

Generation Z members say they want sustainable clothes but buy fast fashion instead, research says

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Generation Z members say they want their clothes to be sustainable but still regularly buy fast fashion, demonstrating a "clear gap" between

ideals and practice, new research shows.

Nine in ten who were surveyed bought fast fashion and only one in six could name a brand that made sustainable clothing, the British Academy of Management annual conference at the Alliance Manchester Business School heard today.

Women were more likely than men to advocate for sustainable clothing, but less likely than them to actually buy it, the survey found.

Four researchers from the Sheffield Business School, Sheffield Hallam University, surveyed 56 [university students](#) aged 18–24 and four aged over 24, and interviewed six in-depth about sustainable clothing—articles produced without exploiting workers or animals and using lower carbon emissions. The four researchers were: Joanne Calver, Glyn Littlewood, Dr. Marc Duffy and Joanne Watts.

The survey of Sheffield Hallam students found that 63% agreed they were concerned about the social implications of the fast fashion industry and 48% said they were concerned about its environmental implications. Only 3% of participants stated that they were not concerned at all about either its social or environmental implications.

However, 17% of participants admitted shopping at a fast fashion retailer each week, 62% monthly and 11% yearly, with only 10% claiming that they had never purchased from a fast fashion retailer. Less than half of those surveyed, 43%, stated that they considered where and how their clothes were made before they bought.

Five out of the six who were interviewed could not name any brands that produced sustainable clothes. All six said that price was the main barrier to purchasing sustainable fashion.

Dr. Duffy told the conference, "Generation z are increasingly concerned for the planet, with 94% believing that action is needed relative to sustainability, and that we need to come together to solve important issues. All participants had a [negative attitude](#) towards the term 'fast fashion,' mentioning words such as 'unsustainable, unethical and bad quality.'

"But the large proportion who admitted buying fast fashion demonstrates a clear gap between pro-sustainability ideologies and observed behavior."

He said that the [women](#) surveyed "portrayed support for sustainable fashion by stating that they would be willing to pay more or even boycott unethical brands. All the women stated that they would be willing to pay more for sustainable clothing, whereas the males were not."

By contrast, the men showed a "lack of concern and knowledge around sustainable fashion, yet their buying habits were considerably more sustainable than females, purchasing fast fashion less frequently and sourcing clothes from more sustainable retailers. However, this was not intentional—they preferred these brands as they were deemed trendy and cool."

The researchers identified six key barriers to sustainable clothes shopping: price, lack of knowledge, lack of choice, lack of aesthetic choice, skepticism over business transparency, and social desirability.

Generation Z comprises those born between 1997 and 2012. The global fashion industry is valued at \$300 billion and is expected to reach \$360 billion by 2025. This increase in demand for production and consumer consumption is causing significant environmental implications, including pollution, waste accumulation and excessive water consumption. There are growing concerns around social implications of the global fashion

industry, including exploitation of workers, child labor and inhumane working conditions. Despite demand for sustainable [fashion](#) reaching £6.35 billion in 2019 and being forecast to reach £8.25 billion in 2023, the sector is still expanding considerably more slowly than other segments, such as the [fast fashion](#) market, which is worth \$30.58 billion.

Provided by British Academy of Management

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