Analyzing Fast Fashion Brand Loyalty and Avoidance among UC Berkeley Students

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ABSTRACT

My research analyzes fast-fashion brand loyalty and avoidance among students at the University of California, Berkeley. Fast fashion is a newer industry that sells trendy but inexpensive clothing at a faster rate than traditional fashion. Fast fashion is extremely profitable, the business model being purposefully constructed to keep consumers loyal, particularly younger ones. Aside from its success in the industry, fast fashion is environmentally unsustainable. In response to the detrimental effects of massive consumption due to fast fashion, anti-consumption and brand avoidance have also been becoming increasingly popular. These movements and ideals are especially prominent among the Millenial and Gen Z generations. These competing values have led fast fashion to become a topic of controversy and a subject extensively studied in literature. Studies have established models analyzing brand loyalty dimensions and others looked deeper into brand avoidance and established avoidance categories. My study used the previously established models from previous studies and applied them to students at UC Berkeley to find out what keeps students loyal, and what motivates them to avoid fast fashion. Through structural equation modeling, my study found significant support that perceived quality and organizational associations positively influence brand loyalty, while the effects of brand awareness, brand uniqueness, perceived value, and brand awareness did not yield significant results. Students' responses showed all three avoidance categories that have been established but had some slight differences in themes and sub-themes, as students were concerned about environmental issues which was not seen in previous studies.

KEYWORDS

brand avoidance, business model, anti-consumption, brand equity, consumer behavior

INTRODUCTION

Fast fashion is a newer yet controversial industry that sells inexpensive and widely available clothing that is on-trend for a short period (Byun and Sternquist 2011). The rise of consumerism in the mid-to-late 1900s has led to the emergence of fast fashion with its seemingly endless stream of clothing (Bhardwaj 2010). Currently, fast fashion's business model is popular among consumers and has been experiencing blistering growth for the past 20 years (Moore and Fernie 2004). Fast fashion brands are easy to spot. They appeal to the public by engaging in popular trends and are rapidly increasing their sales and expanding their stores. Fast fashion brands produce inexpensive knockoffs of the most expensive high fashion and have them in stores in a matter of weeks after the release (Joung 2013).

Businesses, particularly fast-fashion businesses, are no longer just focusing on competing for new customers, but rather securing brand loyalty among consumers (Su and Chang 2018). Knowing what motivates or stops a person from purchasing a certain product is crucial information to the brand (Keller 2008) and brands are capitalizing on the factors influencing brand loyalty. This is allowing consumers to continue purchasing from fast fashion brands, despite the environmental costs associated with fast fashion.

Fast fashion is unsustainable and environmental impacts are becoming well-known to the public. The premise of fast fashion is to get rid of "the old" and replace it with "the new," encouraging continual and massive consumption. Fast fashion alone is terrible for the environment. For example, manufacturing produces over 4 gigatons of CO2 and 92 million tons of waste a year, making up to about 35% of microplastic pollution in the ocean (Niinimäki 2020). To manufacture one pair of jeans, 3,781 liters of water are needed (UNEP 2019). In response, consumers are becoming aware of their role in consumption and its social and environmental impacts. This has allowed movements such as "slow fashion" and anti-consumption to form (Kim et al. 2013).

Despite having numerous movements forming in response to the impacts of fast fashion, the business model still remains popular among consumers, some even to the point of addiction (Mrad et al. 2020). Fast fashion epitomizes materialistic consumption and many fashion-leaders still consume fast fashion despite being aware of the issues associated with its consumption (Cavender and Lee 2018). Research and experts in the industry have shown that when consumers

purchase fast fashion, environmental and ethical concerns are the least considered despite consumers being consciously aware of them (Kim et al. 2013). Being fashionable is correlated to a high social standing while also giving the consumer a sense of identity (Dodd et al. 2000). Fast fashion provides consumers with the most up-to-date styles that are cheap and accessible to almost everyone regardless of social status (Yang et al. 2017). Fast fashion brings a sense of uniqueness to the consumer, and overall, evoke a good feeling when purchasing (Shen et al. 2014) Anecdotal evidence from consumers who purchase from fast fashion brands reports that fast fashion allows them to improve their personal style and fulfill their fashion "dream" (Mrad et al. 2020).

College students are amongst the many that contribute to fast fashion. This is due to being at an age where appearance matters and where steady incomes are rare (Su and Chang 2018). Fast fashion is generally popular amongst younger generations as the products are easy to access and are cheap (Joung 2014). As a result, most of the demographic that is participating in trendy culture are college students. College students are placed in a social environment where fast fashion apparel plays an important role in socializing and developing a sense of self, so they tend to turn to fast fashion (Park and Sullivan 2009). For this study, it is also important to note that despite a large number of college students participating in fast fashion consumption, younger generations are beginning to avoid fast fashion (Sorensen and Jorgensen 2019).

This study aims to find out what motivates students at the University of California, Berkeley to continue being loyal to fast fashion brands. Brand equity is regarded as a very important concept to study by business practices as it gives vital information about what keeps consumers coming back (Keller 2008). Additionally, this study aims to analyze what stops UC Berkeley students from purchasing from fast fashion brands and dive deeper into why they avoid fast fashion overall. Although understanding what influences a consumer to buy or avoid a brand is important for companies to gain an advantage over other companies, those same motivations can be used by researchers or organizations to find ways to stop people from purchasing from fast fashion to mitigate environmental and social impacts, along with other issues surrounding the industry.

EXTENDED INTRODUCTION

Brand equity

Brand equity has no universally agreed-upon definition in literature (Veloutsou et al 2013). Brand equity, commonly referred to as CBBE in literature, reflects the general attitude strength of a consumer (Farquhar 1989). Researchers have agreed that measurement of brand equity should be focused on consumers as it presents valuable information to the business firm and other parties interested in consumer perception (Cobb-Walgren et al. 1995).

There is consensus in literature that several dimensions need to be established to accurately measure CBBE, though there is no agreement on the exact dimensions. Keller (1993) conceptualized CBBE as having two components, brand awareness, and brand image. Aaker (1991) views CBBE as having several attributes that reflect on the brand's name that affects how the consumer views the brand. Aaker (1991) provided four dimensions: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty. Yoo and Donthu (2001) agreed with Aaker's (1991) dimensions, but combined brand awareness and association as one, viewing brand equity as having three dimensions which were later validated by Washburn & Plank (2002).

Su and Chang (2018) concluded that Aaker (1991) offered the most generally accepted dimensions in literature, though argued that brand loyalty is to be excluded from the dimensions as brand loyalty is one of the consequences of brand equity and should be used interchangeably (Brady et al. 2018; Chen 2001, Nam et al. 2011). For that purpose, I will be using the modified version of Aaker's (1991) dimensions, drawing inspiration from Su and Chang's (2018) model. The dimensions proposed by Su and Chang (2018) are as follows: brand awareness, perceived quality, perceived value, brand personality, organizational associations, and brand uniqueness. Below, I will define the dimensions mentioned, drawing inspiration from Su and Chang's (2018) definitions.

Brand loyalty dimensions and development of hypothesis

Brand awareness

Brand awareness is defined by Aaker (1991) as "the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category." In other words, brand awareness is the ability of a consumer to recognize a brand through recognition and recall of the brand (Keller 1993). Keller (1993) argued that the ability of a consumer to recognize and recall a brand is the first step in brand communication with consumers. Growth in the use of media (phones, TV, radio, etc) has contributed to consumers becoming more fashion-conscious, particularly young consumers (Sasmita and Suki 2015). Su and Chang (2018) established brand awareness as impacting consumer perception of fast-fashion products, thus affecting brand loyalty.

Perceived quality

Zeithaml (1998) defined perceived quality as "the consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority." It is not the actual quality of the product itself, but what the consumer perceives the quality to be depending on their perceptions (Buil et al., 2008; Zeithaml, 1988). Perceived quality may also be influenced by past experience with a brand, which is stronger and more accurate (Netemeyer et al., 2004). There is general consensus in literature that the perceived quality of items from a brand allows consumers to differentiate between other brands, influencing brand loyalty (Pappu et al 2005).

Brand uniqueness

Uniqueness concerning brands is defined as how much a consumer views a certain brand from others (Netemeyer et al. 2014). Consumers have shown that if the product is similar to a lot of other products, deeming them unoriginal, they are less inclined to purchase the product and avoid the brand altogether (Netemeyer et al. 2014). Consumers often seek fast-fashion brands due to the brands bringing in "new" and "trendy" items that create uniqueness as it gives the consumer a feeling of self-fulfillment (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2016; Shen et al. (2014).

Shen et al. (2014) concluded that despite the need for uniqueness being present for consumers purchasing from luxury and designer brands, the need is higher among consumers purchasing from fast fashion brands.

Perceived value, organizational associations, and brand personality

Su and Chang (2018) argue that the three core assets for building strong associations between consumer and a brand are perceived value, brand personality, and organizational associations. Aaker (1991) claimed that the main reason behind brands creating brand associations is to create meanings for consumers. Keller (1993) stated, "customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is aware of the brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory." Perceived value is the consumer's overall evaluation of a product. This includes the consumer's assessment of its experiential, functional, or symbolic qualities, and the benefit the consumer receives from purchasing the product (Netemeyer et al. 2004). Brand personality is defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker 1997). Brand personality affects how consumers perceive and feel about a brand, thus having an impact on brand loyalty (Sung and Kim 2010). Having a favorable and strong brand personality can be beneficial to the brand, leading to increased brand loyalty (Sung and Kim 2010). Organizational awareness is when a brand is perceived as honest, trustworthy, and caring towards its customers (Neteymeyer et al. 2004). Knowledge of how trustworthy a brand influences consumer's decisions on whether they would continue purchasing from a brand, thus influencing brand loyalty (Chen 2001).

Fast fashion avoidance

Despite fast fashion quickly becoming a global dominating force, environmental and ethical issues have emerged (Clark 2008). A review done by Niinimaki et al. (2020) discussed how the very premise of fast fashion is unsustainable in terms of resource use. Every production step, from growing and producing the materials to the disposal of the garment, negatively affects the environment (Niinimaki et al. 2020). Several media outlets have reported on ethical issues,

such as labor under terrible working conditions with little pay and the exploitation of child labor (Kim and Oh 2020).

With fast fashion dominating the industry and its related issues being revealed to the public, there is growing interest and concern among consumers. This has resulted in a "slow fashion" movement, where the consumers focus on the environmental impacts, sustainability, and business ethics of the brand (Ro 2010). Websites, such as fashionrevolution.org, have come up with ways to make the public even more aware of fashion's impacts. For example, the website has come up with a "Fashion Transparency Index," by reviewing and ranking top fashion brands depending on whether they disclose their social and environmental policies, impacts, and practices. Consumers have also turned to anti-consumption, which involves a person actively rejecting the act of purchasing a product, as well as reusing and recycling other products.

Brand avoidance has been deemed as a special form of anti-consumption (Lee et al. 2009). Anti-consumption is a broader term that encompasses a group of people who are concerned with the whole process of consumption. Brand avoidance is more specific, being concerned with only brand-level resistance, while also encompassing other social, environmental, and other issues (Kim et al. 2013). Brand avoidance involves active rejection of a certain brand, as opposed to switching due to high price, inaccessibility, and other factors (Kim et al. 2013; Thompson and Rindfleisch 2006).

A conceptual framework based on brand avoidance was developed by Lee et al. (2009) and its applicability to fast fashion brands was later confirmed by Kim et al. (2013). Through in-depth interviews, Lee et al. (2009) proposed three categories for brand avoidance along with themes and subthemes relating to the categories. The three dimensions are experiential avoidance, which is avoidance due to a negative experience with a brand; identity avoidance, which is avoidance due to incongruence with one's sense of self; and moral avoidance, which is avoidance due to ideological incompatibility.

Research Methodology

Brand owners need to understand the motivations consumers have before purchasing from their brand, especially fast fashion brands that are responsive to current trends (Shen et al.

2014). I argue that understanding what makes consumers purchase items is essential to mitigate the environmental impacts caused by fast fashion.

Most research on consumer motivations and perception of fast fashion has been focused on the positive effects of brands and how to capitalize on those motivations. Few studies have examined brand avoidance, even though it is important to understand what causes a consumer to avoid a brand. Brands can use consumer avoidance information to find ways to address those concerns, such as embracing sustainable practices. Understanding what makes consumers avoid brands can also help the general public find ways to fix those concerns. Few, if any, studies have focused on both the motivation and avoidance of fast-fashion brands in the same population. To answer my research questions and breach the gap in literature, I aim to (1) determine what factors motivate UC Berkeley students to continue being loyal to fast-fashion brands using Su and Chang's (2018) proposed dimensions and survey model and (2) find out why UC Berkeley students avoid fast-fashion brands focusing on the dimensions proposed by Lee et al. (2009). Based on this literature review, I hypothesize that each of these dimensions will have a significant positive influence on brand loyalty and that UC Berkeley students will fall under the categories proposed, but with different themes and subthemes due to the rising concern surrounding fast fashion.

METHODS

Study system description

The target population was undergraduates at the University of California, Berkeley located in Berkeley, California. Currently, UC Berkeley holds about 30,799 undergraduates (UC Berkeley Quick Facts). At UC Berkeley, 53.6% identify as female, 47.5% identify as male, and about 0.00009% identify as non-binary (UC Berkeley Quick Facts 2020). In terms of race/ethnicity, 39.48% of the undergraduate population are Asian, 21.88% are White, 17.92% are Chicanx, 3.76% are Black, 0.42% are Native American/Alaska Native, 0.19% are Pacific Islander, and 12.1% are International (UC Berkeley Quick Facts 2020). In terms of colleges, a vast majority (around 75%) of UC Berkeley Undergraduate students are in the College of Letters

and Sciences (L&S Facts 2020). The College of Natural Resources holds about 7% of the student population, The College of Chemistry holds about 3%, Haas holds about 2%, the College of Engineering holds about 12%, and the college of Environmental Design holds about (About Rausser College 2020, Berkeley Academic Guide 2020, Haas at a Glance 2020, College of Environmental Design 2020, Facts and Figures 2020).

Data collection methods

I chose to survey and interview UC Berkeley undergraduates. I utilized UC Berkeley Qualtrics as my survey instrument and conducted interviews in person or over the phone. I chose UC Berkeley students based on unanimous research findings that young consumers tend to be more fashion-conscious and up-to-date with trends (Deutsch and Theodrou 2010). College students are also a population soon entering the workforce and soon to have disposable incomes. I distributed the survey in an online format to multiple UC Berkeley organizations and in-person by standing on Sproul Plaza and asking students to take the online survey. Interviewees were selected based on their responses to the survey.

In the first section of the survey, I asked general demographic information relating to gender, race, and the current college or school they are in. I used this data to gather information about the survey population, and whether the survey population adequately fit the UC Berkeley student population.

In the following sections, I asked a series of 5-point Likert scale questions to assess brand awareness, perceived quality, brand uniqueness, perceived value, brand personality, organization associations, and brand loyalty. The questions used to measure these dimensions were taken from Su and Chang (2018), who did an extensive review of literature to establish the validity of each. I modified the questions to fit my study. At the end of the survey, I asked if financial constraints were not a concern, would the survey respondent still purchase from fast-fashion brands. If answered no, I gave the survey respondent the option to be selected for an interview.

Once I gathered my interview population (Table 1), I asked them in-depth questions relating to reasons for fast-fashion avoidance. The interviews were to find and categorize

fast-fashion avoidance behaviors among UC Berkeley students and to determine themes and subthemes.

Table 1 - Participant Details

Participant	Age	Sex
1	19	F
2	20	F
3	20	M
4	20	F
5	18	F
6	22	M
7	21	F
8	21	F
9	18	M

Data analysis methods

To determine if the dimensions predict brand loyalty, an evaluation of the dimensions was conducted by using confirmatory factor analysis. Fit indexes such as comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) were used to determine the model fit. Structural equation modeling was used to determine which brand loyalty dimension influenced brand loyalty. For the in-depth interviews, I categorized each respondent into the three avoidance categories proposed and developed themes and sub-themes within each category based on interview responses.

RESULTS

Demographics

I surveyed 168 people and interviewed 9 students. Of those surveyed, 68.32% were female, 53.6% male, and 2.48% classified themselves as neither male nor female (Table 2). In terms of ethnicity, 23.6% surveyed were Spanish, Latinx, or Hispanic, 44.83% white, 36.78% Asian, 1.72% black or African American, 2.3% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 14.37% classified themselves as other or international. In terms of colleges, 61.15% of the respondents are in the College of Letters & Science, 0.64% are in the College of Environmental Design, 27.39% are in Rausser College of Natural Resources, 6.37% are in the College of Engineering, 3.18% are in the College of Chemistry, and 1.27 are in the Haas Business School.

Table 2 - Demographics

	Survey	**UC Berkeley Population**
Gender		
Female	68.32%	53.6%
Male	29.19%	47.5%
Other	2.48%	0.00009%
Ethnicity		
Spanish/Hispanic/Latino	23.60%	17.92
White	44.83%	28.88%
Asian	36.78%	39.48%
Black or African American	1.72%	3.76%
American Indian or Alaska Native	N/A	0.42
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2.3%	0.19%
Other/International	14.37%	12.1
College		
College of Letters & Science	61.15%	~75%
College of Environmental Design	0.64%	~1

Rausser College of Natural Resources	27.39%	~7%
College of Engineering	6.37%	~12%
College of Chemistry	3.18%	~3%
Haas Business School	1.27%	~2%

Fast Fashion Brand Loyalty

The measurement model

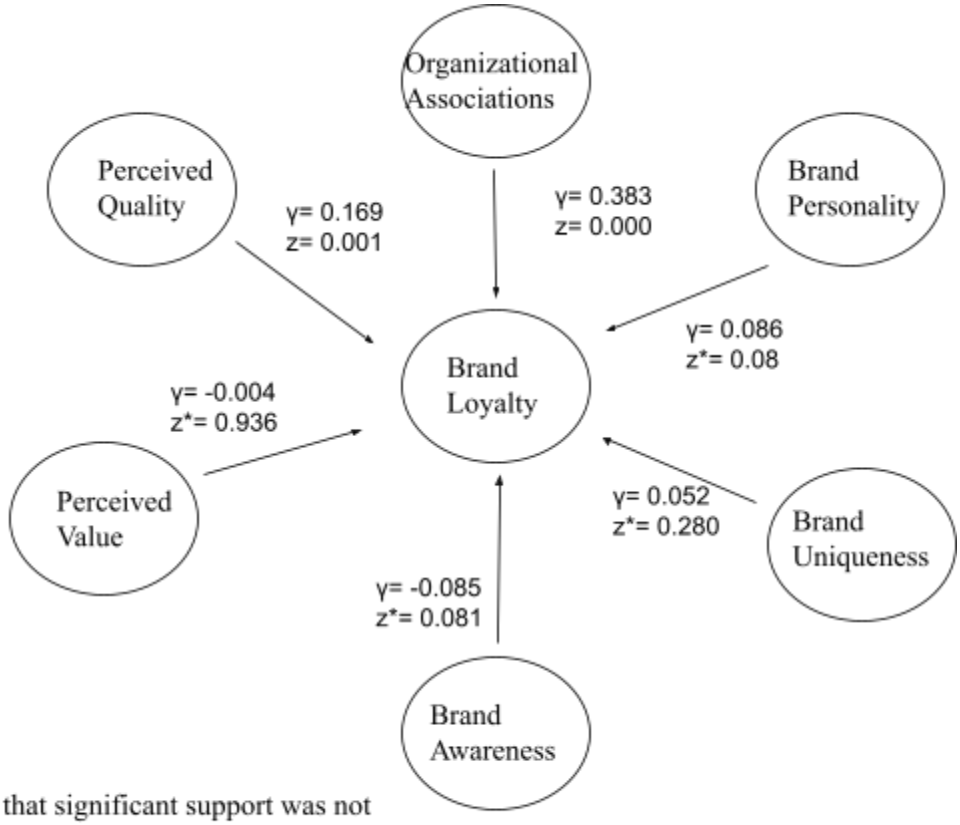
The comparative fit index score was 1, which is above the recommended number of .9. The root mean square error of approximation and standardized root mean square residual were both 0, which is below the recommended values of .06 (number applies to both fit measures). Based on these results, the data fit the model.

Structural equation modeling

Results from my analysis revealed that for UC Berkeley college students, perceived quality and organizational associations all contribute to influencing consumers to continue supporting fast-fashion brands. With a standardized path coefficient of 0.169, $z=3.23$, and $p<0.05$, results support the hypothesis that perceived quality influences brand loyalty. With a standardized path coefficient of 0.383, $z=7.46$, and $p<0.05$, results support the hypothesis that organizational associations influence brand loyalty.

Brand awareness, perceived value, brand uniqueness, and brand personality did not yield significant results. With a standardized path coefficient of -0.004, $t=-0.080$, and $p>0.05$, results do not support the hypothesis that perceived value influences brand loyalty. With a standardized path coefficient of 0.086, $t=1.75$, and $p>0.05$, results do not support the hypothesis that brand personality positively influences brand loyalty. With a standardized path coefficient of 0.052, $t=1.08$, and $p>0.05$, results do not support the hypothesis that brand uniqueness positively influences brand loyalty. With a standardized path coefficient of 0.086, $t=1.75$, and $p>0.05$,

results do not support the hypothesis that brand uniqueness positively influences brand loyalty**.** With a standardized path coefficient of -0.085, t=-1.74, and p>0.05, results do not support the hypothesis that brand awareness positively influences brand loyalty (Figure 1).



* indicates that significant support was not found for the z-value at p<0.05

Figure 1. Structural equation results

Fast fashion avoidance

Table 3 shows the three main categories Lee et al. (2009) identified and my proposed themes and subthemes based on interview responses. In the first category, UC Berkeley students avoided fast fashion due to negative experiences with the brands. This is due to poor performance, false advertisement, and high return costs. In the second category, UC Berkeley students reported avoiding fast fashion due to the brand not fulfilling their sense of self. This is because the style does not coincide with their desired self due to deindividualization and

unattractive styles. In the final category, UC Berkeley students avoided fast fashion due to incompatibility with their ideologies. Students reported these sentiments because of the environmental and social issues relating to corporate irresponsibility, chemical release, climate change, overconsumption, and uneven distribution of negative externalities.

Table 3 - Fast Fashion Avoidance

Main categories	Themes	Sub-themes
Experiential avoidance: unmet Expectations	Negative product experience	Poor performance False advertisement High return costs
Identity avoidance: symbolic incongruence	Undesired self	Deindividualization Unattractive style
Moral avoidance: ideological incompatibility	Environmental issues Social issues	Power Imbalance Climate change Chemical release Uneven distribution Corporate irresponsibility

DISCUSSION

This research aimed to determine what keeps UC Berkeley undergraduate students loyal to fast fashion brands while also looking at the motivations behind fast fashion avoidance among the same population. This study used Su and Chang's (2018) brand loyalty dimensions and Lee et al's (2009) brand avoidance model to analyze and categorize students' responses. This exploratory study addresses a gap in literature by investigating both fast fashion loyalty and avoidance behaviors within the same population. This study found that within the UC Berkeley undergraduate student population, only perceived quality and organizational associations significantly influenced fast fashion loyalty. In terms of fast fashion avoidance, I found the majority of students fell under the moral avoidance category and their responses yielded slightly different themes and sub-themes than those previously proposed. Brand awareness, perceived value, brand uniqueness, and brand personality all did not have strong enough support to conclude that there was an effect on brand loyalty.

Dimension influence on brand loyalty

Perceived quality was the most influential factor among UC Berkeley students when determining brand loyalty. This was an interesting result as Su and Chang's (2018) study found perceived quality to not be a dimension affecting brand loyalty. Despite not achieving significant results, the authors did mention perceived quality having some extent of influence. Fast fashion is known to have low-quality items that last only a certain period, and usually, college students are more interested in fashionable styles than the quality (Su and Chang 2018). Possible explanations for the inconsistencies in the results could be due to past research claiming that having high quality alone is not a guarantee of a successful brand, so perceived quality isn't a reliable measure when determining brand loyalty (Tong and Hawley 2009; Buil and Martinez 2013). The survey was also administered to only a small fraction of the student population, so results could change with higher sample size. Nonetheless, students at UC Berkeley may feel that the clothing they have purchased in the past from fast fashion brands is of sufficient quality to continue purchasing from fast fashion brands.

Organizational associations were the second dimension that positively influenced brand loyalty. According to Aaker (1996), organizational associations are a "brand-as-organization" way of viewing, placing importance on the organization behind the brand, and what the brand stands for as a whole. This supports previous research, as Su and Chang (2018) also found organizational associations to be a positive influence on brand loyalty. College students are more educated and passionate about social and environmental issues in general, so when brands evoke positive feelings associated with environmental and social reform, they are more likely to purchase from the brand. This coincides with fast fashion brands starting to add sustainability while advertising in response to the public being more concerned about ethical and sustainable business practices (Cavender and Lee 2018).

Brand awareness was a factor that did not significantly influence brand loyalty among UC Berkeley students. This differs from Su and Chang's (2018) results who found brand awareness to positively affect brand loyalty at a significant level. The authors argued that US young consumers are generally familiar with fast fashion brands and this increased awareness allows them to continue purchasing from fast fashion brands. This was not the case in this study, which means that UC Berkeley students as a whole may not be aware enough of fast fashion

brands to significantly influence brand loyalty. The result did come out as marginally insignificant, so a repeated test with a larger sample size could potentially yield different results.

The results also did not find support for supporting a significant relationship between brand uniqueness and brand loyalty. This means that UC Berkeley students do not find brands that show individuality as a significant enough factor when choosing to continue purchasing from a brand. A possible explanation for this could be behind the nature of fast fashion. Fast fashion brands' whole purpose is to provide items that the general public finds fashionable or trendy, so naturally, brands provide more or less the same items as other brands. Fast fashion's goal is to target young consumers who want trendy and inexpensive clothing (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006), not to provide unique styles.

Perceived value was another factor that did not significantly influence brand loyalty, though was marginally insignificant. Normally, those who perceive something to be of good value continue to keep buying from a brand, and brands who successfully market their goods as having high-value yield higher profits (Khalifa 2004). This could be because UC Berkeley students may not feel like they are getting good value for their money when buying clothing from fast fashion brands. As previously mentioned, knowledge about the unfair and unsustainable practices of businesses has become general knowledge among the public, so UC Berkeley students, in general, may view clothing that they know exploited humans and took cents to make as not being of good value.

Brand personality did not significantly affect brand loyalty, which was also the same result Su and Chang (2018) reported. This signifies that fast fashion's attractive and exciting marketing isn't enough to significantly influence fast fashion loyalty among UC Berkeley students. A possible explanation for this result could be that students find fast fashion to be inauthentic due to the unsustainable practices committed by fast fashion. This sentiment may be so strong that any brand personality marketing technique isn't enough to convince students to continue purchasing. Another possible explanation could be due to brand personality influencing other variables such as brand and customer satisfaction and not brand loyalty (Brakus et al. 2009; Su and Tong 2016).

Fast fashion avoidance

Experiential avoidance

The qualitative data suggest that negative experiences are the main reasons for experiential avoidance in fast fashion. This supports Lee et al's (2009) results, which also had negative experiences as the main theme for experiential avoidance. Some participants specifically avoided fast fashion brands due to false advertisement and high return costs. One participant stated:

> There have been countless times where I have ordered stuff and been extremely unsatisfied because the item I received was nothing like what the photo depicted. Since the items from fast fashion brands are so cheap they either are non-returnable or the price to ship back makes it [not] worth it (Participant 1).

The participant describes how the clothing she received was nothing like how it was advertised, resulting in her let down from the brand. She also mentions the increased cost if returned, bringing up a trend commonly seen in fast fashion retailers such as NastyGal and Shein: return shipping costs. This is a new concept not previously discussed in research using brand avoidance models (Lee et al. 2009). This could be due to the massive expansion of fast fashion seen in the last ten years (Su 2016). Nonetheless, her negative experience is similar to the other participant's experiences, all falling under the same theme of unmet expectations with poor performance being a major culprit:

> It's also frustrating when you buy a shirt from a fast fashion retailer, and it just falls apart because of the lower quality (Participant 2).
>
> But sometimes it doesn't last too long, which is pretty bad, but in general, it's not too bad, but still a concern (Participant 3)
>
> ...fast fashion brands typically have bad quality, and it is difficult to keep them for long-term use because they start to pill, tear, or

> stretch out. Particularly bad quality fabric can make an entire outfit look tacky in real life (Participant 7).

The clothing is so bad quality, it is not worth it to the participants to continue buying. Because of poor performance from the specific brand, students from UC Berkeley avoid fast fashion brands as a whole. Apart from not being able to attain well-performing and reliable clothing from fast fashion brands, their sizing is off, which is expressed by a particular participant, mentioning that "it's hard to shop my size in trendy styles" (Participant 2). The participant not only felt like the quality wasn't adequate, but she also experienced trouble finding the correct size when it came to buying fast fashion clothing. This is all due to negative product experience and the product not meeting the consumer's expectations due to poor performance.

Identity avoidance

The second category for brand avoidance identified by Lee's (2009) study is identity avoidance which was noted among participant's answers. Considerably fewer Berkeley students mentioned a form of identity avoidance than previous studies such as Lee et. al (2009) and Kim et. al (2013). Most of the interviewees felt like the trendy styles being advertised by fast fashion brands didn't coincide with their desired self and felt deindividualized while shopping. One participant mentioned individuality incongruence while explaining why she doesn't shop from fast fashion brands:

> "I like the idea that I am thrifty. I regularly shop from thrift stores or sustainable brands if they are affordable, as some tend to be on the pricier side. I've tried shopping from a few fast fashion brands but I felt like it didn't go with the person I was trying to be or who I view myself as, since I don't really consider myself to be the trendiest person nor really have any interest in being one. Obviously no shame to those who purchase from those stores, it just isn't for me or the self I am envisioning myself to be" (Participant 4).

This statement is important when analyzing anti-consumption and the importance of symbolic incongruence when shopping. Shopping from fast fashion brands made this participant feel like she was doing something that didn't make her feel like herself, so she avoids fast fashion brands altogether. Another participant noted how fast fashion model doesn't fit with her preferences, preferring few high-quality products over many lower quality ones that will only be on trend for a short period:

> "I would rather curate a wardrobe of interchangeable, high-quality items that fit my style, rather than accumulate a lot of one-off pieces that will be in style for a few months. Fast fashion doesn't do that for me, so I tend to avoid those brands" (Participant 7).

Moral avoidance

The final reason for brand avoidance mentioned by Lee et. al (2009) is moral avoidance which coincides with ideological incompatibility. Ideology has been defined by Hodge and Kress (1993) "as a systematic body of ideas, organized from a particular point of view." Anti-consumerism movements have risen amongst Millenials and Gen-Zs due to increasing resistance to capitalist ideology such as consumption and marketing (Lee et al. 2009). The movement calls for moral and ethical changes to consumerist ideology (Kozinets & Handelmann 2004), which seems to reflect what UC Berkeley students desire.

Based on interview responses, I found ideological incompatibility due to the social and environmental issues associated with fast fashion to be the most popular reason why UC Berkeley students avoid fast fashion brands. Students feel like there is a major power imbalance between the companies and the worker's and found that the companies were irresponsible with the treatment of their employees and the exploitation of the global south:

> "Another negative aspect that comes along with fast fashion is the fact that people in third world countries are subjected to work in horrendous conditions for little to nothing. Not only are adults exploited, but children too which are extremely dangerous and cruel" (Participant 9)

> The labor practices put in place. I think that it's very problematic. It's the overworking of these people and taking advantage of the lack of labor regulations in other countries. (Participant 6)

> A lot of the people who make fast fashion garments are paid a fraction of a living wage. In many cases, these workers have been discovered to be small children. And while companies like GAP have been caught doing this, paid fines, and promised not to do it again, over and over we see these fast fashion companies treating these repercussions to inhumane business practices as a cost of doing business (Participant 8).

These quotes demonstrate a common sentiment among UC Berkeley students. They feel that the moral ideology of these capitalistic fast fashion companies doesn't coincide with their views and they avoid the brand altogether. This sentiment was also noted in Lee et al's (2009) study, who found social issues and power imbalance to be major themes and subthemes when interviewing their population.

The overwhelming majority of those interviewed mentioned the environmental issues associated with fast fashion, which was not a theme in Lee et al's (2009) study. Many students found fast fashion brands to be major contributors to climate change and chemical release:

> "Fast fashion is also very bad for the environment due to the high amounts of greenhouse gasses released. Whether these gases come from the factories where the clothing is produced or during transportation, it all has the same effect on our environment. Which as time has shown and continues to say climate change is real and it is truly the biggest issue at hand, especially in countries that are disproportionately affected" (Participant 1).

> "I think a big factor is just the environmental costs in the places where they're being made as well. And I think it's an uneven distribution of environmental costs [but] I'm not super, super well

> informed or anything like that, but I would assume there's more environmental cost locally from the factories where it's being built, but also most of the people that live there are not the people that are benefiting from fast fashion" (Participant 7).

The students express concern over the effects on the environment by fast fashion consumption as well as concern over the uneven distribution of those affects. As previously noted, Lee et al's (2009) study did not have environmental concerns as one of the themes while almost everyone that was interviewed for this study exhibited a degree of concern for the health of the environment. This shift in thought could be due to the change in both the political and social climate in the United States since Lee et al's (2009) study was published. Recently, consumers (especially those falling under the Gen-Z generation) have been more aware of their role in consumption and the corresponding effects on the environment. Furthermore, environmental issues are now a concern to ordinary people and not those with higher education (Kim et al. 2013). So it is not surprising to find that students who attend a highly ranked university are worried about the future of the environment.

Despite environmental issues not being mentioned by the interviewees in Lee et al's (2009) study, the sub-themes of corporate irresponsibility and power imbalance were also prevalent among UC Berkeley students when discussing moral issues associated with fast fashion. We see this theme show up in student responses even when discussing other concerns, such as environmental costs. Although fast fashion is a relatively new business model, anti-consumption sentiment fueled by discontent with the socially irresponsible company practices has been seen far before both these studies were conducted (Fletcher 2010).

Overall, this study showed how different results can be when conducting a study with a different demographic and in a different time period, but showed valuable information that could be used to mitigate the environmental impacts caused by the fashion industry. I found that perceived quality and organizational associations to be positively influencing fast fashion loyalty among UC Berkeley students, despite Su and Chang (2018) yielding completely different results in their study. Brand awareness, brand uniqueness, perceived value, and brand personality, and brand awareness all did not have significant support to influence brand loyalty, even though Su and Chang (2018) did find significance for perceived value, brand uniqueness, and brand

awareness. All three categories identified by Lee et al. (2009) were also seen among the respondents in this study, with some themes and subthemes being different than those identified by Lee et al. (2009). The most noticeable difference in themes was the fact that UC Berkeley students found environmental-related issues to be a major contributor to their fast fashion avoidance, while Lee et al's (2009) respondents did not mention anything about brands and the environment.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that need to be addressed. First, this study focused on consumer perceptions in the United States and cannot be generalized to people outside of the country. Secondly, this study looked at college students which generally represents a small age range with similar socioeconomic statuses and budget constraints. Therefore, this study cannot be generalized for people of different ages and socioeconomic statuses. This study also focused on UC Berkeley students under the assumption that the students hold more or less the same opinion as college students across the country, which could potentially not be the case. The study was done with a small sample size and through convenience sampling which may not yield representative results.

Future directions

Since this study was conducted at one university that may not be representative of all college campuses around the country, it would be interesting to see a cross-campus study looking at brand loyalty and avoidance amongst the student population. Future studies could also look into fast fashion brand equity and avoidance trends in populations other than college students as older people participate in fast fashion. Furthermore, the dimensions that positively influenced fast fashion could be further studied to find ways to stop consumers from purchasing so much fast fashion clothing to mitigate environmental impacts. This can also be done by looking at what influenced UC Berkeley to avoid fast fashion and finding ways to use that information to encourage others to stop using fast fashion.

Conclusion

This study found that the message behind and the quality of the brand is what is keeping students at UC Berkeley loyal to fast fashion brands. This study also found that for the majority of those interviewed, poor performance and environmental issues associated with chemical release and climate change were the major motivators behind avoiding fast fashion brands. Using this information, a brand that sells good quality and sustainable clothing can be developed to mitigate the environmental impacts of fast fashion.

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