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Millennial Perceptions of Fast Fashion and Second-Hand Clothing: An Exploration of Clothing Preferences Using Q Methodology

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Abstract: Millennials are becoming more conscientious of the products they buy, as well as the social and environmental implications behind them. However, Millennials with low discretionary incomes have limited choices in today's marketplace, and it is unclear as to how these consumers perceive low-cost apparel options, including fast fashion apparel and second-hand apparel. The purpose of this study is to explore and compare Millennials' perceptions of inexpensive fast fashion and second-hand apparel. The Q methodology was employed to determine patterns among perceptions. Participants sorted 14 statements describing ideal clothing items into a Q sort grid. The Q sort grid forced participants to rank statements by the degree to which they agree (or disagree). Once the Q sort grid was completed, participants shared their thoughts (qualitatively) as to why they ranked each statement the way that they did. The findings indicate that there are varied perceptions across the Millennial generation, which resulted in the emergence of four distinct factors for both fast fashion and second-hand apparel. The findings of this study are extensive. Fast fashion retailers and consignment shops will need to update their future strategies in order to target the Millennial generation.

Keywords: fast fashion; second-hand clothing; Millennials; Q methodology

1. Introduction

While the popularity of fast fashion remains constant, fast fashion companies have garnered criticism from consumers due to poor working conditions in clothing factories and the increasing amount of textile waste in landfills (Todeschini et al. 2017). Fast fashion is known to create disposable, cheap clothing that has generated this excess consumption and waste (Yang et al. 2017). However, fast fashion companies provide consumers with the most up-to-date trends copied from the runway, which can be produced and available in stores in just a few weeks (Yang et al. 2017) at cheap prices. Currently, fast fashion retailers are trying to retain customers by incorporating recycling programs or launch collections that feature eco-friendly fibers. H&M and Zara are two fast fashion companies offering sustainable lines to adhere to the new values of Millennials (Johansson et al. 2017) in order to remain relevant.

In contrast, consignment stores, which sell second-hand clothing, are usually associated with sustainable consumption as the re-selling of clothing products extends the product's lifecycle (Yang et al. 2017). Second-hand fashion retailers sell clothing that was previously owned and typically shows minimal wear (Pierce and Paulos 2011), and may include the sale of designer brands at a fraction of the retail cost. To increase the market reach, second-hand clothing is available in brick-and-mortar stores or may also be sold online (Kestenbaum 2017; Pierce and Paulos 2011). Due to its increased popularity, the second-hand clothing market is currently an $18 billion industry and is expected to grow

into a \$33 billion industry by 2021 (Kestenbaum 2017), mainly due to shoppers from the Millennial generation (Planet Aid 2019).

Millennials have been found to purchase products that match their personal values of environmental and social causes (Hwang and Griffiths 2017; Todeschini et al. 2017). Younger generations, including Millennials, have been found to be open to new ideas, passionate about the environment, and involved in political issues when compared to previous generations (Lee 2014). Millennials are also becoming more conscientious of the products they buy, as well as the social and environmental issues behind them (Hwang and Griffiths 2017). They recognize that sustainability is an issue within the fashion industry (Han et al. 2017) and are working to 'vote with their dollar.' Therefore, previous studies have identified that this generation is willing to pay more for sustainable products, but they also have low discretionary incomes that make it difficult to follow their values (Hwang and Griffiths 2017; Lee et al. 2017). Fashion companies are in the process of shifting their business models to include sustainable initiatives (Todeschini et al. 2017) and it is unclear as to how consumers regard sustainable garments (Kong and Ko 2017) when compared to other low-cost options. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore Millennials' perceptions of fast fashion and second-hand clothing using a Q methodology. More research is needed on this topic, as Han et al. (2017) identified the need to understand how consumers in the United States perceive sustainable fashion products and Yang et al. (2017) also highlighted that more research is required to compare and contrast different types of companies when it comes to sustainability retailing.

In this study, the use of the Q methodology will enable the understanding of Millennials' perceptions on fast fashion and second-hand clothing and their consumption habits of each. The Q methodology is essential to this study, as this method is used to measure the subjective in an objective manner. The method also provides an in-depth view of each diverse perception, which is not possible to achieve using traditional quantitative or qualitative methods (Barry and Proops 1999). Additional qualitative information will also investigate if Millennials seek out brands that publicize their corporate responsibility, follow the news about social and environmental issues, and are willing to spend more money on an item that is environmentally conscious compared to a non-environmentally conscious product. In this way, this study will investigate fast fashion, second-hand clothing, and the Millennial generation.

2. Fast Fashion, Second-Hand Clothing, and Millennials

2.1. Fast Fashion Clothing

Fast fashion retailers sell clothing replicated after current runway trends, as there are few intellectual property protections on clothing designs. The lack of protection allows fast fashion retailers such as Forever 21, H&M, and Zara, to continue to copy the latest trends without punishment. These retailers can produce copies of trending designs and have them on the market quicker than other designers and retailers (Elrod 2017). In addition, fast fashion retailers receive shipments of new products more often than traditional clothing retailers, sometimes receiving products every week (Elrod 2017). For example, fast fashion retailer H&M releases over 12 new collections and Zara produces 24 new collections every year (Johansson et al. 2017). Typically, this clothing is of a lower quality and is produced in bulk through a short supply chain. Due to the ample amount of clothing produced, fast fashion retailers can sell their products inexpensively to a wide range of income levels (Yang et al. 2017). As a result, fast fashion encourages consumers to dispose of untrendy clothing more frequently, which puts natural resources at risk (Elrod 2017; Yang et al. 2017).

Severe environmental and ethical issues are a result of fast fashion's business model (Elrod 2017). Fast fashion companies have been criticized for the increased waste of textiles, as well as their business practices within their factories. To counter these issues, fast fashion retailers have recently tried to increase the number of corporate social responsibility initiatives to create a positive brand image. For example, H&M tried to save their brand image after they were accused of organic cotton fraud,

child labor, and poor working conditions in their factories. H&M now offers an organic clothing line and a clothing recycling program (Todeschini et al. 2017), where consumers that donate their used clothing to H&M receive a discount on new fast fashion products. H&M reported that the recycling program yielded 39,000 tons of used clothing (Yang et al. 2017) and has taken a zero-discharge pledge, which is a commitment to create a safe manufacturing facility for workers and eliminate the discharge of hazardous chemicals by 2020 (Elrod 2017; H&M n.d.). Therefore, H&M changed their business practices to be more transparent and even allow consumers to view their ethical reports (Lee et al. 2017). However, it is questionable whether the company has really become sustainable (Robertson 2019). For consumers that are looking for more sustainable clothing choices, second-hand stores can serve as an affordable option.

2.2. Second-Hand Clothing

Second-hand stores, consignment stores, and charity shops were considered official businesses in 1960 (Yang et al. 2017), but places such as auctions, Ebay, Craigslist, thrift stores, vintage stores, flea markets, charity shops, community thrift stores, and church thrift stores also sell second-hand clothing (Pierce and Paulos 2011). In these businesses, people donate or sell items that are gently used (Todeschini et al. 2017) and these items are typically sold at a cheap price. Purchasing second-hand clothing is also considered to be a sustainable alternative to other options (Yang et al. 2017). The consumption of second-hand clothing helps to not only extend the product's life, but also helps the environment as these clothing items do not end up in landfills. However, not all second-hand consumption behavior is driven by sustainability, as some consumers enjoy creating a personal aesthetic or enjoy searching for items that are one of a kind, authentic, and of quality. Second-hand stores are also a cheaper alternative than a shopping mall and are affordable for lower incomes (Pierce and Paulos 2011). Nevertheless, low-budget consumers purchase 1.4 times in a three-month period and believe that the value of second-hand clothing is low (Gwozdz et al. 2017).

There are many types of second-hand brick-and-mortar stores that operate using different business models. Thrift stores rely on donations, consignment stores give sellers a physical space to display in exchange for a percentage of the sale, and other stores pay for the items on the spot at a lower cost. Consumers typically sell to second-hand clothing stores to earn extra money, not caring about sustainable reasons (Yang et al. 2017). Another business model for second-hand clothing has also emerged, which focuses on lending items to consumers. Rent the Runway and LENA are online "fashion libraries" that allow consumers to borrow items and return them for others to use. The clothing they offer can be worn for special occasions such as weddings, prom, or homecoming. This business model's profit stems from consumer payments for the rental of an individual item or a monthly subscription fee. Overall, this business model helps decrease the consumption of clothing for the use of one occasion (Todeschini et al. 2017). Second-hand retailers are also noticing an interest in online shopping, as many companies such as Poshmark, Ebay, and ThreadUp have created an online market for second-hand clothing. Many of these online companies are also targeting Millennials and younger age groups (Planet Aid 2019).

2.3. Millennials

Millennials, also referred to as Generation Y, are defined as individuals born between 1980 and 1995 (Lam et al. 2016). Millennials are the biggest generation since the Baby Boomers and have significant spending power (Johansson et al. 2017). Compared to previous generations, Millennials value the environment and social issues. They are also willing to pay extra money for socially responsible products when compared to the same product that is not ethically made (Hwang and Griffiths 2017; Lam et al. 2016; Lee et al. 2017). However, Millennials' values and expectations also contradict one another, as they care about sustainable issues, but still consume fast fashion products (Johansson et al. 2017).

Ironically, Millennials are also the target market for fast fashion retailers and shop at those retailers more than other generations, even though the products contradict how they feel about ethical business practices. Fast fashion products are affordable when compared to other retailers, which fits within Millennials' budgets and stage in life (Lam et al. 2016). However, Millennials are forcing fast fashion and other companies to change their business practices to be more sustainable. The companies that implement this new business practice are becoming more transparent about their supply chain, which adds brand value and helps differentiate themselves from their competitors (Allen and Spialek 2018). To determine Millennials' current perceptions of fast fashion and second-hand clothing, the Q methodology was employed.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Q Methodology

To determine Millennials' perceptions of fast fashion and second-hand clothing, the Q methodology was employed. The Q methodology focuses attention on the subjective viewpoints of participants, which is based on their own experiences and individual traits (Barry and Proops 1999; Watts and Stenner 2005). It seeks to understand patterns among participants' perception on a topic and how they are related by a group of participants (Watts and Stenner 2005); however, additional information on the topic is gained (Stephenson 1953; Brown 1993). As a result, the Q methodology identifies factors which correspond to patterns of perceptions that are prevalent among this generation. Factors are identified by examining correlations, extracted factors, and factor rotation (Donner 2001), each of which allows for the comparison of viewpoints on the topic at hand (Van Exel and Graaf 2005). The Q methodology is best for research that is about a social phenomenon (Barry and Proops 1999) and has been used in a variety of fields which benefit from the systematic inquiry of subjective viewpoints (Barry and Proops 1999; Brown 1993). Overall, Q studies provide in-depth content on a topic that cannot be reached using a traditional quantitative analysis (Ramlo and Newman 2011). Therefore, the Q methodology was an essential methodology to investigate perceptions.

3.2. Materials and Design

The Q Methodology was specifically used to determine Millennials' perceptions of fast fashion and second-hand apparel as this method has been proven to measure subjectivities in a more objective manner than other methods (Stephenson 1953; Brown 1993). To determine the appropriate statements to measure perceptions in this Q study, a literature review was conducted to find keywords in recent research articles, which included literature on sustainable-centric and consumption-centric consumers. The literature focused upon pros, cons, and null opinions of fast fashion, second-hand clothing, sustainability, and consumption. Based on key terms found in these studies, a concourse was determined and an extensive list of terms on the topic was used to decide upon the 14 appropriate statement cards (also known as the Q sample) used in this study. The 14 statements were deemed to be broad terms that would enable diverse perspectives to emerge, while still providing a comprehensive viewpoint on the topic. Statements placed on the cards are shown in Table 1. The terms on the statement cards were not defined for the participant, as participants were expected to interpret each statement based on his or her own experiences (Brown 1993; McKeown and Thomas 1988; Ramlo and Newman 2011; Stephenson 1953). After Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was received, the study was disseminated on Amazon's MTurk. Amazon's MTurk serves as an online consumer research platform, which provides people with opportunities to earn money by completing tasks or surveys posted by companies or researchers. Amazon's MTurk was selected as an appropriate data collection method for this study due to its accessibility and popularity among diverse populations. For this study, a task was posted on Amazon's MTurk which only Millennials could access. The MTurk post contained a direct link to the data collection instrument housed on Qualtrics. Qualtrics is an online

survey platform in which data collection instruments can be created and disseminated to participants, and responses are recorded for data analysis.

Table 1. Q Sample Statements for Fast Fashion and Second-Hand Clothing Q Sorts.

#	Statement
1	Accessible
2	Affordable
3	Acceptable
4	Exciting
5	Trendy
6	Unique
7	Authentic
8	Sustainable
9	Ethical
10	Guilt-Free
11	Durable
12	Valuable
13	Quality
14	Rare

In Qualtrics, participants were first shown two preliminary questions asking about previous shopping experiences with fast fashion and second-hand stores. A limited number of examples of each type of store were provided to participants, including Zara, H&M, Topshop, and Forever 21 for fast fashion retailers and ThreadUp, Poshmark, Plato's Closet, and Goodwill for second-hand shops. After the preliminary questions, participants engaged in two different Q sort conditions. Both Q sort conditions used the same set of 14 statements, but the first condition's Q sort was used to gauge consumer preferences toward fast fashion, while the second condition's Q sort determined consumer preferences toward second-hand apparel. The user interface of Qualtrics allowed for participants to sort these statements into groups representing the degree to which they agreed with each statement on a scale from −2 (strongly disagree) to +2 (strongly agree). This sorting procedure (the Q sort grid) forces participants to rank each statement in relation to the other statements based on agreement (or disagreement). A majority of the statements are expected to be placed at zero, which is considered neutral in the Q sort grid (Watts and Stenner 2012). After each Q sort grid was completed, participants were given a series of open-ended questions based on their responses to the location of each statement on the grid. The data was then analyzed using the PQ method for each condition (fast fashion and second-hand clothing) and qualitative information was coded to determine Millennials' perceptions of fast fashion and second-hand apparel.

3.3. Participants

Millennials in the United States are the population employed for this study. As defined earlier, Millennials are individuals born from 1980 to 1999 (Lee et al. 2017) who are the target market for fast fashion clothing and who are gaining interest in the second-hand clothing market. Participants were recruited on Amazon's MTurk and received $1.00 for their time. In total, forty participants completed the Q sort and qualitative portions of this study. Twenty-two of the participants were female and 18 were male, and averaged a household income of $30,000 to $50,000 per year. Based on the preliminary questions completed by participants, 80% of participants had shopped for clothing at fast fashion stores, while 57% of participants had shopped for clothing at second-hand stores. Since our participants were recruited online, there are also a few limitations to highlight.

3.4. Limitations

The limitations of this study include the lack of generalizability across the Millennial generation. The Q methodology is not meant to generalize across large groups of people, but serves to identify

unique perceptions of a purposefully diverse group of participants. This standpoint is also supported by Thomas and Baas (1993) when stating that the Q methodology's purpose is to understand the range of meanings on a topic, and that there are only so many perspectives that can emerge. Additionally, it is expected by Q methodologists that the sample size of the study should be significantly smaller than typical quantitative studies (Brown 1993). An additional limitation includes the use of Amazon's MTurk, as deception could occur in an online panel environment. Deception in Amazon's MTurk can include falsifying information about gender, age, income, and ethnicity, as well as altering true feelings on the topic. However, deception does not typically take place when compensation is low and the study has few barriers to participation (Kan and Drummey 2018). Therefore, the researchers are confident that the factors that emerged in this study represent diverse Millennial viewpoints on the perceptions of fast fashion and second-hand clothing.

4. Findings

Millennials' perceptions of fast fashion apparel and second-hand apparel both yielded four factors each. Each factor identifies a pattern found among participant responses and highlights perceptions on the topic. The number of factors extracted from both the fast fashion dataset and the second-hand apparel dataset were determined by balancing distinctions found in the correlation matrix for each factor and the desire to hear as many different viewpoints as possible on the topic. Therefore, each factor is unique and shares diverse perspectives.

Based on the pattern found among participants for each factor, a factor-exemplifying Q sort is determined by the PQ method software. The factor-exemplifying Q sorts help to provide a holistic profile of each factor, from which inferences can be made. The grid position of each statement in the factor is represented by a number, with −2 being "Strongly Disagree" and 2 being "Strongly Agree." The factors and the factor-exemplifying Q sorts are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Factors for Fast Fashion and Second-Hand Clothing.

#	Statement	Fast Fashion Factors				Second-Hand Clothing Factors			
		Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
1	Accessible	1	−1	1	−1	1	0	2	0
2	Affordable	2	0	−1	2	2	2	2	2
3	Acceptable	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	−1
4	Exciting	1	1	0	−1	0	−2	−2	0
5	Trendy	2	1	2	0	−1	−1	−1	−2
6	Unique	0	2	2	1	0	0	−2	−2
7	Authentic	0	−1	−1	1	0	1	1	0
8	Sustainable	0	0	−2	0	1	2	−1	1
9	Ethical	−1	0	1	2	−2	0	1	0
10	Guilt-Free	−1	−2	0	0	−1	1	0	1
11	Durable	−2	1	−2	−1	1	−1	−1	2
12	Valuable	1	−1	0	−2	−2	−1	0	−1
13	Quality	−1	2	−1	−2	0	0	0	−1
14	Rare	−2	−2	1	0	−1	−2	1	1

4.1. Fast Fashion Clothing: Factor 1 "Trying the Trend Shoppers"

Participants representing Factor 1, entitled "Trying the Trend Shoppers," indicated that fast fashion is trendy (+2) and exciting (+1). While fast fashion lacks rarity (−2) and is affordable (+2), it is also perceived to be valuable (+1) and accessible (+1). The quality is not the best (−1) due to a lack of durability (−2). The clothing is not always ethical (−1), however, and can create feelings of guilt (−1). Overall, 10 participant Q sorts significantly and purely loaded on Factor 1. Eight females and two males comprised the 10 participants, and all income ranges ($10,000–$110,000+ per year) were represented. Factor 1 explained 24% of the study's variance.

Participants for this factor found fast fashion to provide an opportunity to try out new clothing styles that may not serve as a staple in his or her wardrobe. The brands continue to update and change trends, leading to an exciting shopping experience. One participant elaborated on this idea by saying, "Fast fashion is great if one wants to try out a new clothing style or need a few special occasion pieces that one will not wear more than once or twice." Another female participant stated that the clothing is "new, hot, and happening."

The clothing tends to be affordable, so participants can have the latest trends for less money. Due to the low prices, fast fashion is deemed to be accessible to a majority of the United States' population. One participant noted, however, that some parts of the population are still far from acceptance. Accessibility was not an issue for these participants, however, as they found fast fashion stores in local malls and online. Due to the high level of accessibility, a lack of rarity was mentioned as "A piece of fast fashion clothing is re-produced thousands of times." In addition, one participant noted a few things about fast fashion by saying, "Ethical and rare are two words that don't represent these types of stores. The clothing they sell are found everywhere and probably are made by a third world country."

Participants associated with this factor did note the ethical issues for which fast fashion is known. Many participants identified the likely production in third world countries, in which the production workers may not be paid as well. Environmental impacts were also cited, as participants questioned how environmentally friendly the operation and production methods were. One participant summarized by stating, "I wish more ethical methods of producing clothing were easily available."

4.2. Fast Fashion Clothing: Factor 2 "High Quality Seekers"

Participants for Factor 2, entitled "High Quality Seekers," highlighted the quality (+2) and durability (+1) of fast fashion clothing. In addition, this participant group found the clothing to be unique (+2), exciting (+1), and trendy (+1). However, these clothing items are not rare (−2), valuable (-1), or authentic (−1). These participants did not find fast fashion clothing to be accessible (−1), but did feel guilt (−2) with fast fashion. Factor 2 represents five participant Q sorts, which significantly and purely loaded on the factor. Four males and one female contributed to this factor, while a wide income range was represented (under \$10,000–\$70,000 per year). Factor 2 explained 17% of the variance.

Unique to this factor, participants cited the quality and durability of fast fashion. Participants expanded upon their Q sort selections by stating that fast fashion usually produces quality products. The material of the clothing was also mentioned to be of high quality. In addition, the products are unique, as they fulfill what is popular at a particular moment. One participant exclaimed, "Quality and uniqueness are the key factors for the fashion industry to make a good product," which is demonstrated by the clothing that fast fashion brands produce. Rarity was viewed negatively by these participants, and accessibility was consistently discussed. Another participant noted that "rare products disappoint people."

4.3. Fast Fashion Clothing: Factor 3 "Enviornmental Enthusiasts"

Factor 3, entitled "Environmental Enthusiasts," represents the perception that fast fashion clothing is unique (+2), trendy (+2), and ethical (+1). While fast fashion retailers are accessible (+1), the clothing tends to be rare (+1). Participants associated with this factor find fast fashion to be unaffordable (−1) and unauthentic (−1). This clothing is considered to be unsustainable (−2), and lacks quality (−1) and durability (−2). Five participant Q sorts contribute to this factor, four of which were from a male participant and one of which was from a female participant. In addition, the participants represent a wide income range (\$10,000–\$70,000 per year). This factor represents 15% of the study's variance.

Participants associated with this factor identified how fast fashion can be unaffordable. Due to the lack of quality and durability, purchasing a lot of fast fashion items can be costly over time. As one participant stated, "The clothes aren't durable for years. I've purchased a lot of them and only get a couple years of wear from them." Others echoed this statement, as they indicated how cost-prohibitive

the items can be and how fast fashion brands will not guarantee or stand by their products if issues arise. One participant summarized by saying, "I also don't think purchasing from these brands for a long period of time is sustainable because they are expensive. I think fast fashion isn't affordable." Many participants found that their fast fashion items lose shape or tear after only a few wears or washings.

4.4. Fast Fashion Clothing: Factor 4 "Ethical Believers"

Participants significantly loading on Factor 4, entitled "Ethical Believers," found fast fashion clothing to lack value (−2), quality (−2), and durability (−1), and thought that it fails to stimulate excitement (−1) among customers. While fast fashion is considered to be affordable (+2) and acceptable (+1), accessibility to the clothing is an issue (−1). Fast fashion is viewed to be ethical (+2) and provides authentic (+1) and unique (+1) clothing. Overall, a total of four participant Q sorts significantly and purely loaded on this factor. Three females and one male comprised the four participants, and a variety of income ranges were represented ($10,000–$70,000 and $90,000–$110,000 per year). This factor explained 11% of the variance.

Participants for this factor indicated that ethicality can be in the eye of the beholder. One participant highlighted this issue by stating, "I don't think the companies really are operating their fashion on ethical or guilt-free standards. I don't think ethics really applies to clothing unless they are having you wear something that damaged your skin or something." This view on ethics in the fashion industry provides interesting insight into the leniency that some consumers may have toward clothing. Diverse viewpoints, such as this one, allow for diverse perspectives to arise and for more in-depth information to be gained on the topic.

Even though the value, quality, and durability are lacking, it is viewed to be a consumer's problem. Many participants cited the production of fast fashion clothing as contributing to this issue, as the clothing is made quickly and cheaply, is made in bulk, and is not meant to last a long time. One participant summarized by saying, "The quality of fast fashion is usually not very good and doesn't last as long. A piece of fast fashion clothing is re-produced thousands of times."

4.5. Second-Hand Clothing: Factor 1 "Disinterested Consumers"

Participants that represent Factor 1, entitled "Disinterested Consumers," find second-hand clothing to be unethical (−2) and valueless (−2), even though the sustainable nature of second-hand clothing is viewed as sustainable (+1). Clothing found in second-hand shops is affordable (+2), accessible (+1), durable (+1), and acceptable (+2). The clothing, however, is not trendy (−1) or rare (−1). Shopping for clothing at second-hand shops also makes the shopper feel guilty (−1). Six participant Q sorts contributed to this factor, which included Q sorts from three males and three females. Incomes of under $10,000 to $70,000 per year were represented. Factor 1 explained 17% of the study's variance.

Information gleaned from the open-ended survey questions highlighted the perception of how second-hand clothing is invaluable and common. Many participants that contributed to this factor stated that second-hand stores and clothing are easy to find. The clothing is also the same as in other stores, but has just been used before and is less expensive. As stated by a participant, "I don't think most (second-hand) clothes would be considered valuable or rare. Seems to just be standard clothing." Some participants also expressed the loss of value due to the clothing item's previous use. Others believed that donors do not give rare or valuable clothing to second-hand stores. Overall, second-hand clothing was not perceived as trendy, but the durability of the clothing item was thought to be expressed through multiple owners and uses.

4.6. Second-Hand Clothing: Factor 2 "Sustainable Suitors"

Second-hand clothing, for participants representing Factor 2 entitled "Sustainable Suitors," is found to lack rarity (−2), value (−1), and excitement (−2). The clothing is also not found to be durable (−1) or trendy (−1), but is affordable (+2) and authentic (+1). Participants representing this factor highlighted the sustainable (+2) nature of second-hand clothing, and how it represents a guilt-free

(+1) option for clothing. Second-hand clothing was also determined to be acceptable (+1) for these participants. For this factor, seven participant Q sorts significantly and purely loaded on this factor. Five females and two males comprised the seven participants, and a variety of income ranges were represented ($30,000–$70,000 per year and $90,000–$110+ per year). This factor explained 20% of the study's variance.

Participants expanded upon these views by describing the sustainable nature of second-hand clothing. Sustainability seemed to stem from others' extra, barely-worn clothing being shared with others for less than the normal retail price. One participant elaborated on the sustainability of second-hand clothing by saying, "Second-hand clothing allows good quality clothes to be recycled and many times they are well-made and barely worn items to be found at heavily discounted prices compared to its normal retail price." This statement not only mentions environmental sustainability (recycling), but primarily highlights the financially sustainable nature of second-hand clothing. Since the Q methodology requires participants to interpret the meaning of each statement, more in-depth information was gleaned due to this flexibility.

Participants also felt guilt-free, as some second-hand stores provide profits to charity. Others believed that purchasing and using second-hand clothing helps the environment by reducing unnecessary waste and limiting the harmful production practices used to produce new clothing. The participant expanded on this topic by stating, "You purchase clothing at a fraction of the price and its sustainable for the earth in general . . . we aren't producing more but recycling clothes."

The rarity and value of the second-hand items were based on the perception that donors do not give up valuable or rare items to second-hand shops. While sustainable, the durability of the second-hand clothing was highlighted. Durability was minimal, as participants believe that old and used clothing has lost durability over time. As one participant stated, "I question the durability of something that is old."

4.7. Second-Hand Clothing: Factor 3 "New Clothing Purchasers"

Participants representing Factor 3, entitled "New Clothing Purchasers," shared that they believe second-hand clothing is unsustainable (−1) and poorly made (−1). Clothing from second-hand shops is not trendy (−1), unique (−2), or exciting (−2), but does represent an affordable (+2) and accessible option (+2). Authentic (+1) and rare (+1) clothing options can also be found. While participants in this factor found second-hand clothing unsustainable, they also indicated that they determined shopping for second-hand clothing to be ethical (+1). Five participant Q sorts significantly and purely loaded on this factor. Of the five participants, three were male and two were female. Participants contributing to this factor also represented most income ranges ($10,000–$110,000 per year). This factor explained 16% of the study's variance.

Participants that loaded significantly on this factor delved into why second-hand clothing is unsustainable, yet is considered to be ethical. The clothing itself is not considered to be sustainable due to the condition of the clothing. Second-hand clothing is not always worth the time or money due to stains or holes in the clothing item. As one participant discussed, "Since it is used, the clothing would have most likely been through one life-cycle of time and it most likely will be from a previous time period where the clothing was exciting but now it's not." It also may not be something the participant would typically choose to wear, as old clothing does not have the same appeal as new clothing. A participant highlighted this idea by stating, "I personally would rather buy new items so I do not find shopping at a second-hand store exciting." The practice of purchasing second-hand clothing or recycling clothing, however, is considered to be ethical.

More information was also shared about the accessibility and affordability of second-hand clothing. Overall, participants believe that stores that sell second-hand clothing are easy to find. One participant echoed this theme by saying, "It is more economically ethical to buy used clothing and I feel it is perfectly acceptable for people to buy used clothing." The clothing that the store carries is also considered to be highly affordable, if an exciting clothing item can be found.

4.8. Second-Hand Clothing: Factor 4 "Thrill Hunters"

Participants that defined Factor 4, entitled "Thrill Hunters," indicated that second-hand clothing is durable (+2), affordable (+2), and rare (+1). Participants also perceived the clothing to be a guilt-free (+1), sustainable (+1) option. However, second-hand clothing is also considered unacceptable (–1), and lacks quality (–1), value (–1), and unique characteristics (–2). Second-hand clothing is also not considered to be trendy (–2). Four participant Q sorts, two Q sorts from males and two Q sorts from females, significantly and purely loaded on this factor. Participants contributing to this factor represented a wide income range ($10,000–$70,000 per year). This factor explained 13% of the study's variance.

The durability and rarity of second-hand clothing was expanded upon by participants. Second-hand clothing tends to be durable due to the repeated use of the clothing item, and rare finds can sometimes be "hunted." However, a majority of the items in second-hand shops are considered by participants associated with this factor to be old fashioned and off-trend. One participant's comment seemed to encompass what many other participants discussed by saying, "Second-hand clothing is usually old fashioned, so you won't find a whole lot of trendy clothing there." With that said, participants noted that every once in a while a gem can be found.

Overall, the eight factors found in this study represent diverse viewpoints that Millennials have toward fast fashion and second-hand apparel. These factors provide new insight into ethical and sustainable preferences, and in some instances, support results from a few previous studies. Of particular interest, each factor found in this study represents a variety of demographic backgrounds and shopping experiences.

5. Discussion

The factors for fast fashion clothing highlighted a variety of unique perceptions and each factor represented people that both had and had not previously shopped at fast fashion retailers. While participants were asked to focus on the product itself, a few key sustainable issues in fast fashion emerged. Participants across factors identified a lack of quality (Factors 1, 3 and 4), unethical behaviors performed by fast fashion companies (Factor 1), and feelings of guilt when purchasing fast fashion items (Factors 1 and 2). Factors 1 and 4 were predominantly represented by females, while Factors 2 and 3 were predominantly represented by males, thus highlighting females' interest in quality clothing produced by ethical business practices. In the qualitative portion of the study, participants across factors noted that production in third world countries was not ideal and more ethical ways of manufacturing clothing was desired. This finding is similar to other research, as participants in a past study defined sustainable fashion based solely on how clothing was sourced and produced, instead of describing fair wages and working conditions (Henninger et al. 2016). It is also believed that sustainable clothing items are at a higher price point, which can hinder the purchase of such items. Therefore, sustainable fashion is viewed to be a luxury (Henninger et al. 2016) and could drive fast fashion clothing purchases.

In contrast, some of fast fashion's factors identified perceptions of quality (Factor 2), durability (Factor 2), and ethicality (Factors 3 and 4). This finding is surprising, as other researchers have highlighted that fast fashion is unsustainable due to the production of disposable and high-trend items (Elrod 2017; Yang et al. 2017). Notably, Factors 2 and 3 in this study were predominantly represented by male participants, so males may be more interested in the product itself instead of ethical or sustainable business practices in the fashion industry. However, all participants contributing to the factors in this study may be aware of fast fashion's attempts to increase sustainable practices, which is also outlined by Todeschini et al.'s (2017) and Lee et al.'s (2017) studies.

As Han et al. (2017) note, consumers are rarely exposed to sustainable fashion when shopping or when perusing media outlets. The consumer, however, must experience the sustainable fashion product, as simply looking at the product may not alter pre-existing attitudes toward sustainable products (Han et al. 2017). Therefore, consumers must experience sustainable fashion products before adoption

can occur. To educate consumers, extensive marketing initiatives should take place to highlight unique and trendy product characteristics and encourage personalized experiences with the product (Han et al. 2017). In addition, persuasive techniques must be used to entice mainstream consumers to connect with the sustainability initiative in order to obtain a higher buy-in for sustainable products.

Four factors emerged on the perceptions of second-hand clothing. Unsurprisingly, some factors outlined that second-hand clothing was affordable (Factors 1, 2, 3, and 4), not exciting (Factors 2 and 3), not valuable (Factors 1 and 2), and not unique (Factors 2 and 3). Complementary to findings in the qualitative portion of this study, Gopalakrishnan and Matthews (2017) indicated that second-hand stores must maintain a clean and well-merchandised store in order to attract consumers. Consumers want a pleasant shopping experience and do not appreciate clutter typically found in second-hand shops. They also hope to find clothing that is clean and pressed (Gopalakrishnan and Matthews 2017).

Surprisingly, participants in Factor 4 believe that second-hand clothing is durable. The qualitative portion of the data collection procedure solidified this stance by stating that the clothing has already survived use by others. In addition, Factor 4 also believes that second-hand clothing can yield rare finds and fulfills the "joy of the hunt." Participants that contributed to Factor 1 also highlighted how second-hand clothing can be acceptable but unethical, as it is just standard clothing being resold. As discussed in Gopalakrishnan and Matthews's (2017) study, due to the affordability of second-hand clothing, many second-hand stores locate themselves around college campuses to attract college students that want brand named products at low prices. At these stores, consumers can find affordable prices and unique assortments. Excitement can also be found due to the "thrill of the hunt" when shopping in second-hand stores (Gopalakrishnan and Matthews 2017).

Consumers' perceptions of second-hand clothing are not as positive for a variety of reasons. Many perceived second-hand stores to be disgusting due to the belief that these stores have unpleasant smells, damaged clothing, and an unorganized store appearance. Of the sample in this study, only 57% of participants had shopped at a second-hand store; however, each factor had representation from males and females, as well as people that had and had not shopped at second-hand stores. Therefore, these perceptions are an issue for second-hand stores, despite prior experiences. To begin to change consumer perceptions, second-hand stores could ensure that all clothing is laundered at their own facility and all damaged items are fixed or repurposed. Second-hand stores should also consider alternative merchandising techniques or shopping experiences. Clothing can be arranged based on trends instead of by size, as many participants cited the importance of trends in this study. In addition, second-hand stores should develop marketing messages that mention pricing, cleanliness, and the ability to quickly find trends in the store.

Overall, consumers have a greater awareness of sustainability, which has increased the popularity of alternatives to fast fashion (Todeschini et al. 2017) and allowed consumers to see the difference they can make with their consumption choices (Han et al. 2017). Parallel to these previous findings, participants associated with one factor stated that fast fashion is considered to be expensive based on the lack of durability. Second-hand clothing was also considered to be sustainable based on participant perceptions demonstrated for another factor. However, sustainable choices do not always translate into the purchasing of sustainable clothing (Han et al. 2017) or to a heightened perception of second-hand clothing. As found in this study, there is also a perception of quality and durability for fast fashion clothing, which contradicts many expert opinions on fast fashion products. In addition, some Millennial consumers do not believe that ethical standards apply to clothing unless the item is directly harmful to the human body. Some consumers also dislike common or soiled clothing typically found in second-hand stores. Therefore, the Q methodology allowed for participants to define their own terms through the use of the Q sort and corresponding open-ended questions, allowing for diverse perspectives to emerge. As a result, there are many implications that can be drawn, including the increased need to market to different groups of people within the Millennial target market.

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