



The Psychological Impact of Fast Fashion's Rapid Product Turnover on Gen Z

Shilpi Kulshrestha

Associate Professor, Department of Management Studies, Global Academy of Technology, Bengaluru India.

Article Info

Received: June 21, 2024

Accepted: June 25, 2024

Published: June 28, 2024

***Corresponding author:** Shilpi Kulshrestha, Associate Professor, Department of Management Studies, Global Academy of Technology, Bengaluru India.

Citation: Shilpi Kulshrestha. (2024). "The Psychological Impact of Fast Fashion's Rapid Product Turnover on Gen Z." *Clinical Psychology and Mental Health Care*, 6(1); DOI: 10.61148/2994-0184/CPMHC/080

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Abstract:

Fast fashion, defined by the quick production of low-cost, stylish clothing, has become a debatable issue. This phenomenon elicits complicated emotions from Gen Z customers and influences their purchasing decisions.

Introduction:

Fast fashion, defined by the quick production of low-cost, stylish clothing, has become a debatable issue. This phenomenon elicits complicated emotions from Gen Z customers and influences their purchasing decisions.

Fast fashion has revolutionized the apparel industry by rapidly producing trendy clothing at affordable prices. Companies like Zara, H&M, and Forever 21 epitomize this model, introducing new collections almost weekly. For Generation Z (Gen Z), individuals born between 1997 and 2012, this constant influx of new products significantly influences their consumption patterns. While fast fashion offers consumers the thrill of frequently updating their wardrobes with on-trend pieces at affordable prices, there is a growing concern about the psychological impact of this relentless cycle of consumption and disposal, particularly on the Generation Z cohort -demographic, raised in the digital age and accustomed to instant gratification, has been exposed to fast fashion's frenetic pace from a young age, shaping their attitudes and behavior's toward clothing in profound ways.

This article explores the psychological impact of fast fashion's rapid product turnover on Gen Z consumers, considering aspects such as social pressure, impulse buying, and environmental consciousness. It examines the potential consequences of this trend, including increased materialism, diminished satisfaction, and environmental indifference, while also considering the broader societal implications.

The Allure of Fast Fashion for Gen Z:

This is the first generation of Generation Z that has grown up with the internet and social media as fundamental components of their lives. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat play crucial roles in shaping their fashion choices. Influencers and peers showcasing the latest trends create a fear of missing out (FOMO), compelling Gen Z to frequently update their wardrobes to stay relevant. The rapid product turnover in fast fashion aligns perfectly with this need for innovation and Fast fashion's success hinges on its ability to capitalize on Gen Z's desire for constant novelty and immediate gratification. This generation, raised in an era of instant access to information, entertainment, and digital experiences, has grown accustomed

to a rapid pace of change and instant fulfillment.

According to a study by the consulting firm McKinsey & Company, Gen Z consumers are more likely to make impulsive purchases, with 60% admitting to buying something they didn't need (McKinsey & Company, 2018). This tendency is further fuelled by the ubiquity of social media, where influencers and peers constantly showcase the latest fashion trends, creating a sense of urgency and fear of missing out (FOMO).

Psychological Drivers of Fast Fashion Consumption:

Social Pressure and Identity Formation:

Fast fashion enables Gen Z to experiment with different styles and identities without significant financial investment. However, this constant exposure to new trends can lead to social pressure. Research by Park and John (2020) indicates that social comparison is heightened in digital spaces, leading to increased anxiety and stress among young consumers. Gen Z often feels compelled to conform to the latest trends to fit in with their peers, fostering a cycle of continuous consumption.

Impulse Buying and Instant Gratification:

The rapid turnover of products in fast fashion stores creates a sense of urgency. Limited-time offers and frequent new arrivals trigger impulse buying behaviour. According to a study by Dholakia (2021), the availability of trendy items at low prices significantly increases impulse purchases among Gen Z. This behaviour is driven by the need for instant gratification, where the excitement of acquiring new items outweighs the long-term considerations of their utility or value.

Environmental and Ethical Concerns:

Despite their propensity for fast fashion, Gen Z is also the most environmentally conscious generation. They understand the harmful effects of fast fashion on the environment and labor conditions. However, the allure of affordable and trendy clothing often overrides these concerns. This cognitive dissonance, as discussed by Festinger (1957), creates psychological stress. Gen Z consumers experience guilt and anxiety over their purchases, balancing their desire for new fashion with their environmental values.

The Paradox of Choice and Decision Fatigue:

While fast fashion offers an abundance of choices, this overwhelming array of options can paradoxically lead to decision fatigue and diminished satisfaction among Gen Z consumers. Researchers have found that an excessive number of choices can be mentally draining and cause individuals to make suboptimal decisions or become overwhelmed, a phenomenon known as "choice overload" (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000).

Demands sustainable shopping:

Generation Z is profoundly concerned about environmental sustainability and the future, which offers a significant opportunity

for companies aiming for long-term success. They perceive prior generations as embodying excessive spending, capitalism, and materialism.

Research by First Insight reveals that 73% of Generation Z consumers are willing to pay 10% more for sustainable products. They have a strong preference for personalized items and are often attracted to brands that align with their political views. Many individuals in Generation Z witnessed their parents endure substantial financial losses and hardships during the Great Recession of 2008. Consequently, they tend to be more frugal and price-sensitive. This generational shift towards sustainability and value-consciousness indicates a transformative change in consumer behavior that businesses must adapt to in order to thrive. Brands that successfully tap into Gen Z's values and preferences are likely to build strong, loyal customer bases in the coming years. Generation Z is willing to buy on credit at a rate of 19%, compared to 30% among Millennials.

Influenced by social influencers:

Compared to older age groups, Gen Z consumers exhibit lower levels of trust in businesses. Instead, they prefer to follow influencers on platforms like Instagram and YouTube who have substantial followings and broad reach. A Google survey found that 70% of young subscribers to YouTube channels consider YouTube personalities more relatable than traditional celebrities. This is also where they decide if a product is worth buying. Hence, retailers are increasingly recognizing the value of transitioning from conventional digital marketing to influencer marketing.

Influencers such as Emma Chamberlain, Addison Rae, Charli D'Amelio, Bretman Rock, and James Charles have captivated Gen Z in the apparel industry, leveraging their large platforms to showcase fashion trends and endorse products.

This shift highlights the growing importance of authenticity and relatability in marketing strategies. For instance, Emma Chamberlain's casual and candid style has made her a fashion icon for many young people, while Addison Rae and Charli D'Amelio's dance videos often feature trendy outfits that quickly become popular. Bretman Rock's bold and unique fashion sense has also garnered a massive following, and James Charles, with his focus on makeup and fashion, continues to influence purchasing decisions among Gen Z. These influencers not only shape fashion trends but also drive consumer behavior, making them key players in the modern marketing landscape. Brands that collaborate with these influencers can effectively tap into Gen Z's preferences and build stronger, more relatable connections with this demographic.

Real-Life Examples:

Social Media Influence: The Case of TikTok Fashion Trends
TikTok has become a powerful platform for setting fashion trends. Challenges like the "TikTok Made Me Buy It" hashtag showcase how quickly trends can spread and fade. A notable example is the sudden popularity of the "cottage core" aesthetic in 2020. Young consumers flocked to fast fashion retailers to buy floral dresses and vintage-inspired clothing, driven by the desire to participate in the

trend and gain social validation. This phenomenon underscores the significant impact of social media on Gen Z's fashion choices and the pressure to keep up with ever-changing trends.

Impulse Buying: Zara's Weekly Collections:

Zara's strategy of releasing new collections weekly exemplifies the fast fashion model. This frequent product turnover creates a sense of scarcity and urgency. A survey by McKinsey & Company (2020) found that 60% of Gen Z consumers make unplanned purchases, often driven by the fear that the desired item might sell out quickly. The excitement of finding new items in-store or online encourages impulsive buying, reinforcing the cycle of constant consumption.

Environmental Concerns: H&M's Conscious Collection:

H&M's Conscious Collection aims to address the environmental concerns associated with fast fashion. While this initiative appeals to Gen Z's values, it also highlights the internal conflict they face. Despite the availability of sustainable options, many still opt for cheaper, trendier items. A study by the Fashion Retail Academy (2021) revealed that 70% of Gen Z consumers prioritize price and style over sustainability when making fashion purchases. This discrepancy between values and actions illustrates the psychological tension inherent in their shopping habits.

Long-term Psychological Impacts: *Mental Health and Well-being:*

The persistent search of new trends can cause tension and worry. The pressure to present a stylish image on social media might exacerbate poor mental health. Nesi (2020) discovered a link between social media use, body image concerns, and depression symptoms in Generation Z. The rapid fashion cycle exacerbates these concerns by pushing unrealistic beauty and lifestyle standards, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem.

Consumer Fatigue:

The rapid pace of fashion turnover can lead to consumer fatigue. Gen Z, bombarded with endless options and trends, may experience decision fatigue, where the constant need to make choices becomes overwhelming. This can result in decreased purchase satisfaction and a diminished sense of fulfilment. Over time, the excitement of new acquisitions wanes, leading to a more superficial relationship with material goods.

Financial Implications:

Impulse buying and frequent shopping sprees can have significant financial implications. Many Gen Z consumers, particularly students or young professionals, may not have substantial disposable income. Accumulating debt or spending beyond their means can lead to financial stress. According to a report by the National Endowment for Financial Education (2021), many young adults struggle with managing their finances due to impulsive spending habits cultivated by the fast fashion industry.

Addressing the Psychological Impact: *Promoting Sustainable Fashion Education:*

Educating Gen Z about sustainable fashion practices can help mitigate the negative psychological effects of fast fashion. Programs highlighting the environmental and ethical impacts of fashion choices can encourage more mindful consumption. Initiatives like the The Revolution movement in the Fashion industry advocate for transparency in the fashion industry and enable consumers to make educated decisions.

Encouraging Mindful Consumption:

Mindful consumption practices, such as capsule wardrobes and second-hand shopping, can reduce the psychological strain associated with fast fashion. Encouraging Gen Z to invest in quality over quantity and to cherish their clothing can foster a healthier relationship with fashion. Movements like "slow fashion" advocate for thoughtful purchasing and can help counteract the impulse buying behaviour driven by fast fashion.

Leveraging Technology for Positive Change:

Technology can also play a role in addressing these issues. Apps that track wardrobe usage and suggest sustainable alternatives can help Gen Z make more conscious fashion choices. Virtual styling tools and AI-driven recommendations can reduce the need for constant new purchases by helping consumers rediscover items they already own.

Conclusion:

The rapid product turnover inherent in fast fashion profoundly impacts Gen Z consumers' psychology. Social pressure, impulse buying, and the conflict between ethical concerns and fashion desires contribute to a complex psychological landscape. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including education, mindful consumption, and leveraging technology for sustainable practices. By understanding and mitigating the psychological effects of fast fashion, we can foster a more conscious and mentally healthy consumer culture among Gen Z.

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