Although sustainability should be considered by all companies when designing new products, the finding that fit is influential in extension evaluation is notable. Despite seeming opposition between fast fashion and sustainability (Black, 2008; Claudio, 2007), the potential for the brand to fit with the cause of sustainability should be emphasized when introducing a sustainable product. The consumers' level of knowledge about the brand and cause should also be considered when presenting sustainability as fitting with a brand.

Overall, the findings show that knowledge level and affect towards the brand and the cause will each have an impact on the perception of the extension. In general, consumers who shop have higher knowledge of or affect towards a fast fashion retailer will be more willing to accept new products introduced by the company (Choi et al., 2010). Specifically, this study shows that frequent customers may also be more willing to purchase the retailer's new sustainable products. This study highlights the importance of fit in this relationship. When consumers have established knowledge and affect towards the brand or the cause they have higher perceptions of the respective fit type, leading to more positive evaluations of the extension product.

This study contributes to the knowledge of the sustainability perceptions of Generation Y consumers. Previous study has shown these consumers to be concerned for global issues. However, companies should take caution when trying to reach this group with CSR activities due to young consumers' high levels of skepticism (Yan, 2003). This study suggests companies that target Generation Y consumers should consider the influence of previous experience with the brand and leverage this when introducing

sustainable products. More specific implications for both academia and companies are discussed in the following section.

IMPLICATIONS

Academic Implications

In addition to confirming previous research in both the brand extension and CSR areas, this study contributes to the understanding of both areas by considering their combination. The introduction of a sustainable product by a conventional brand imbeds the cause into the extension product, thus combining both brand extension and CSR activities. This study takes a step towards integrating the research of these two areas to further understand consumers' perceptions towards sustainable brand extensions. A better understanding of the consumers' perceptions of the fit between sustainability and conventional products can aid researchers in determining the influential factors in sustainable purchase decision making. Such understanding may aid in determining what factors lie in the gap between consumer concern for the environment and sustainable purchasing. This research shows that consumers' perception of fit between the brand and cause and brand and sustainable extension product is important in determining their evaluation of the brand extension. Additionally, we show that brand knowledge and affect along with cause knowledge and involvement will influence these fit perceptions.

This study adds to the literature on fast fashion. Although there is much literature on the history and structure of quick response supply chain, little research on consumer perceptions exists. This study tests the perceptions of Generation Y, as the target market of fast fashion retailers. Research on consumer perceptions is especially important when considering the demand-driven nature of quick response supply chains.

Consumer perceptions of sustainability have been widely studied. However, little research has tested the perceptions of Generation Y. Research specifically about Generation Y's perceptions is important as they view social issues differently than other generations. This research tests consumers' perceptions of the introduction of a sustainable product, showing the positive impact of factors that could potentially be used to overcome the skepticism of this generation.

Managerial Implications

This study shows the opportunity for sustainability in fast fashion. Although critics of fast fashion have pointed out the seemingly opposing goals of fast fashion and sustainability, this study shows consumers can perceive these two movements as fitting well together. However, this study also illustrates the importance of fit in consumer evaluation of sustainable extensions. Companies should take note of the importance of fit when designing new products and promotional materials. Additionally, other retailers could also benefit from these findings, as if consumers view even fast fashion as fitting with sustainability, they too may accept sustainable product offerings of other types of retailers.

Consumers' perceptions of the parent brand and cause of sustainability influence their perceptions of the fit of the two. Thus, the influence of the characteristics of the brand may play a role in consumer acceptance of sustainable products. Previous studies have reported consumers' suggestions that sustainable apparel products should be similar to conventional garments in style, fit, and fabrication (Hiller Connell, 2010). As this study shows that higher brand-extension fit perceptions will lead to higher extension evaluations, companies could facilitate the consumer acceptance of sustainable products through offering garments that consumers feel are equal to conventional offerings.

These findings illuminate the benefits of the quick-response supply chain in sustainability. Fast fashion retailers can utilize both information technology and vertically integrated supply chains to read and adjust to sustainable products introduced based on their level of fit. Companies asses how well new sustainable garments fit with their current conventional offerings and notice customer purchases of various products with various fit levels. Thus enabling fast fashion retailers to implement sustainability in a way that is congruent with their business model.

Specifically, the perceptions of Generation Y tested in this study are important to fast fashion retailers that target this market. Fast fashion retailers should utilize these findings in specifying marketing materials to appeal to this group. Emphasizing the continuity of the brand into the extension products may help consumers associate previous knowledge of the brand with the extension product. Additionally, as this generation has a long future of purchasing, companies targeting these consumers should be especially careful in designing marketing material to avoid agitating consumer skepticism. Fast fashion retailers may be able to implement a layered marketing campaign with messages that appeal to both shoppers who frequently visit the retailer and those that do not.

Chapter 10: Conclusions

This study is limited in that it only tests individual level factors influencing the perception of fit. The inclusion of other brand and product related features such as level of price or quality between the brand and extension could also influence the consumers' perceptions of fit. Brand and product level factors have been found by the brand extension literature to influence fit perceptions (Aaker & Keller, 1990; sKeller & Aaker, 1992; Park et al., 1991). Additionally, these factors are especially salient in apparel purchases (Butler & Francis, 1997; Forney et al., 2005), and have a unique role in the perception of fast fashion retailers. Thus, further study into other influences on the perception of fit is needed.

Testing only the perceptions of the Generation Y consumer, although useful for targeting the consumers of fast fashion, may not be representative of the entire population of fast fashion consumers. Study of a younger generational cohort of consumers would also build the knowledge of consumers' fast fashion perceptions.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study demonstrates the importance of fit perceptions in the introduction of a sustainable brand extension. Further study on the role of consumer past experience with the brand and cause may work to solidify the understanding of the influence of these two factors. An understanding of the potential interaction between these two factors on the influence on extension evaluation would be interesting. As this study has shown that past brand knowledge influences the level of perceived fit, additional study of the influence of deeper connections with the brand such as commitment and loyalty would be interesting.

Additional study of the cognitive processes involved in consumers' fit perceptions may increase the understanding of the role of past knowledge. Experimental studies similar to those utilized by Boush & Loken (1991) to test the cognitive processing time of consumers evaluating brand extensions would be useful in understanding the processing of sustainable brand extensions. Comparison with the processing time of conventional brand extensions, considering specific factors in information processing could shed light on areas that may influence consumer sustainable decision making.

Future research should also consider additional factors in sustainable purchase decision making. As perception of fit is just one of many factors contributing to the decision to purchase a sustainable product, additional studies should consider the influence of price and quality on the perception of fit of sustainable brand extensions, as many consumers assume sustainable products will have different levels of price and quality (Joergens, 2006). This could be especially salient when considering fast fashion brands, as they are known for low price and quality. More specific considerations for the purchase of sustainable apparel include style, fit and fabrication (Butler & Francis, 1997), for which the perceptions of fit between the parent brand and extension should be tested.

The perceptions of Generation Y consumers concerning sustainability also merits additional study. Generation Y consumers, characterized by concern for global issues and yet skepticism, feel even fast fashion retailers can do things to be more sustainable. Further research into the specific perceptions of this generation concerning purchasing sustainable products would be interesting and useful for companies. Such research would continue to build the growing literature on sustainability, in an effort to uncover the factors that will bridge the gap between consumers' sustainable opinions and actions.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this study shows the importance of the consumers' perception of fit in their attitudes towards sustainable products introduced by existing companies. Findings suggest that to capture the sustainable purchases of the socially concerned and yet skeptical Generation Y consumers, companies must leverage consumers past experience with the brand and cause. Fast fashion retailers have the ability to closely read patterns in customer spending and demand, which they can use to create products that are fitting with the things consumers have previously embraced and sustainability. Through these and other means, companies can begin to offer sustainable products that the consumer may purchase. However, more study is needed to determine other influential factors in consumer sustainable decision making.

The impact of past experience on fit perceptions illustrates the importance of companies meeting consumers' level of knowledge and awareness. Long is the road ahead of the members of Generation Y, both in consumption decisions and conservation decisions. Each step taken as a consumer, citizen and human should consider the three pillars of sustainability. Yet, consumers will not take these steps alone. Companies can guide consumers through sustainable product offerings that the market will embrace, that is, if they feel the products fit with consumers' current expectations and their desires for the future. Those companies that can adequately judge and leverage the consumers' demand for sustainable products will have the most opportunities to walk with consumers towards sustainability.

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