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HÖGSKOLAN I BORÅS

Consumer Behavior Characteristics in Fast Fashion

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Abstract

Currently there is a lack of research in fast fashion consumer behaviors both in academic and marketing aspects. This research addresses the fast fashion consumer behavior characteristics, and analyzes the how general consumer behavior theories apply to fast fashion consumer behavior, and what the underlying causes that form the behaviors. The analyses are based on combination and comparison of conventional consumer behavior theories, empirical basis that is found from questionnaires conducted in Sweden, and brands studies on H&M, Ginatricot and Zara. The main results from the analyses are respectively obtained in 3 main terms: Decision making process and involvement, Individual differences, and Group influences. The three aspects try to cover the main topics according to general consumer behavior theories. And the outcome is further developed into marketing implication, also offering ideas for further research.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Consumer Behavior Theories originated from psychology study in the beginning of 20 century, and did not become systematic theories until 1968. Although it is a very young field, since its practical significance, there is already a large and expanding field of research that has emerged focusing on consumer behavior in the past few decades. From the marketing perspective, consumer behavior research is a necessary tool for the marketers to understand their target market and consumer group, in order to develop marketing strategies. Because of this, the consumer behavior theories have been quickly applied to various sectors of all fields in the world. Nevertheless every field has its own features, and none of any theory can perfectly match all situations, the theory has to be properly adjusted to a particular market. Besides that, as a young field, the consumer behavior theories system is not comprehensive enough, and there are still researches remained to develop for maturity like many other theory fields' developing process. That is why this thesis is done in order to see in fast fashion how the consumer behavior theories applied and what the consumer behavior characteristics are.

Presently in existing works, the research about the connection between fashion and consumer behavior is not plenteous. However a few researches have been contributed in this field, for example the book *Consumer behavior in fashion* by Michael R. Solomon and Nancy J. Rabolt in 2004 (Solomon & Rabolt 2009) was providing a comprehensive analysis of today's fashion consumer. But for the fast fashion field, which should be separately treated from ordinary fashion field, seldom study in consumer behavior involves or pay attention to this newly growing market. It is because firstly the fast fashion is always considered as a small part of fashion industry, so the features of fast fashion and its own consumer characteristics are ignored. Actually there are a lot of differences between fast fashion and conventional fashion, which will be discussed in Chapter 2, and it has significant meaning to find out the characteristics of the fast fashion consumer behavior. Secondly, the fast fashion is a newly emerged market, so it needs time to form an appropriate theory environment around this topic. Thirdly, now the fast fashion market is mainly dominated in each geographical areas by several big brands, and the threshold for entering the market is relatively high for the new entrants and small brands, so the theory for this particular market may only serve for few brands, therefore the brands themselves have more enthusiasm to research their own consumers by themselves than other researchers.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The lack of knowledge in fast fashion consumer behavior makes the potential new

entrances to be faced with even more disadvantages, indirectly being one of the causes for partly monopoly of fast fashion market. This is the existing problem that restricts the further development of fast fashion market in a way.

1.3 Main Objective and Research Questions

The main objective of this research is to describe and analyze the similarities and differences between fast fashion consumer behavior characteristics and general consumer behavior theories. This leads to the following research questions:

- What are the special characteristics of fast fashion consumer behavior?
- What are the underlying causes that form the fast fashion consumer behavior difference?
- To what extent the general consumer behavior theories can be applied to fast fashion consumer behavior?

1.4 Methodology of the Study

1.4.1 Geographic boundary of the study and brand selection

The geographic boundary of the study covers only the markets, consumers and available brands in Sweden, which is actually one of the most advanced countries in fast fashion field, owning its typical brand H&M. Some fast fashion brands are chosen here, H&M, Ginatricot, and Zara, as the main study brands involved in the thesis.

- H&M (Hennes & Mauritz) is a Swedish brand offering fashion forward clothing for women, men, teenagers and children. Founded in 1947, today H&M operate around 2,000 stores spread over 37 markets (Hm.com 2010). H&M says that it owes its success to three factors: inventive design, the best quality at the best price, and efficient logistics (Tungate 2008)
- Ginatricot is a Swedish fastest growing fashion brand founded in Borås in 1997. The main focus of Ginatricot is at selling fashion forward casual clothes for women. Every week there's new clothes released to the stores. In 2009 the company's turnover exceeded SEK 2.3 billion from over 135 shops in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark (Ginatricot.com).
- Zara is established in 1975 in Spanish, belonging to Inditex group. As one of the biggest international fashion brand, Zara has men's clothing and women's clothing, each of these subdivided in Lower Garment, Upper Garment, Shoes, Cosmetics and Complements, as well as children's clothing (Zara Kids). Zara needs just two weeks to develop a new product and get it to stores, compared with a six-month industry average,

and launches around 10,000 new designs each year. Zara has 8 stores in Sweden (Tiplady 2006).

1.4.2 Data collection

In conducting this research, both primary and secondary data are used. Primary data is information collected specifically for the problem investigated (Churchill 1996), and in this thesis, the primary data come from the questionnaire surveys, interviews and observation on the related consumers. The respondents to the questionnaires were found coming out of the stores of H&M, Ginatricot and Zara, mostly had consumed in those stores apparently with the shopping bags, and their age groups are from 13 to 55. All of the questionnaires were conducted in the author's presence, to avoid any misunderstanding, and some short conversation interviews were carried out during the time if the respondents agreed. The secondary data is data that already exists and that has been collected for another purpose (Churchill 1996), and for this thesis, secondary data is gained from Internet and relative books, all of which are marked as reference source.

1.4.3 Method of Analysis

The analysis is divided into three parts, Decision Making Process and Involvement, Individual Differences, and Group Influences, according to the three big categories in general consumer behavior theory. The analysis takes advantage of empirical finding from the questionnaires and the corresponding conventional consumer behavior theory, based on which to develop a new theory with the goal of understanding what the consumers' characteristics and why consumers behave as they do, where a marketing perspective is used. Since the empirical finding chapter before analysis provides visible data with figures and tables, which make it easier to get a conclusion from those data basis and compare if it is applicable to the conventional theory.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

In this thesis, the researches of consumer behavior are partly based on the questionnaire surveys and observation on the consumers in Borås and Gothenburg in Sweden, as well as on some existing common knowledge. Due to the limitation of resource in interviewees, the analysis can only focus on the available resources, which means the results may only apply to the Swedish market and Swedish consumers. Though, the Swedish fashion market, with a lot of conceptual Swedish ready-to-wear labels which are already spread around the globe, is regarded very representative of the European fashion market, as well as the consumers in this environment.

The regarding respondents are only female, from 13 to 55 years old, and mostly are Swedish nationality. Only female is chosen to be involved here because the majority of fast

fashion consumers are females, and also one of the three selected brands only offers women's clothing (Ginatricot). Moreover, the male behavior in fashion consumption is very different from the behavior of the female.

In the thesis, the consumer behavior happens in the physical stores, so the in-home shopping, such as e-commerce or teleshopping, is not included here.

1.6 Target Audience

This thesis is of great interest for any company within the fashion industry that want to gain knowledge about the fast fashion consumer behavior, and particularly for established fast fashion companies, new entrances and those attempt to do fast fashion business. Moreover, the outcome of this study can be used throughout the marketing strategy concerns to consumers, since the marketers can take advantage of the findings about the fast fashion consumer behavior characteristics and developed theories as marketing tool.

Finally, this study forms a different perspective of consumer behavior, and the interest is not only limited to private fast fashion business enterprise development, but also can be useful in supporting further related research.

2 About Fast Fashion

2.1 Definition of Fast Fashion

Fast fashion is a new term used to describe clothing collections that are based on the most recent fashion trends. It emerges in the context of that the fashion cycle is moving faster than ever before. Powered by the Internet, technological innovation and globalization, the up-dated rate of fashion becomes rapid, and then turns to form new market and field, which is relatively different from the conventional fashion market. Fashion has its life cycle, so does the fast fashion. Apparently the latter has shorter cycle because it grows and consumes faster.

The fashion cycle, or fashion life cycle, comprise the introduction, acceptance, culmination, and decline of the acceptance of a certain style as shown in Figure 2-1 (Solomon & Rabolt 2009, p. 14).

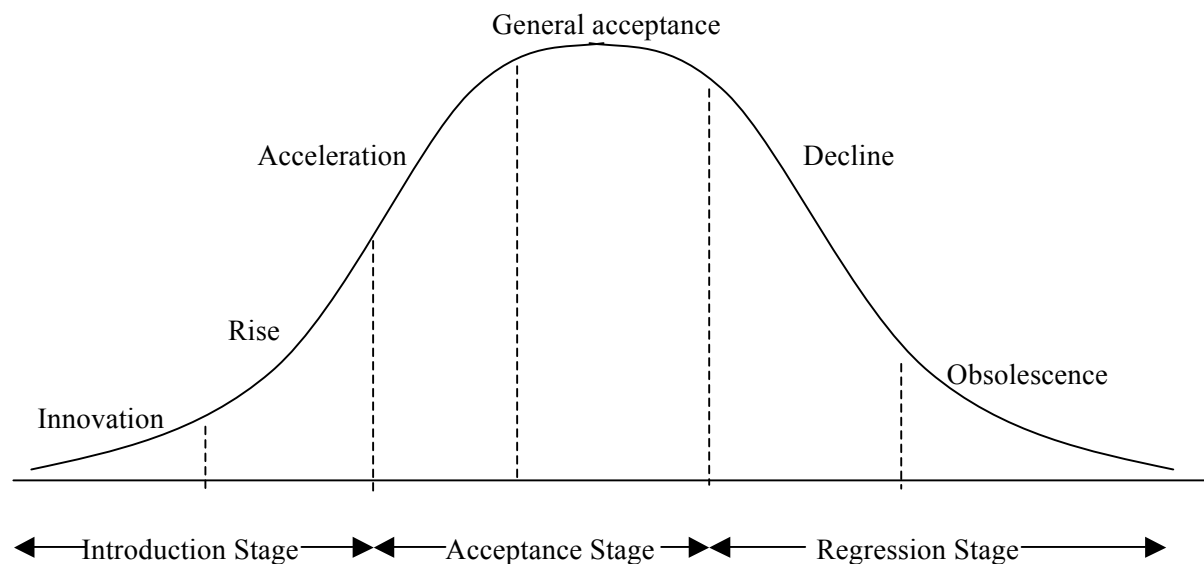


Figure 2-1 A General Fashion Cycle Model

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The figure above shows the regular pattern. In general, a fashion life cycle starts with innovation and rise, both of which compose the first step called the Introduction Stage, followed by the Acceptance Stage, in which the fashion reaches its culmination after the acceleration of adoption. After that, the fashion adopters gradually decline as time goes by, until it becomes obsolete, or even disappears from people's sight.

But the cycle's length and shape are different due to different kinds of fashion. Because though many fashion exhibit a moderate cycle, others are longer-lived or shorter-lived, and also the changing trend of stages are various. According to the relative length of acceptance cycle, there are other three kinds of "fashion" besides Moderate Fashion, which can be named Fads, Fast Fashion and Classics.

To see the different of these four kinds of "fashion" and get an idea of the position of Fast Fashion, the life cycle curves of Classic, Moderate Fashion, Fast fashion and Fad are compared as below (Figure 2-2).

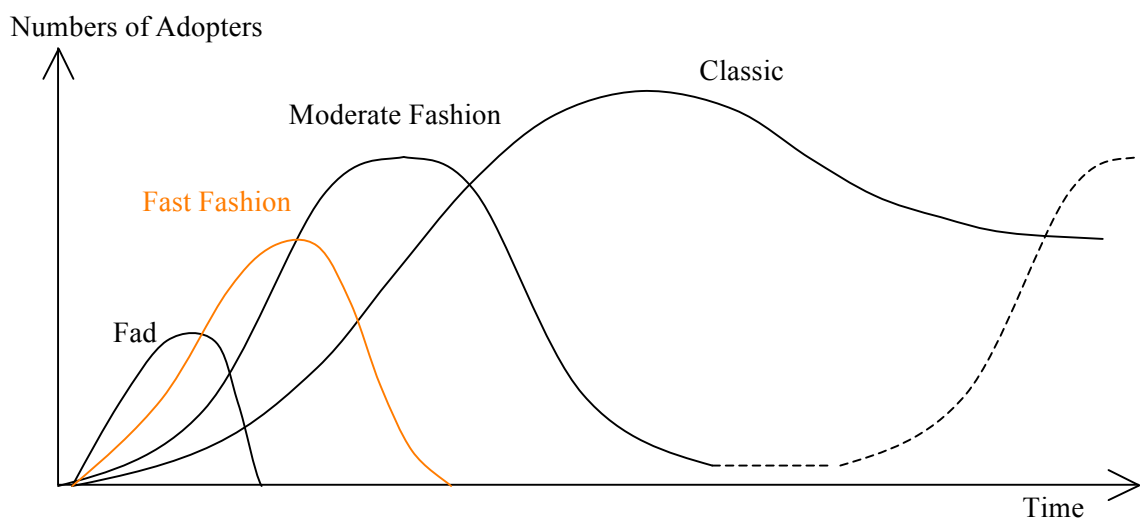


Figure 2-2 Comparison of the Acceptance Cycle of Fad, Fast Fashion, Moderate Fashion and Classics

In the acceptance cycle diagram, Fast Fashion is located between Moderate Fashion and Fad. A fad is a short-lived fashion that suddenly becomes popular and quickly disappears, and does not perform any meaningful function (Solomon & Rabolt 2009, p. 16). Moderate Fashion is a style prevalent in a moderate period, there is big possibility for it to be cyclical. And Fast fashion can be defined from the perspective of business concept as a strategy which aims to reduce the processes involved in the buying cycle and lead times for getting new fashion product into stores, in order to satisfy consumer demand at its peak (Liz & Gaynor 2006, p. 8).

The phenomenon of Fast Fashion is under-researched academically, but has received attention in most of the fashion and business press. The Fast Fashion concept has generated a Harvard Business School case study, and the fast fashion sale accounts for 12 per cent of the UK apparel market (Liz & Gaynor 2006, p. 8), meanwhile, the sales of adults' fast fashion clothing have grown an astonishing 11% in an otherwise subdued retail market (TNS n.d.). Thus it can be roughly estimated how big the fast fashion market of all over the world exists. In any case, Fast Fashion will no longer be ignored.

2.2 key Words in Fast Fashion

- Cheap

If we see the changing trend of the whole fashion sector, cheap characterizes our age. This is because, in the fashion industry, everything, from production to distribution, can be de-localized with relative ease, which makes cheap more widely developed than other industries (Bosshart 2006, p. 18). Fast fashion's soul is to make fashion democratized with its low price and speed, which means cheap plays an essential role in fast fashion. For instant, H&M describes its mission as "Fashion and quality at the best price". Cheap can stimulate consume and make products flow quicker, so as to enable the fast fashion brand has the ability of space and capital to update their garments fast.

- Cater

To focus on the fast strategy, fast fashion brands do any thing to shorten their products' shelf time. Not as strict as some luxury brands, fast fashion brands tend to make more response to consumers' preference in stead of insisting some belief. For example, in Zara, if a design doesn't sell well within a week, it is withdrawn from shops, further orders are canceled and a new design is pursued. In this case, Zara choose to cater the consumers by denying their own design without loss of time. No design stays in the shop for more than four weeks, which encourages Zara fans to make repeat visits.

- Dominance

A fast fashion system combines quick response production capabilities with enhanced product design capabilities, to both design hot products that capture the latest consumer trends and exploit minimal production leadtimes to match supply with uncertain demand (Cachon & Swinney 2010). All of these need a strong mature group to support and manage. That is why there are only some established fashion brands dominating the fast fashion market.

3 Empirical Findings

There are 25 questions (including sub-questions) in each questionnaire (See Appendix 1), and 28 respondents in total. And to make sure the respondents to understand every question, all of the questionnaires are conducted face by face, which also give the author good chances to communicate with respondents and know more behind their answers. Each question has its purpose in order to analyze. Some questions served dual purpose because they provided validation for more than one hypothesis. In the following chapter the results from the all the conducted questionnaires are presented.

1. How often do you shop in H&M, Ginatricot, Zara or Topshop?

a. twice a week b. once a week c. twice a month d. once a month

Firstly, to classify the data basically by age groups:

It can be found that almost all the student-respondents aged from 13 to 18, shop twice a month in the mentioned stores, and in this age group, only one girl has a regular part time job (with an relatively higher income of 7000 kr every month) and shops once a week; in the group aged from 20 to 26, the shopping frequencies are varied from twice a week to twice a month, which is higher than the younger group, in addition, there is only one girl in the group is married, and she shops merely once a month; for the aged 31 to 39 group, the fast fashion shopping frequency becomes apparently lower than the younger groups, it is within once to twice a month; in the group aged 47 to 55, most of them shop in the mentioned stores once a month, besides, one of them shops fast fashion even more seldom (twice a year), and another respondent shops very frequently than the others in this age group and her interest is clothes.

Secondly, to divide into groups according to the respondents' income:

The first group has income less than 5,000 kr monthly (In fact, the girl whose income is 5,000 kr should be regard as a special case in this group, because she has to pay her entire life fee, which means except basic costs like rent and food, only about 1,000 kr can be used on other expenses. The rest in this group are all students younger than 23 living with parents with income below 3,000 kr. Thus the first group's income should be under 3,000 kr.), and they shop in fast fashion stores from twice a week to once a month. So does the group with income from 6,000 kr to 16,000 kr; the shopping frequencies also cover all the options. It can be conclude that the income of less than 16,000 does not directly influence the shopping frequency. The final group has income from 20,000 kr to 50,000 kr, and their shopping frequencies are once to twice a month or even less, which are obviously lower than the other two groups.

Thirdly, due to the occupation can reflect one's leisure time, the data is sorted out by occupation in the same way. The respondents are divided into four groups as students,

students with extra work, nurses & teachers and other full time jobs respectively. Those four groups have different leisure time, and the fast fashion shopping frequencies related to each group of occupation, as well as related to groups of age and income factors is shown in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1 Fast Fashion Shopping Frequency					
Group type		Twice /week	Once /week	Twice /month	Once /month
Age group	13-18				
	20-26				
	31-39				
	47-55				
Income group	less than 3,000 kr				
	6,000-16,000 kr				
	20,000-50,000 kr				
Occupation group (leisure time)	students				
	students with extra work				
	nurses & teachers				
	other full time jobs				

2. Before shopping for clothes, do you have expectation about what you are going to buy?
 Yes No

For this question, 17 of the respondents chose “Yes”, which means most of the people have certain ideas about what they are going to buy before they go shopping cloth. 9 of them chose “No”, and the rest 2 said “Sometimes”.

3. Comparing with other fashion brands, what makes you choose fast fashion brands?
 (Multi-choice)

- a. brand identity
- b. cheap
- c. trendy
- d. more options
- e. store environment
- f. habit

For this multi-choice question, there are 21 respondents chose “cheap”, 17 chose “trendy”, 11 chose “more options”, and 6 chose “habit”. It can be found that the most influential factors that fast fashion brands distinguished from other fashion brands are cheap and trendy, and then more option is also considered sometimes when they make decision. But the store environment and brand identity is not the reason for most consumers to choose fast fashion brands. (See Figure 3-1)

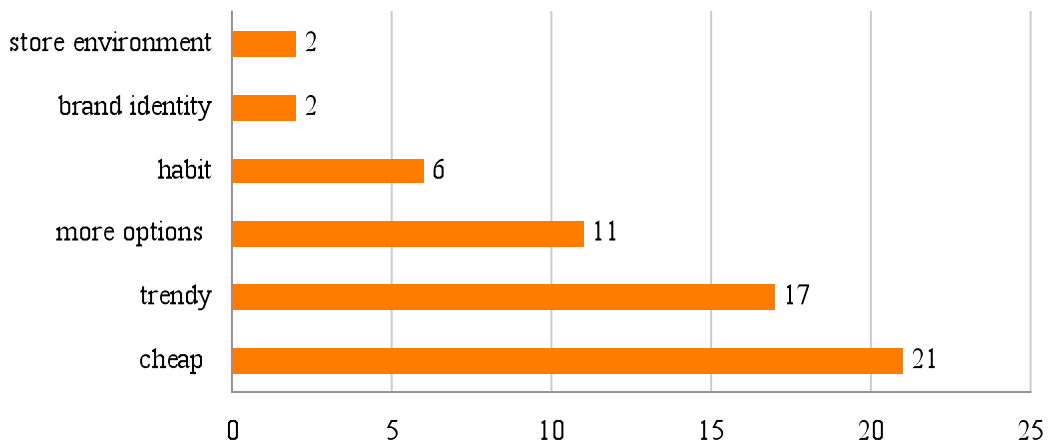


Figure 3-1 The Reasons for the Consumers to Choose Fast Fashion Brands

4.1. Before shopping, do you have knowledge about the latest fashion trends and what's in/out in fashion? Yes No

4.2. Where do you get information about trend and fashion?

a. Magazine & Newspaper

b. TV show

c. Internet

d. Shop window

e. Celebrities

f. People around you

4.3. Do you learn it during your shopping experience? Yes No

These 3 questions are trying to figure out the situation about how the consumers search for fashion information. The results of the first two questions show that 19 respondents think they are acquainted with the latest fashion information, while the rest 9 respondents do not think they have the knowledge before shopping. And the sources to get the fashion information are mostly from “People around them”, and also media like “Magazine & Newspaper” or “Internet” (see Figure 3-2). The third question under this topic is to find whether the consumers learn latest fashion information when they are shopping in the store, and 86% of the respondents think they do.

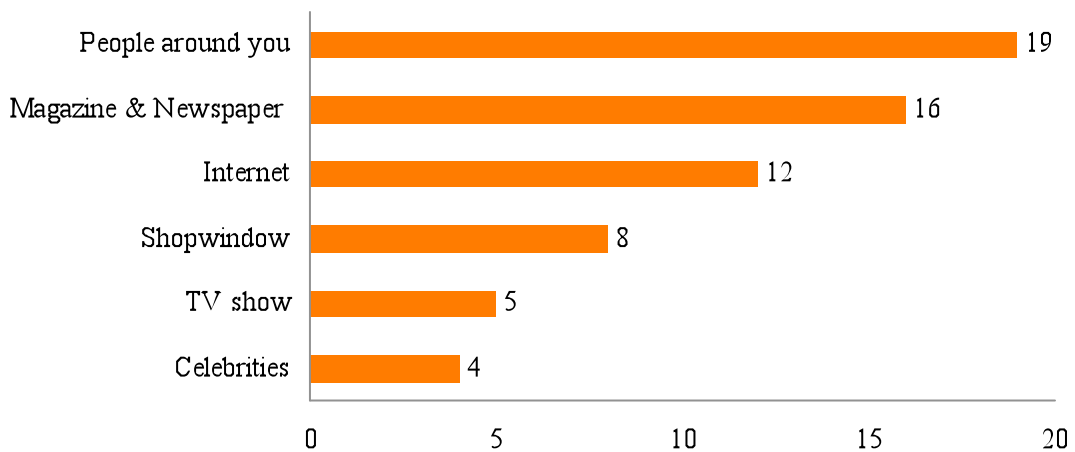


Figure 3-2 Consumers' Sources to Get Trend and Fashion Information

5. How significant are fast fashion clothes for your self-image?

- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| <i>Very important</i> | <i>Important</i> |
| <i>Less important but have a certain influence</i> | <i>Not important</i> |

This question is to find out how the perceived personal importance of fast fashion products is to an individual. The result shows 75% respondents in total hold negative-tendency attitude toward the importance of fast fashion to themselves, from which 46% respondents regard it less important but have a certain influence to self-image, and 29% think it not importance; only 25% respondents consider fast fashion is important or very important for their self-image.

6. Do you have brand preference when shopping fast fashion? (Why?)

- Yes, I am loyal customer of H&M / Ginatricot / other brand _____
- Yes, I prefer H&M / Ginatricot / other brand _____
- No, I don't care which brand it is.

When shopping fast fashion, 46% respondents do not care about the brand, 29% prefer some brand, and 25% are loyal customers of some brand (See Figure 3-3). When talking about why, respondents who have certain level of brand preference always take products as the main reason. Size is mentioned a lot in this case, some people can not find the suitable size easily in some brands, so they prefer other brands that offer more big-size options, for instance, there is one respondent never goes to Ginatricot but like H&M instead, because H&M has the collection B&B, which has the perfect size for her. Also the clothes in some brands target to young people, therefore they may lose some older customer. However, there are nearly half of the respondents do not have any brand preference for fast fashion.

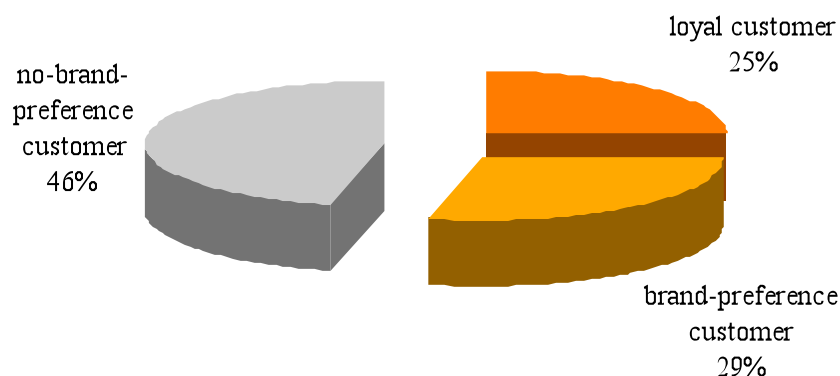


Figure 3-3 Brand Preferences of Fast Fashion Consumers

7. Would you wait to buy a garment until its on sale? Yes No

For this question, 18 respondents chose “No”, 3 said “Sometimes”, and the rest 7 chose “Yes”. The 64% respondents holding negative attitude shows that most consumers do not wait for sale if what they want to buy are fast fashion products.

8. *Do you think the display and store atmosphere is important for a fast fashion store?*

Yes No

Does it really influence your purchase decision?

Yes No

86% respondents think the store atmosphere is important for a fast fashion store, while not as many as them think it really influences their purchase decision, 60% respondents think it does, but the other 40% do not think the display or atmosphere in a fast fashion store really influences their buying decision.

9. *The clothes you buy in fast fashion stores are mostly for? (Choose 1~2)*

a. weekends

b. work days

c. basic daily needs

d. parties

e. others _____

As shown in the table below (Table 3-2), most clothes that the respondent consumers buy in fast fashion stores are for basic daily wear, and they are also adapted equably for use in weekends, work days and parties.

Option:	Weekends	Work days	Basic daily needs	Parties
Votes:	8	8	19	8

10. *You shop fast fashion clothes because they are _____ (please sort by importance).*

a. comfortable

b. good looking

c. ready/easy-to-wear

d. good price

e. in latest trend

The respondents were requested to sort the reasons of shopping fast fashion clothes by the importance to them. The results are shown in Table 3-3. It can be found that “good looking” is the most important reason that make the consumers to decide to buy a fast fashion clothes for the majority. Although there are some of them put “good price” in the No. 1 position, still “good price” as well as “comfortable” rank the second mostly when consumers are making decisions. “Ready-to-wear” and “in latest trend” are not so important in this case.

		Rank				
		No. 1	No. 2	No. 3	No. 4	No. 5
Option	<i>comfortable</i>	3	9	5	2	1
	<i>good looking</i>	18	3	4	1	
	<i>ready/easy-to-wear</i>	1	4	4	3	3

	<i>good price</i>	6	11	8	1	
	<i>in latest trend</i>	1	1	2	4	7

11. *What do you feel about the shopping experience in fast fashion stores? (like tired, boring, enjoyable, excited, stressful, relax and other feelings) why?*

And do you always feel like this? Yes No

The answers of these two questions about respondents' feeling in fast fashion store can be divided into 4 groups of attitude: always positive, mostly positive, mostly negative, and always negative (Figure 3-4). There are 7 respondents always feel shopping in fast fashion store is enjoyable or relaxing, as is said by one of them "shopping makes me happy"; 13 respondents feel good in most of their shopping experience, but sometimes they still have other feeling, and it may "depends on what mood" they are in or something else, for example a 31 years old female who has a kid said "Most time I feel enjoyable, excited and relax when I'm shopping alone, but if I am with my kid, I will feel stressful because he doesn't like to be in store"; 4 respondents feel boring or tired a lot or stressful "because of the crowd", but sometimes they also find it excited or good; the rest 4 respondents hold very negative attitude towards the shopping experience in fast fashion stores, they feel stressful, exhausted, crowded, and some of them feel that there are "too many choices", and they always feel in this way.

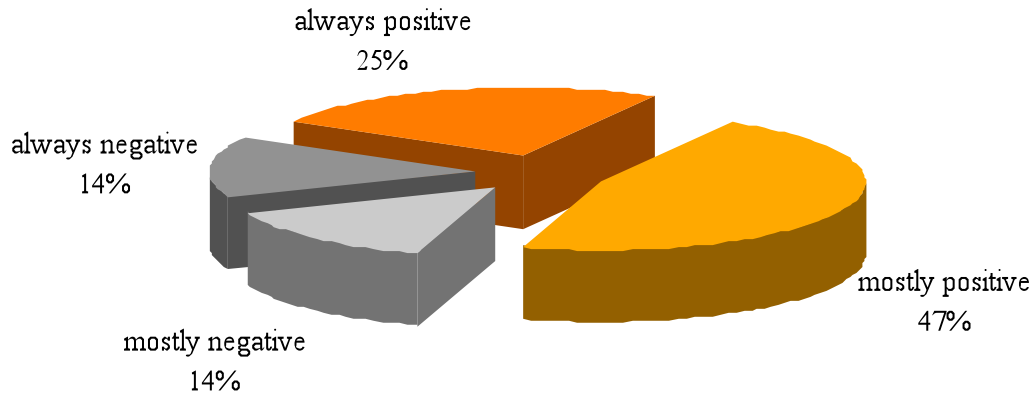


Figure 3-4 Attitudes towards the Feeling of the Shopping Experience in Fast Fashion Store

12. *What's your feeling now about the products you purchased in the past half year?*

When talking about the products bought in the past half year, almost all of the respondents (about 85%) think they are "good", or "still like and use them", which shows the products' actual outcome matches most consumers' expectation. However, there are still some different feedbacks, for example "not always the best quality", and there are about 10% respondents get tired of the clothes very easily, probably only wear them for once, or have

thrown some away even only few months past. In addition, respondents may compare the products among different brands, like one respondent think the quality for H&M is better than Ginatricot when being asked the feeling of the purchase.

13. Do you think you are good at styling or have certain ideas about fashion?

Yes No

79% respondents think they are good at styling or have ideas about fashion in some way, and 21% respondents do not think they are good at that.

14. Can you tell the difference between H&M and Ginatricot's brand image? Describe with few key words what you associate with: H&M _____

Ginatricot _____

The answers with keywords are as following, and bigger sized words are held by more respondents:

H&M: for the whole family, all sizes, cheaper, trendy, more choices, basic, better quality, designed clothes from celebrities, international brand, fun, comfortable

Ginatricot: cheaper, trendy, not good quality, for younger people (girls), basic and a little bit boring, cute, smaller size, comfortable, quick-updated (every 2 weeks)

From the above description, it can be found that H&M is distinguished by “for the whole family” since it has clothes for men and children, and by bigger size, on the other hand, Ginatricot is distinguished by cheap, trendy, and worse quality than H&M, also its clothes are regarded as more for younger girls. However, different persons have different opinions, such as some of them think H&M are cheaper, or more basic, while others think on the contrary. Besides that, a few people can not tell the difference between these two brands.

15. What is your fashion style?

a. Casual

b. Official

c. Sport

d. Elegant

e. Sexy

f. Stylish

g. Trendy

h. Street / punk

The result shows that the fashion style of fast fashion consumer respondents covers almost every type. Meanwhile this question is in order to find the relation between the consumer's fashion style and frequency of fast fashion shopping, but from the comparison of the answers of this question and question #1 “How often do you shop in H&M, Ginatricot, Zara or Topshop”, it cannot be found that there is very clear relation in general. Although, for those respondents who selected “casual” and “trendy”, shopping fast fashion seems more frequent to them, and those whose fashion style is more “sport” or “elegant”, they shop fast fashion less than the others, however as mentioned above, the relation is not quite obvious.

16. Do you need to wear more formal clothes during work time? Yes No

This question along with question #1 is aim to provide validation for hypothesis of the relationship between work-time dress style and fast fashion shopping frequency. “Formal clothes” here include uniform, business suit and so on. As shown in the following table (Table 3-4), whether a respondent need to wear formally indeed directly affects his fast fashion shopping frequency, that is, those who need to wear formal clothes go shopping fast fashion obviously less frequently than those who do not need to.

Table 3-4 Relationship between Work-time Dress Style and Fast Fashion Shopping Frequency					
Need to wear formally during work time?	Fast fashion shopping frequency:				
	Twice /week	Once /week	Twice /month	Once /month	Total
Yes	6%	0%	38%	56%	100% (16)
No	8%	33%	33%	25%	100% (12)

17. How much percent of your income do you spend on fashion averagely? _____

Most respondents spend 5% to 10% of their income on fashion every month averagely. After comparing with their monthly income information, it can be found that the general expenditure on fashion account for 5% to 10% of the income no matter how much money the consumers earn. The whole range is from 3% to 70%, depending on individual’s lifestyle. (See table 3-5).

Table 3-5 Percentage of the Income Spending on Fashion									
Percent	3%	5%	8%	10%	15%	30%	50%	60%	70%
Counting	1	7	1	9	1	2	4	1	1

18. Mostly you go shopping _____

- a. alone
- b. with boy friend or husband
- c. with friends
- d. with other family members

According to the data get from questionnaires (See figure 3-5), shopping alone is the most common status for most respondents, and seldom consumers go shopping with boyfriend or husband, but as a matter of fact, when conducting the questionnaires, it is much easier to find some one shopping alone to answer the questionnaires than those who have companies, especially those with boyfriend or husband, because most girls do not want to keep their

companies to wait. So in this case, the data have to be adjusted. The proportion of those often “shopping alone” is likely smaller in the questionnaire respondents than in the overall consumers’ actual situation. Also those consumers who often shop with boyfriend or husband are not as few as the questionnaire results. Another fact is that when talking about other family members, all most all respondents mean their kids. However, the female shop alone a little more often than shop with friends or with kids and they do not go shopping very often with their boyfriend or husband.

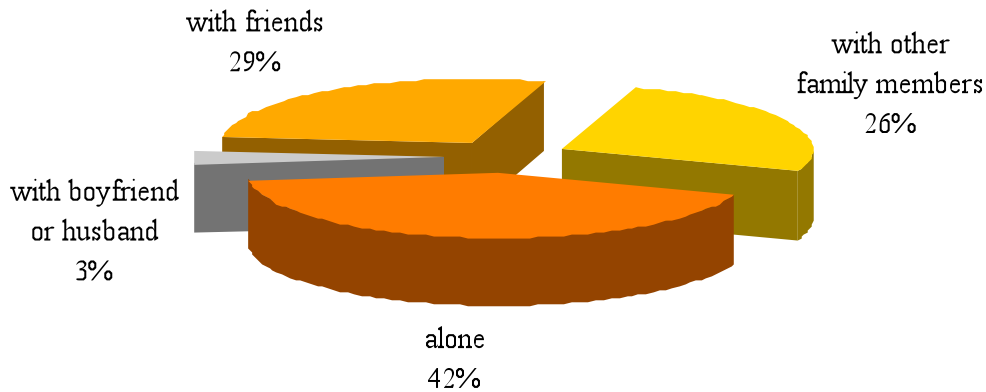
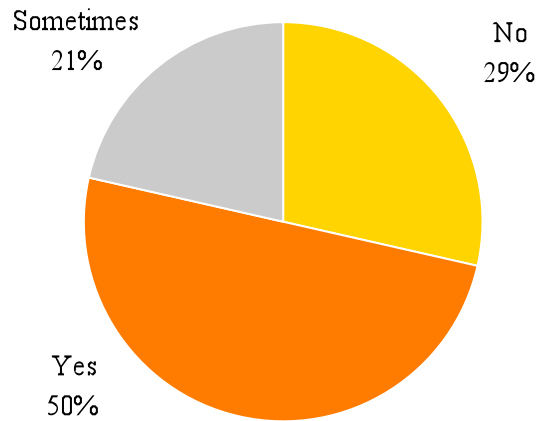


Figure 3-5 The Respondents’ Shopping Companies

19. In general, do you like to talk about fashion with your friends?

As shown in the following pie chart (Figure 3-6), half respondents like to talk about fashion with their friends, more than a quarter of the respondents are not interested in this topic, and the rest respondents occasionally like to share fashion information with friends.

Figure 3-6 Do you like to talk about fashion with your friends?



20. What kind of information or advice from your friends would you listen to?

- a. a brand's new collection
- b. a brand's social responsible work
- c. a brand's clothing quality
- d. some pieces of dress they strongly recommend you
- e. fashion trendy information in general
- f. their own fashion opinions

The investigation finds that individuals' own fashion opinions are the most popular fashion information to share with their friends, and then the second acceptant information or advice is recommendation of some specific pieces of dress and a brand's clothing quality, which is followed by information of a brand's new fashion collection. General fashion trendy information and brand's social responsible work are the lattermost information from friends the respondents would listen to.

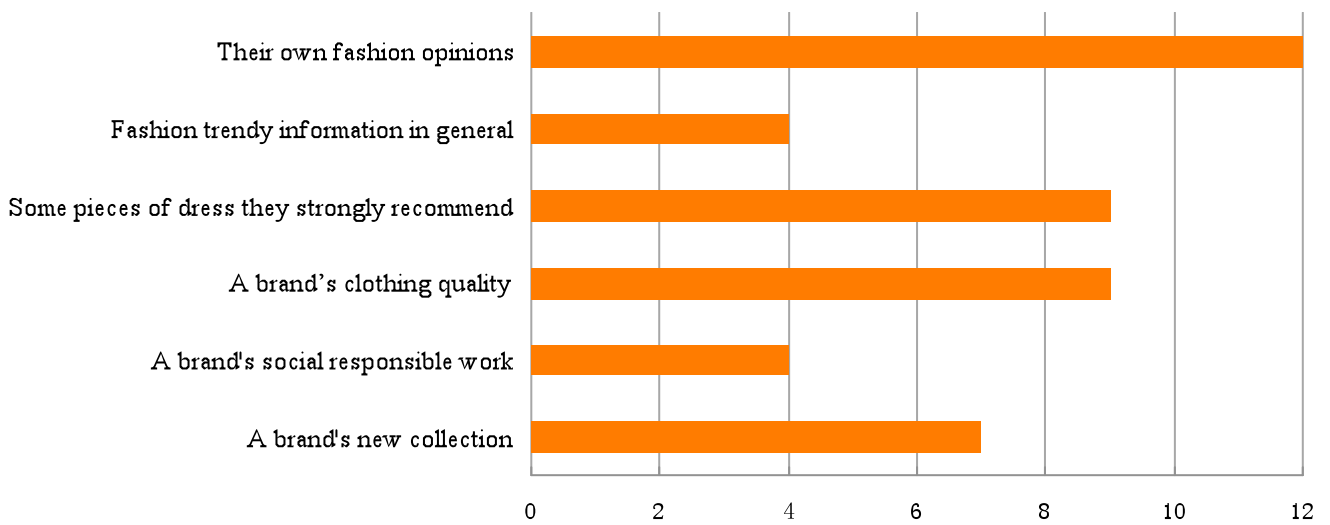


Figure 3-7 Acceptant Degree of Different Kind of Fashion Information or Advice from Friends

21. *When you are fitting or considering about a garment, a stranger who's also shopping come to tell you that he/she think it fit you well, will it influence you even more than the people you know?* Yes No

Respondents generally believe that, when they are fitting or making a final decision to purchase clothes, the suggestion from the stranger consumers will influence their decision making very much, even more than their friends or family members. From the questionnaire data, 22 respondents answered “Yes”, while only 5 respondents said “No”, and there is a girl studying textile design with strong fashion viewpoint said “it will depend on what people...if her fashion style is good, I will take her advice, otherwise not”.

4 Analyses

4.1 Decision Making Process and Involvement

4.1.1 Decision Making Process

The conventional consumer behavior acknowledged theory indicates that there are three basic psychological processes that make up one important category of consumer decision making in general, they are information processing, learning, and attitude and behavior change (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995, p.145).

And meanwhile a model of consumer decision process is provided, it encompasses the following stages: 1) need recognition; 2) search for information; 3) pre-purchase alternative evaluation; 4) purchase; 5) consumption; 6) post-purchase alternative evaluation; and 7) divestment. This model tries to describe the decision-process behavior included in a purchase situation. The whole process is that when a consumer is involved in a purchasing and consumption, firstly he will go through the pre-purchase section, which includes 1) need recognition; 2) search for information; and 3) pre-purchase alternative evaluation. In this section he is initially aware of his need recognition, which comes from a state of desire that initiates a decision process that in turn occurs through the interaction of individual differences such as values and needs, and environmental influences, then he search for information, by both internal search into memory and external search relying on external sources such as marketer-dominated information and others, and the last step in the pre-purchase section is pre-purchase alternative evaluation, to compare different products and brands. And then the consumer will carry out purchase, consumption, post-consumption alternative evaluation, and divestment finally (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995, p. 146-154).

The above is the general theory of consumer decision process model, but what should it be for fast fashion consumer decision process? Are there any possible differences? From the empirical finding of #2: “*Before shopping for clothes, do you have expectation about what you are going to buy*”, it can be found that about 2/3 of the consumers have expectation before they go to purchase, but the remaining 1/3 of them do not know about what they are going to buy in advance. And even for those who have expectation, there is big possibility to buy some other clothes that they do not look forward to until they see them. Actually, much apparel that is considered fashion, especially the fast fashion, does not lend itself to a rational consideration as a response to a problem, because most fashion is not a necessity in our lives (Solomon & Rabolt 2009, p. 381). For example, when a girl find herself need a pair of pants, she might have considered alternatives first internally and then externally, she may compare several different colors and brands, but if a T-shirt appears so exciting and “perfect” and perhaps time is limited, there may be no search for any alternatives, and she

decides to buy the T-shirt immediately without thinking too much. Comparing the girl in this case with the consumer in the model of consumer decision process, it can be found that the pre-purchase behaviors are totally different. So the pre-purchase section in the model of conventional consumer decision process, including steps of need recognition, search for information, and pre-purchase alternative evaluation, is not always applicable to the fast fashion consumer behavior. To be specific, the fast fashion consumer decision process varies, and happens in following 3 patterns:

- (1) Purchasing in accordance with certain expectation.
- (2) Purchasing some unexpected item during the shopping with certain expectation.
- (3) Go shopping without any expectation.

And essentially there only exists two different processes composing the above three fast fashion consumer decision process patterns (See figure 4-1). One is in accordance with the pre-purchase section in the conventional model of consumer decision process, and hence it takes turns in need recognition, search, and pre-purchase alternative evaluation before purchase. The other process does not go through the steps, the purchase happens only because some particular items are discovered.

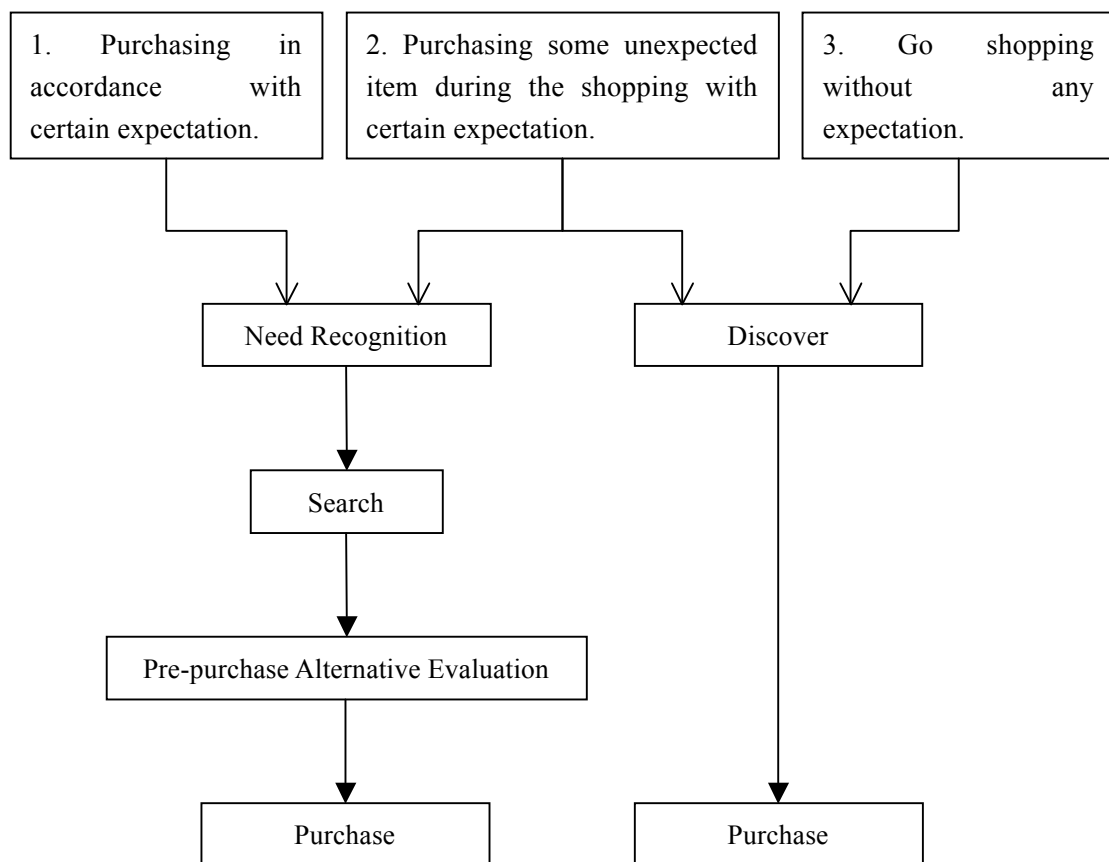


Figure 4-1 Compositions of the Three Fast Fashion Consumer Decision Process Patterns

Some special categories of buying behavior in the conventional consumer behavior theory cover the pre-purchase behaviors that do not neatly fit into the problem-solving continuum, including relevant part of fast fashion consumer behavior. The special category that fits the third pattern and part of the second pattern above is Impulse Purchase - an unplanned spur-of-the-moment action triggered by product display or point-of-sale promotion (Piron 1991, p. 512). The following is the characteristics that Dennis W. Rook and Stephen J. Hoch described of Impulse Purchasing (Rook & Hoch 1985, p. 23-27), and followed by corresponding behaviors of the unexpected decision process in fast fashion:

- A sudden and spontaneous desire to act accompanied by urgency
- A state of psychological disequilibrium in which a person can feel temporarily out of control
- The onset of conflict and struggle that is resolved by an immediate action
- Minimal objective evaluation – emotional considerations are dominant
- A lack of regard for consequences

Since fast fashion is fast up-dated, new products come into stores and are replaced by next collection quickly, so some consumers may not have chance to see the product twice, every time when they visit the store, they are attracted by new cloths. As a result, they do not have time and condition to form any very clear expect about the fast fashion products. It may lead two effects on consumers: one is subconscious awareness of some cloths will probably not be in the store next time, so to avoid any regret, they may tend to buy it immediately; the other one is the fresh new fashion can always stimulate consumers', especially female consumers' nerves and arouse their shopping desires, without appropriate objective evaluation, buying happens due to the emotional motive. In this condition, the behavior of consume can be sudden and accompanied by urgency. Another fact is the fast fashion is so cheap that the consumers consider not much about the risk of the purchase, the regardless for consequence also leads to impulse purchase.

To briefly conclude, the fast fashion consumer decision process is partly different from the traditional model of decision making process, which means part of it is applicable of the model, and part of it does not follow the regular rule.

4.1.2 Degree of Involvement

Involvement is the level of perceived personal importance and/ or interest evoked by a stimulus (or stimuli) within a specific situation (Antil 1984, p. 204). Degree of involvement can reflect the motivation in the personal relevance of a product in a particular context. Usually when a consumer considers a purchase behavior has big personal significance in his life, the degree of involvement will be high. Besides that it can also be found that the degree of involvement is high in the following context:

- 1) When there is lack of the information of a product for the consumers.
Involvement can be viewed as the motivation to process information (Mitchell 1979, p. 191-196). When the consumers regard the relevant knowledge of a product exist considerably and do not try hard to find more intentionally, or when the information is everywhere and easy to get, then the involvement will be very low. Otherwise if the information is in lack, or the consumers are unassured about if their knowledge is enough, then the involvement will be high.
- 2) There will be high risk of a purchasing decision.
Products or brands also become involving if there is some perceived risk in purchase and use, the greater the perceived risk, the greater the likelihood of high involvement (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995, p. 162).
- 3) When the product has a social importance.
A product's social importance means the product is supposed to have certain social meaning. For many products, their social meanings usually vary with different situation, such as a bottle of wine can have a low social importance when it is served in the consumer's own dinner, but when it is chosen as a gift for his boss, then it will have a very high social importance.

Based on the above analysis and the questionnaires, the degree of involvement for the consumer behavior in fast fashion can be found out:

The main symbol for high degree of involvement is the product has personal significance. Is fast fashion has big personal significance for its consumers? From the questionnaires, 75% respondents in total hold negative-tendency attitude toward the importance of fast fashion to themselves, and most respondents regard it less important but have a certain influence to self-image. According to this, it can be found that the consumers think fast fashion can bring some good effects to their self-image, and they may also be attracted by fast fashion, but generally fast fashion product has not very significant meaning to consumers.

Now to see if the previously listed situations happen often to fast fashion.

Firstly, from the 70% respondents' positive answers for question #4 in the questionnaire, it can be seen that most fast fashion consumers think they have knowledge about fast fashion product before shopping, such as what's the latest fashion trend and what's in and out in fashion, and today there are many ways for them to acquire the relative information, usually from friends, magazines, newspapers, and internet. So the consumers do not lack the information. And even most of the consumers (86% of the respondents, see empirical finding of #4.3) can learn the information during the time they are shopping in the stores. Actually the consumers are quite familiar with those fast fashion brands and their fashion

style, so the amount of product information search is small.

Secondly, there is no high risk for consumers to make the purchasing decision, because cheap is a key word for fast fashion, so there is rarely economical risk, and then the garments of fast fashion follow the main trend, which means it will never depart far from the common taste, therefore most of time the consumers do not need to worry about if the clothes from H&M may embarrass them. And in addition, at least in Sweden, most of the fast fashion stores accept the consumers' goods return within one or two weeks, in this case, the consumers are aware that the immediate purchase can still be reconsidered later, so the risk of purchasing decision is reduced more.

Thirdly, in most situations, fast fashion does not have social importance, since it would not be used as social tool, or either it is not common to dress fast fashion on the occasion that social class is needed to be shown, which can also be concluded from the result of question #9, most people buy fast fashion for basic daily needs.

To sum up, fast fashion has not significant meaning to consumers' self-image, the information for consumers are not in lack, the risk to purchase is not high, and it also has not social importance, therefore fast fashion can be regarded to belong to the low degree of involvement.

4.1.3 Alternative Evaluation

In this part, the alternative evaluation between fast fashion brands and other garments brands is discussed, as well as on the consumers' alternative evaluation among different fast fashion brands.

Consumers evaluate alternatives during both pre-purchase stage and purchase stage, but in term of fast fashion consumer behavior, as concluded in chapter 4.1.1, the impulse purchase happens more than other product categories, so the pre-purchase stage does not play very important role for fast fashion, in another word, usually after the pre-purchase alternative evaluation, it often is possible for consumers to articulate their purchase intentions, and these fall into three outcomes: fully planned purchase – both product and brand are chosen in advance; partially planned purchase – there is an intention to buy a given product or brand, but the final choice is deferred until shopping is completed; and unplanned purchase – both the product and brand are chosen at point of sale. Accordingly, the outcome of fast fashion pre-purchase alternative evaluation should be partially planned or even more unplanned purchase. For the above reason, in this chapter, we do not separately study and analyze pre-purchase alternative evaluation and decision-making evaluation in purchase stage. We discuss alternative evaluation as a whole topic in fast fashion consumer behavior.

Evaluative criteria are nothing more than the particular dimensions or attributes that are

used in judging the choice alternatives (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995, 208). Consumer may consider different factors when purchasing different products, for example, in buying a car, safety and reliability come to their evaluation first, and then the price and gas mileage are also in their evaluative criteria; in purchasing a computer, brand name and warranty as well as price can be the most important evaluative criteria. Normally for most products, price is always a factor to consider.

So in purchasing garments, what makes the consumers to choose fast fashion brands instead of other garments brands?

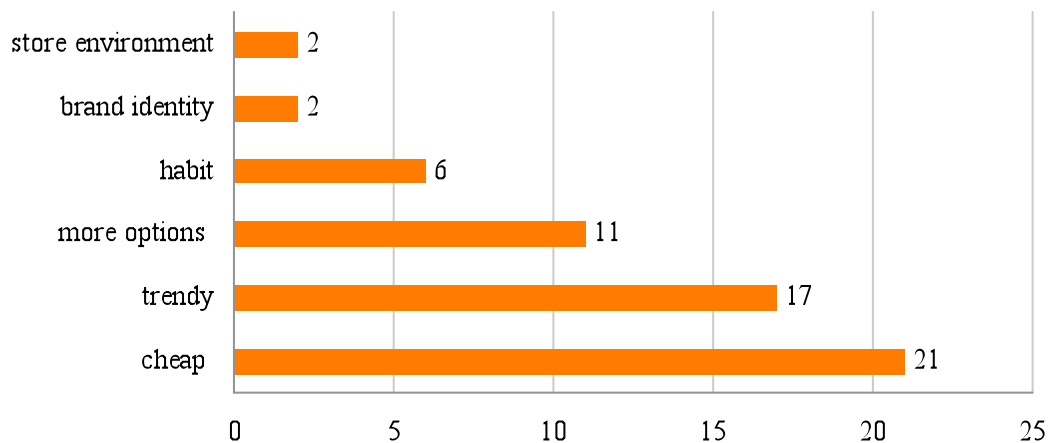


Figure 4-2 The Reasons for the Consumers to Choose Fast Fashion Brands

Based on the empirical finding of #2, we got figure 4-2, the most influential factor that makes consumers to choose fast fashion brands instead of other fashion brands is “cheap”. The low price is a very significant feature that drives the consumers to choose going into a fast fashion store or decide to shop fast fashion clothes in the store. Consumers will compare the price of fast fashion brands and normal fashion brands in the pre-purchase stage, since the fast fashion brands, like H&M or Zara, they adapt latest fashion trend information from many sources, such as TV, Internet, film content; trend spotter who focused on venues such as university campuses and discotheques; and even Zara’s young, fashion-conscious staff (Ghemawat & Nueno 2006). Meanwhile, industry publications like fashion shows of some high street fashion brands’ new season collection are also very important sources for the fast fashion design team. Therefore, the fast fashion brands may have items that can be found as very similar ones in other expensive fashion brands. For an extreme example, two very similar dresses (see picture below) that have similar colors, pattern and style, the one in H&M costs only 199 kronor, while the similar one in Alexander McQueen costs 1325 Euros, and in fact, examples like this can be found everywhere. So in this case, fast fashion has big advantage when consumers evaluate price as an important criterion.

199kr
H&M



1325 Euros
Alexander McQueen



Fashion is a special product category that when being evaluated, people will not think much about how the quality is or how long it can last, instead, whether trendy is an more concerned criterion. Most girls do not like to pay for an out-of-season dress if they can find a trendy one at the same price easily.

Above are the criteria that people used to evaluate alternatives between fast fashion and normal fashion. Following the criteria that are used in alternative evaluation among just fast fashion brands will be concerned.

First of all to figure out if the price is still a very important factor that affect people make decision among those several fast fashion brands. From the result of question #14, when the consumers are asked to describe the difference between H&M and Ginatricot with some key words, the word “cheaper” appears both in H&M and Ginatricot, since nearly half consumers think one brand is cheaper than the other, while the other half held the opposite point of view, it means that the consumers do not have very clear idea about the two brands’ price difference. And as a matter of fact, through investigating and comparing, the price of these two brands is quite similar indeed. Not only these two brands, but also other fast fashion brands such as Zara and Gap, they all have very close price position, their price strategies are the same – “cheap”. Thus, it approves that “consumers may rate price as a very important attribute, but if all brands cost the same amount, the impact of price essentially drops out” (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995, p. 211) can be applied in the case of evaluating among fast fashion brands.

Then for the fast fashion consuming as unplanned purchase, the impact of situational influence should probably means a lot to those impulsive consumers according to general consumer behavior theory. Situation influence here can be viewed as the influence arising from factors that are particular to a specific time and place that are independent of consumer and object characteristics (Belk 1974, p. 156-163). Here we focus on purchase situation, specifically the retail environment, which is often referred to as store

atmospherics. There are some fundamental elements that compose the fast fashion stores' environment, including layout and in-store location, point-of-purchase (POP) materials, and crowding, and the rest that mentioned in general theory for conventional retail stores such as colors, sales people, and music seems not influence the customer in a significant level, for instance, sales people in fast fashion stores hardly effect on consumers' decision making.

From the empirical finding of #3, store environment is not the reason that makes consumers to choose fast fashion brands, and it can be understood in two ways: one possibility is that the consumers do not care fashion store environment, no matter for fast fashion stores or any clothes stores; the other way to understand it is that the fast fashion stores do not have enough advantage in this term to attract consumers. The first possibility is not persuasive, because store environment as a marketing tool to show brand image build and communicate with consumers is very important for almost every fashion brands and stores, especially for the luxury fashion brands, the store environment can definitely add value to the brand as well as the products. So it should be understood in the way that the fast fashion stores do not attract their consumers by the store environment. From the interviews and question #11 in the questionnaire, some consumers feel stressful due to the crowd in fast fashion stores, and since fast fashion brands always have a large number of products, as the consumers are glad to have more options, the same time they can also feel exhausted in selection process. Therefore, there is no advantage for fast fashion while consumers evaluating and comparing with other fashion stores.

In the other hand, from the empirical finding of #8, most consumers still think the store atmosphere is important for a fast fashion store, and more than half consumers think it really influence their purchase decision. From this point of view, the fast fashion stores should pay more attention to their store environment and atmosphere. This subject will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. And not only because of consumers' awareness of their own purchasing mood, but also the display, especially the point-of-purchase materials, can serve as very powerful stimuli that increases sales (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995, p. 802). It can also be proved from the empirical finding #4.3: most consumers learn fashion information during their shopping in stores. So to emphasis the POP materials can lead consumers to learn the fashion trend that the brands want, and as a not expensive way to communicate brand image to consumers, marketers can capture the consumers' attention by displays and signs, thereby stimulate purchasing.

Based on all above, some conclusions can be arrived. In the evaluation of alternatives between fast fashion brands and other fashion brands or stores, consumers regard price as a very important criterion, thereby fast fashion gaining more scores when consumers making decision, and especially when there is no relation between price and whether trendy, since trendiness is also a key criterion in this case. Store environment is also regarded as an important criterion by the fashion consumers, and also has every reason to be paid more

attention at by the fast fashion brands, because so far for H&M and Ginatricot there is still some thing left to prove in this term, in this case, Zara have done better. Then in the evaluation of alternatives internally among fast fashion brands, price is no longer an essential criterion due to the close price strategy of most fast fashion brands. Besides the most significant evaluation criteria which prove that the brand preference among fast fashion is not visible, from the empirical finding #6 and #14, we can also find that the consumers do not distinguish the fast fashion brands, at least between the two fast fashion brands in Boras very well, and the consumers actually have only awareness of the difference of products categories, like for whole family or for only women. So brand preference is very weak in fast fashion consumers' mind, and loyal consumers are even much less.

4.2 Individual Differences

Although many common features can be found in the fast fashion consumer behavior, still there are a lot of differences vary from individuals to individuals. According to general consumer behavior theory, individual differ in five fundamental ways: consumer resources, knowledge, attitudes, self-concept, and lifestyle.

4.2.1 Consumer Resources

Key resources of consumers are analyzed here in terms of economic and time.

Firstly income is included in nearly every marketing research survey as one of the key variables in explaining consumer behavior. From our questionnaire, it can be seen (figure 4.3)

Figure 4-3 Fast Fashion Shopping Frequency and Income

Group type		Twice /week	Once /week	Twice /month	Once /month
Income group	Less than 3,000 kr				
	6,000-16,000 kr				
	20,000-50,000 kr				

that the incomes of fast fashion consumers vary from the lowest nearly 0 to the highest about 50,000 kronor per month, which cover a considerable income range. In general consumer behavior theory, relationship between income and spending are revealed most readily. In a survey of average annual income and expenditures of U.S. consumer units, from the examining expenditures by quintiles of income, the top 20 percent spend more than five times as much as the lowest quintile for apparel (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995, p. 302-303). But in the case of fast fashion, it is not so obvious. The data from the questionnaire show that when the consumers' incomes below 16,000 kronor, shopping frequencies cover all the options, so the income below this level does not directly influence

the shopping frequency. But for the consumers whose incomes are more than 20,000 kronor, the shopping frequencies contrarily decrease to twice or once a month, instead of increase. Since fast fashion has low price characteristic, consumers go shopping there more frequently without depending on their incomes. For those who have higher incomes, their shopping frequencies get decrease due to two factors: one is that for people with higher income, they probably have less free time, which will be discussed later in time resource part, and the other factor is that the people with good economic resource may allocate more spend on more expensive brands. Although the frequencies differ out of the usual way, the expenditures proportions vary regularly. From the respondents of questionnaires, it can be found that the general expenditures on fashion account for 5% to 10% of the income no matter how much the consumers earn.

The market for the different income-level consumers can be divided into two types: up-market and down-market. Fast fashion intends to belong to down-market. For this market, back-to-the-basic marketing is the key to reach down-market consumers. As one of our interviewees said, “I will not choose Ginatricot to buy a party dress”. At the same time, fast fashion brands like H&M and Ginatricot have a very clear marketing strategy to focus on down-market. But even stores that appeal to the down market need to be attractive and stylish, especially for a fashion brand. Another advantage for doing this is that, treating the down market with respect and good service also attracts some of the up market and much of the mass market (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995, p. 307). ‘The secret to Zara’s appeal is that, although shopping there is cheap, it doesn’t feel cheap. The stores are large, swish and centrally located. The clothes are given room to breathe’ (Tungate 2008, p. 63).



Zara’s image store in Barcelona

Time is another budget that differs from every individual. Nowadays many consumers value leisure time as highly as they value money because of their increasing lack of time. Although high incomes might allow some people to buy more of everything, they cannot conceivably do more of everything. It means that money together with the leisure time

decides consumers shopping frequencies and expenditures.

Figure 4-4 Fast Fashion Shopping Frequency and Occupation					
Group type		Twice /week	Once /week	Twice /month	Once /month
Occupation group (leisure time)	Students				
	Students with extra work				
	Nurses & teachers				
	Other full time jobs				

Since consumer time budgets traditionally were naively regarded as having two components: work and leisure, to distinguish their leisure time for our research, we group the responds by their occupation. From figure 4.4, it shows that the students especially those with extra work shop apparently more frequently than other full-time-job groups. A main cause of this is because the students have more leisure time to spend, and the students with part-time job have extra money to support their shopping frequencies.

Where the time resource is concerned, one big characteristic of fast fashion clothes should not be ignored, that is they are time-saving goods. For the post-purchase part, many consumers think fast fashion cloths are ready-to-wear. Sometimes this is also regarded as important when people do not have much time and energy to coordinate their cloths.

4.2.2 Knowledge

Knowledge consists of the information stored within memory. The subset of total information relevant to consumers functioning in the marketplace is called consumer knowledge (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995, p. 337), which will greatly affect individual's purchasing pattern.

One of the key knowledge discussed here is the product knowledge. It is a conglomerate of many different types of information, including consumers' awareness of the product category and brands within the product category, beliefs about the product category in general and specific brands, and product attributes or features (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995, p. 338). Although, as we find before, that the consumers do not have strong brand preference among fast fashion brands, but from the questionnaires it can also be found that they actually have enough knowledge about what they can get in fast fashion stores and even in different fast fashion brands. The consumers know that the common features of fast fashion product are cheap and trendy (see empirical finding of #3), and they are clear that from H&M they can get clothes for the whole family, all sizes, meanwhile from Ginatricot they can only find products for younger girls, and most of them believe that quality is not very good.

Purchase Knowledge encompasses the various pieces of information consumers possess

that are germane to acquiring products (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995, p. 345). One basic dimension of purchase knowledge is to concern the decisions of when the purchase should occur. There is a theory in conventional consumer behavior theory: Consumers who know that a product is traditionally placed on sale during certain times of the year may delay purchasing until such times (Wilkie & Pessemier 1973, p. 428-441). But for fast fashion industry, it is a special case. From empirical finding #7, we can find that most of the fast fashion consumers do not wait for sale to buy a garment. Due to the fashion especially fast fashion products up date quickly with seasons and collections, and a key word of fast fashion is trendy, therefore it is not reasonable for consumers to make the delayed purchase choice. So the when-to-buy knowledge does not play a very important role in fast fashion purchase; in another word, the theory does not apply to fast fashion consumer behavior.

4.2.3 Attitudes

Attitude can be defined as simply and overall evaluation, and it usually play a major role in shaping consumer behavior.

As represented in Figure 4-5, in a contemporary view, attitude is formed in two fundamental ways: the cognitive component – beliefs, and the affective component – feelings. And these two determinants contribute in different manner towards different attitude object. And then, a person’s behavioral intention will depend on her or his attitudes. Consequently, consumers’ intentions to perform some behavior should increase as their attitudes become more favorable (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995, p. 364-366).

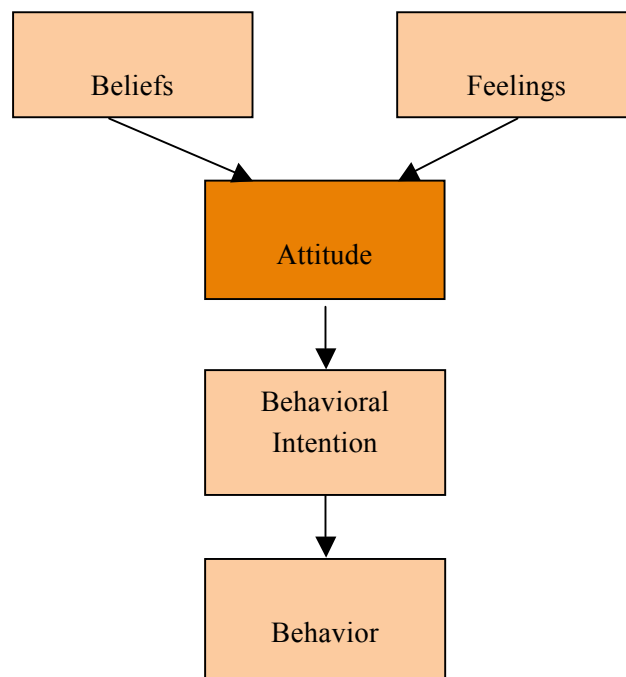


Figure 4-5 The Relationship among Beliefs, Feeling, Attitude, Behavioral Intention, and Behavior

Source: Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995, p. 365.

Attitude is useful for marketers in many ways, such as using campaign to have a positive impact on attitudes, even without influencing sales, and using attitude to segment markets and choose target segments. Because the attitude will help the consumers to shape their final purchase behavior. In our case, it can be found that the consumers already have some attitudes, or beliefs, towards the two different involved fast fashion brands, H&M and Ginatricot. From the empirical finding of #14, consumers believe that H&M has better quality than Ginatricot, and more international, while Ginatricot is believed to be more suitable for younger girls with smaller sizes, and up dates every two weeks, which the consumers learn from its campaigns.

Consumers are also forming their attitude during their consuming in after-purchase stage. The empirical finding of #12 shows that most fast fashion consumers are generally satisfied with the products they purchased in the past half year, but in depth they still have some other feedbacks that can reflect their feelings on the specific brands or products, which will impact their attitudes and consequently influence the next purchase behavior. Some consumers found the fast fashion products lost luster very quickly, and some found they were not long-lasting goods due to the quality is not that good, or some feel H&M have better quality than Ginatricot. All of these feelings accumulate over a period and forms consumers' like and dislike attitude.

Lastly, attitudes can vary along a dimension of confidence. Confidence represents a person's belief that her or his attitude is correct (Berger 1992, p. 103-124). Thereby consumers' attitudes can change if the confidence degree are low and get influenced by other factors even the attitudes are already formed once. Chapter 4.3 will however discuss about group influences that can change consumers' attitudes in a way.

4.2.4 Self-Concept

Self-concept refers to the beliefs a person holds about his or her attributes and how he or she evaluates these qualities. And products such as car, furniture and jewelry help determine the perceived self, and in some way 'we are what we have' (Belk 1988, p. 139-168). Especially culture symbols such as fashion and the act of appearance management can function to express one's self-esteem. That is why clothing is a very important method of announcement of one's identity (Solomon & Rabolt 2009, p. 157-164).

In this context, for fashion marketers it is very important to understand target consumers' self-concept, because fashion can be the most external and direct way to show other one's self-image. When purchasing the fashion products, a consumer will consider 'if they suit my real self or if they can meet my ideal self.' So it will be much easier to attract the target group if a brand does well to stress the match between consumers' self-image and brand

image.

Thus, only when the three images: the brand's target consumers' self-image, the brand image that the brand is building, and the brand image that consumers regard, matched each other, the brand can get the maximum benefit from individuals' self-concept term.

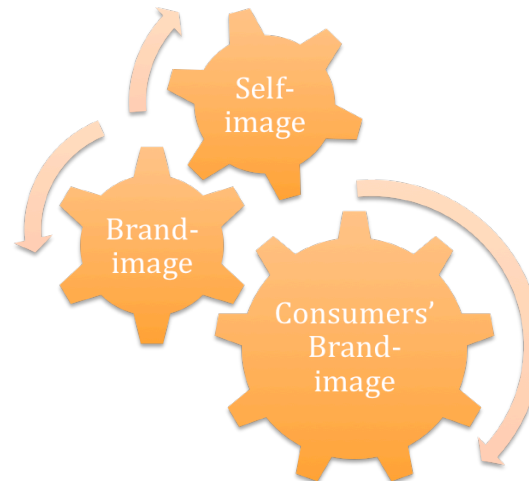


Figure 4-6 Three “Images” Work Together

From the empirical finding of #15, those fast fashion consumers whose styles are “casual” and “trendy”, shopping fast fashion seems more frequently, and those whose fashion style is more “sport” or “elegant”, they shop fast fashion less than the others. Even though the contrast is not obvious, probably due to fast fashion tends to be used more often for basic wear than for showing self-image, which can also be found from the result of question #5, 75% respondents in total hold negative-tendency attitudes toward the significance of fast fashion to their self-images.

As for the brand image that the brand is building, and the brand image that consumers regard, it should be discussed according to different brands. Because though the consumers maybe similar for all fast fashion brands, each brands still wants to build its own characteristics that distinguish itself from others, also the consumers hold different image towards different brands. For example Ginatricot’s case, so far Ginatricot has already built some clear brand images in some ways. In term of brand’s collections’ styles, they are generally casual style, and their consumers’ fashion styles are also mostly casual. And also Ginatricot has delivered well to their consumers what their brand images are, as the Figure 4-7 shows what kind of images Ginatricot wants to transmit and what image the consumers receive and hold.

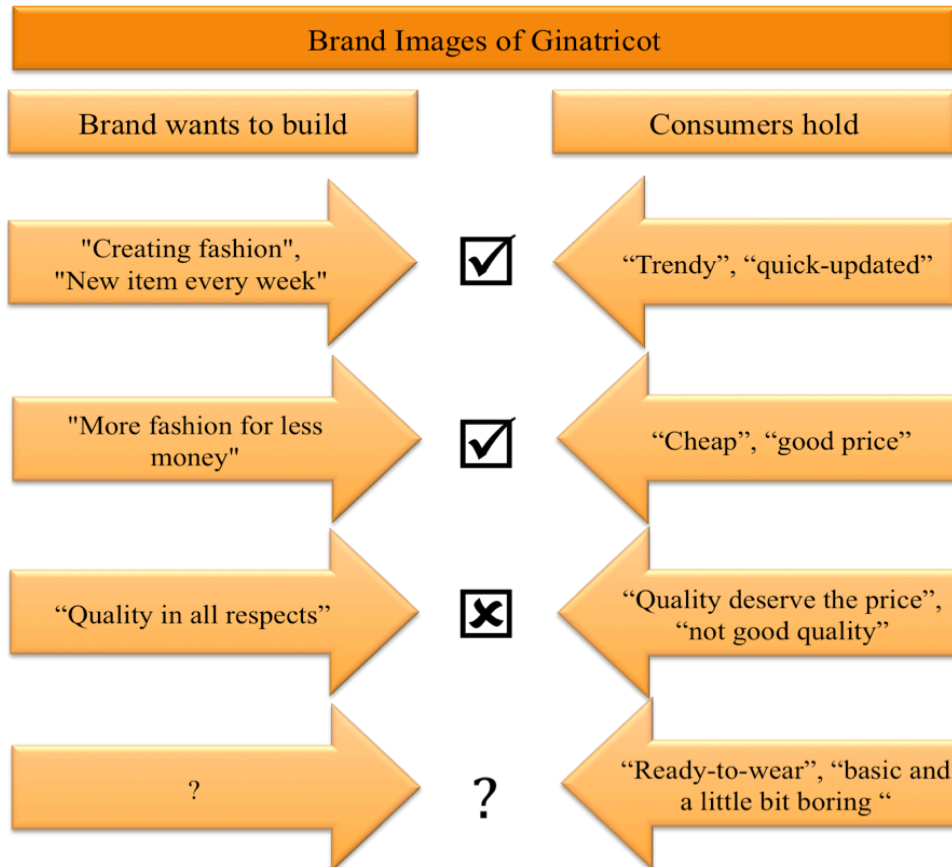


Figure 4-7 Brand-image Matches between Brand and Consumers of Ginatricot
 Source: Brand images listed in the left column are from the website of Ginatricot

4.2.5 Lifestyle

Lifestyle is the patterns in which people live and spend time and money. It reflects a person's activities, interests, and opinions (AIOs) (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995, p. 449). Today lifestyle becomes a popular concept, and the marketers use it very commonly to build relationship of their products with the target consumers' daily life.

In traditional consumers theory, lifestyle along with personality and values compose one dimension of individual difference, but for our case, lifestyle is much more close to fast fashion consumers, and it is more contemporary than personality and more comprehensive and values (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995, p. 448). Therefore, we only focus on lifestyle in this case.

Consumers often choose products, services, and activities over others because they are associated with a certain lifestyle. So the lifestyle influence a consumer's purchasing behavior. For example, one of the respondents Helen is a teacher, her interests are cloths and home styling, and she like to live in a comfortable way, like comfortable T-shirt and comfortable cushion, so she intends to buy casual and comfortable cloths, and as a school teacher, though she does not need to wear very formal cloths in work day, she still needs

some simple cloths that will not get dirty easily and not to be too complicated and expensive. During the day of interview, she bought a T-shirt and said “I maybe wear it for Monday’s work.” The lifestyle makes Helen to be a regular consumer. Another interviewee, she used to have to wear uniform during work time, so previously she did not go to purchase casual cloths very often, but now her lifestyle changed due to the change of her job, she does not need to wear formally during weekdays, so she shops in Ginatricot more often than before.

Whether people need to wear formal clothes is also one part of their lifestyle, and it probably influences their fashion purchase behaviors. The following table is from the empirical finding #16, from which we can see the relationship.

Table 4-1 Relationship between Work-time Dress Style and Fast Fashion Shopping Frequency					
<i>Need to wear formally during work time?</i>	Fast fashion shopping frequency:				
	Twice /week	Once /week	Twice /month	Once /month	Total
Yes	6%	0%	38%	56%	100% (16)
No	8%	33%	33%	25%	100% (12)

The table 4-1 reveals validation for hypothesis of the existing relationship between work-time dress style and fast fashion shopping frequency. “Formal clothes” here include uniform, business suit and so on. As shown above, those who need to wear formal clothes go shopping fast fashion obviously less frequently than those who do not need.

4.3 Group Influences

4.3.1 Reference Group Influence

Aware it or not, other people always influence us, whether classmates, co-workers, family, friends, celebrities, or just casual acquaintances, can influence our purchase decisions in many ways. In that case, those people are used as a reference group. A reference group is ‘an actual or imaginary individual or group conceived of having significant relevance upon an individual’s evaluations, aspirations, or behavior’ (Solomon & Rabolt 2009, p. 422).

As mentioned in Chapter 4.2.4, since fashion is an important method to show one’s self-concept, the consuming motivation for self-identity or social acceptance tends to be stronger than other product categories. So people may be influenced more by reference groups in fashion consuming behavior because their desire to “fit-in” certain groups. That is one of the reasons of why there are more fashion blogs, websites, and magazines about

fashion, rather than electric equipments or food.

To find out what kinds of group influence are working on fast fashion consumers, and how they work directly or indirectly, we begin with the question: What are fast fashion consumers' sources to get trend and fashion information? The empirical finding of #4 tells the answer that most reference sources is people around them, then also media sources like magazines, newspapers, internet, shop windows and television (see figure 4-8). Firstly, the way to get product information from people around is very different from the rest ways, because the information is actually conveyed by individuals on an informal basis, which is very often used in our every day experience, also called "word-of-Mouth communication (WOM), belonging to informal group, without structures and based on people's association. We will specially focus on WOM influence in the next chapter. Besides that, there are many other formal means of communication, such as magazines, newspapers and television, and reference groups appearing in these communication means are mostly formal groups. Though small, informal groups exert a more powerful influence on individual consumers, the large, formal reference groups tend to be more easily to handel for the marketers to get successful effect, because they are mostly well-organised, accissible, and product-specific (Solomon & Rabolt 2009, p. 424).

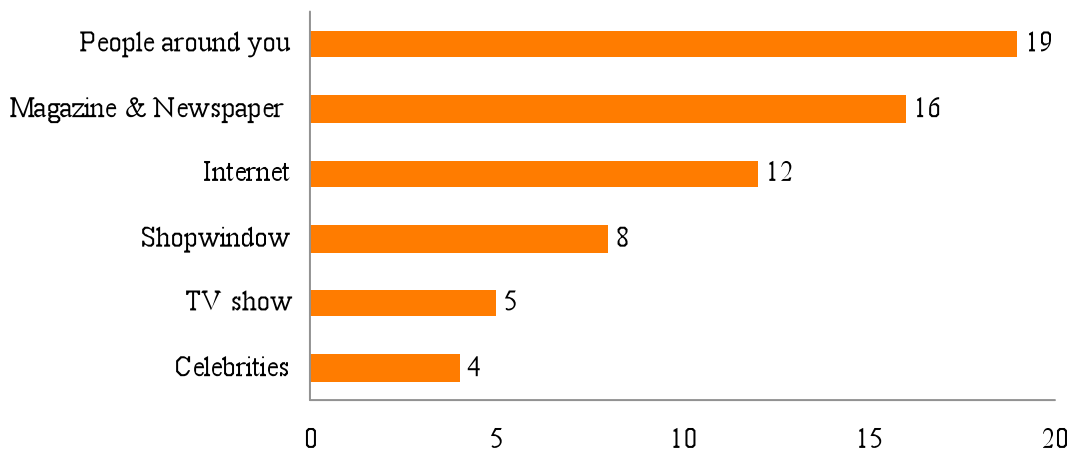
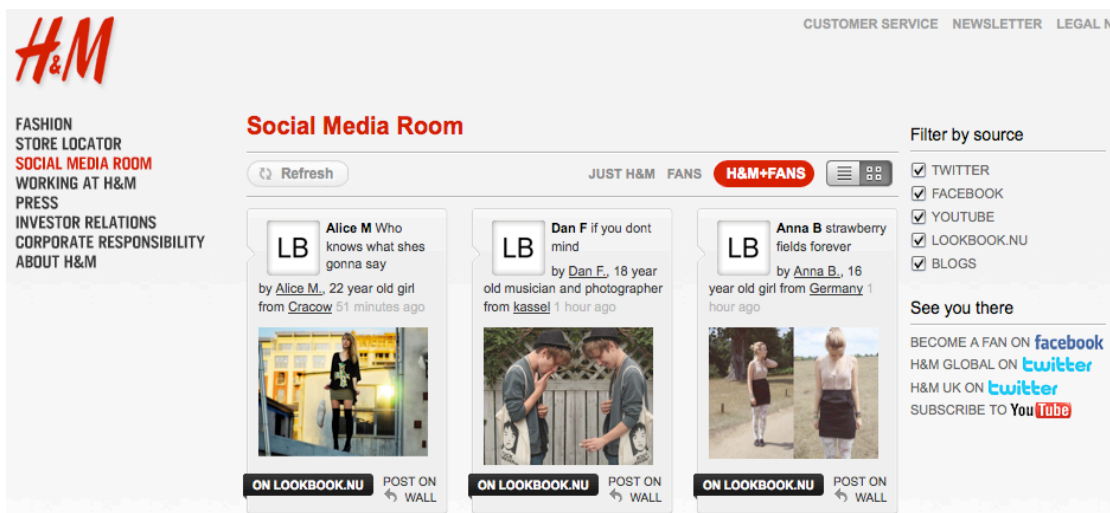


Figure 4-8 Consumers' Sources to Get Trend and Fashion Information

Internet becomes one of the popular ways where people can get and even exchange information. It offers a platform for virtual communities of consumption, which are collections of people whose online interactions are based on shared enthusiasm for and knowledge of a specific consumption activity (Solomon & Rabolt 2009, p. 424). There are many forms of virtual communities of consumption available for fast fashion, such as blogs, web sites, brand communities, and consumers' review, in addition, some cross the platforms and hard to define. For example, in H&M official website's homepage, consumers can find an item "Social Media Room", which collects up-dated news about H&M as well as its fans' newly comments or styles from Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, blogs and a website Lookbook.nu. Some of them are officially published by H&M in

Facebook or Twitter, some are just created by the real people all over the world, as long as they want to share anything about the brand or the products. This form of virtual community of consumption is not formal neither informal, or is both, because the group is partly organized and the members of it are not stable. Here the website Lookbook.nu is ‘the internet's largest source of fashion inspiration from real people around the world’ according to its description, people upload their daily fashion styles at anytime tagged with the brand’s name of each item they wear, others can comment on them or just click “hype” to add one score to them, very visually, without too much words, efficiently, especially fit in the concept of fast fashion. Another website similar is ilikemystyle.net. The fashion fans can search others’ style inspiration by key words of colors, categories, materials, patterns, locations or brands. To make sure the Lookbook.nu members are reliable and fashion-forward people, the registration of a membership is by invitation only, otherwise personal blog/site, note and picture are in need. Magazines and newspapers can up date every week or every day, but these kinds of virtual communities’ information can up date every minute, besides their readership are increasing dramatically. So it is a kind of reference group that influence widely and significantly on individuals, and even more in the future, due to its fast pace of refresh and up to the trend, it should be regarded as one of the best group for fast fashion consumers for reference. In another hand, groups like these should also get attention of the fast fashion brands’ marketers, though it is not easy to take advantage of them.



H&M “Social Media Room”

Source: http://www.hm.com/gb/socialmediaroom__socialMediaRoom.nhtml

seeing spots.

BY [CAYLEE M.](#), 23 YEAR OLD GIRL FROM [INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA](#)

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Lookbook.nu- source of fashion inspiration from real people around the world

Source: <http://lookbook.nu/>

4.3.2 Word-of-Mouth Influence and Opinion Leadership

As mentioned in previous chapter, the questionnaire result shows that the most reference source for fast fashion is people around. Any information transmitted by individuals to individuals that is product related is engaged in word-of-mouth communication (WOM). WOM sometimes plays a decisive role in consumers' purchasing decision making, studies in both industrial and consumer purchase settings underscore the idea that while information from impersonal sources is important for creating brand awareness, personal sources and word of mouth are relied on in the later stages of evaluation and adoption (Martilla 1971, p. 173-178).

Through the exchange of ideas, people get influenced, and the more positive information a consumer gets about a product from peers, the more likely he or she will adopt the product (Arndt 1967, p. 291-295). From empirical finding of #19, it shows that about 3/4 of the respondents in total like or sometimes like to talk about fashion with their friends. In respect of what kind of information or advice they would like to get, as shown in figure 4-9, our investigation finds that individuals' own fashion opinions are the most popular fashion information to share, and then the second popular information or advice is recommendation of some specific pieces of dress and a brand's clothing quality, which is followed by information of a brand's new fashion collection (see empirical finding of #20). All of the

personal information is as important as quoted ‘Today, 80 percent of all buying decisions are influenced by someone’s direct recommendations’ (Stern & SJ 1988). When the information is shared by word-of-mouth, there are also two possibilities of effects on consumers, positive or negative, for instance, when a person hear many people say H&M’s quality is better than Ginatricot, he will probably accept the idea without finding out by himself, this will be a negative influence for Ginatricot.

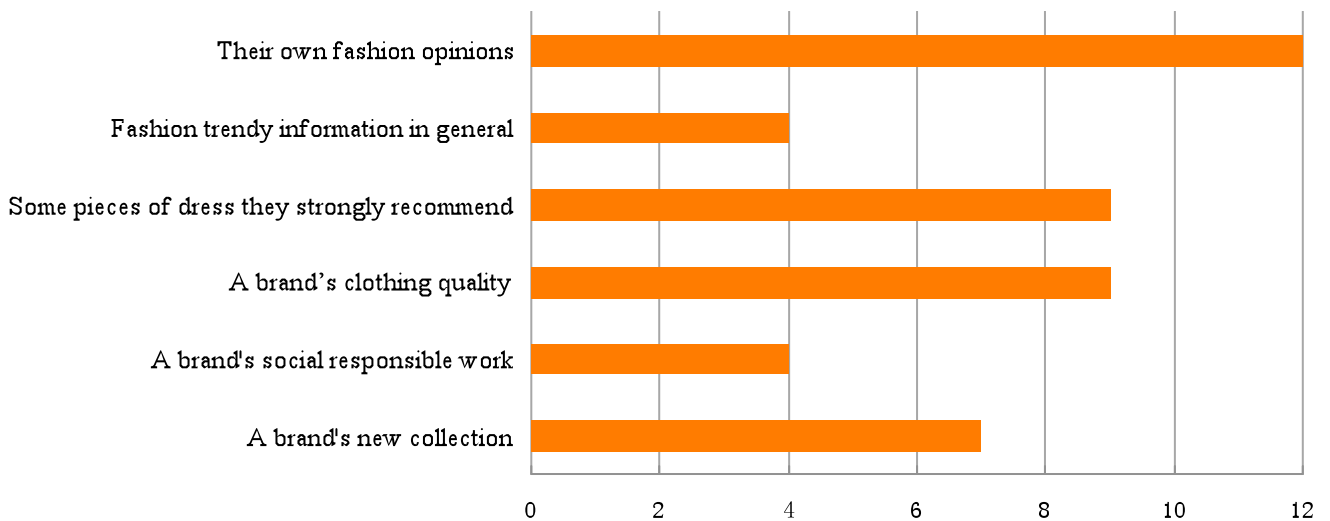


Figure 4-9 Acceptant Degree of Different Kind of Fashion Information or Advice from Friends

From empirical finding of #18 we can find that consumers often go to shop fast fashion alone, which means that they may gain more word-of-mouth information before or after shopping instead of during shopping, but it doesn’t mean that the influence will be smaller, in fact, the suggestions happening in stores can result to purchasing decisions much more directly. When the female consumers do not shop alone, then the company is usually friends or other family members rather than their boyfriends or husbands. As a matter of fact, friend is the main reference group during the shopping process, because as found from the questionnaires that the kids are the major roles when the respondents choose family members, it is obvious that their influences to the consumers are very small, even if there is any influence, almost will be negative influence, because kids do not have any interest in shopping of fast fashion or have patient to wait, neither does the boyfriends or husbands.

Still in the case of during consumers’ shopping in stores, besides the acquaintance, how do the stranger influences to be as a reference group? From the answers of question #21: *When you are fitting or considering about a garment, a stranger who’s also shopping come to tell you that he/she think it fit you well, will it influence you even more than the people you know?* It can be found that the influence of strangers during the shopping is very significant than we may estimate. Most respondents think the strangers’ positive suggestion or opinion can influence their decision a lot, even more than the acquaintance’s, in another word, the

stranger's word of mouth has a stronger likelihood of resulting a uncertain evaluation into a certain purchasing decision. Though, sometimes some consumers, who usually have very strong self-confidence about fashion, will choose to ignore the suggestion or even take it in adverse way, like one respondent who is a student of textile design said, "it will depend on what people...if her fashion style is good, I will take her advice, otherwise not". Those people whom the consumers avoid to associate with are dissociative groups, which is the exact opposite group of aspirational groups (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995, p. 717). This tell a fact that consumers do not tend to just take anyone's advice about fashion purchase, they will seek for someone who have a better knowledge about fashion, so the different degree of aspirational groups turn us attention to the next chapter named Opinion Leadership.

Opinion leaders are individuals who are knowledgeable about products and whose advice is taken seriously by others, they are frequently able to influence others' attitudes or behaviors. Fashion opinion leaders are thought of as those who buy fashion early in the fashion season. (Solomon & Rabolt 2009, p. 444-445). The opinion leader usually takes the risk to try innovative fashion items, so in fast fashion's life cycle, opinion leader tends to adopt a new fashion at a very beginning position of its life cycle, that will definitely before the general acceptance, and should be even at the beginning or before of acceleration stage.

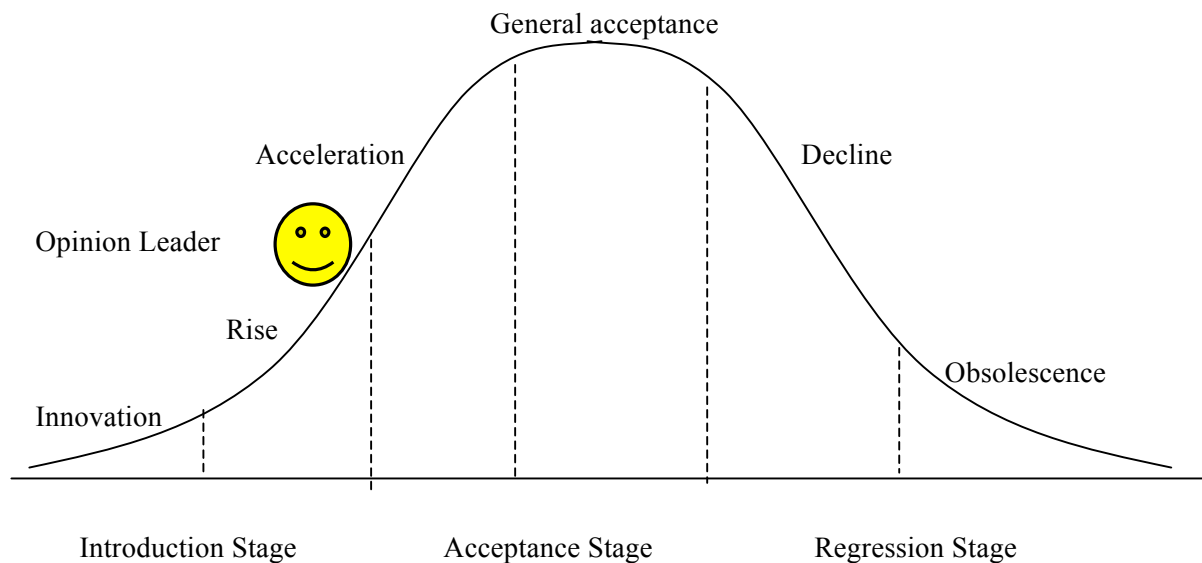


Figure 4-10 The Position of Opinion Leader in A Fashion Cycle

5 Conclusions

In this chapter, the main results we got from the above analysis, which are valuable for marketing strategies, will be further developed into marketing implication, and provide some suggestions and ideas for further research.

5.1 Marketing Implications

- Get more consumers to be involved

From the perspective of the degree of involvement, fast fashion is proved to be low degree involvement products in general situation, which means that the consumers have not strong motivation to process information, especially do not exert much cognitive effort to search and understand its ads. For marketers, low involvement may be a disadvantage, because the lower the involvement level is, the more efforts have to be put into the elaboration of product information. Therefore, successful fast fashion brands are found to make great effort to get more involvement. For example, H&M is working a lot on it. The consumers can find “H&M Magazine” for free in its stores now. It is a new way to attract the potential consumers or fans to process its products as well as its fashion style idea. In the magazine, gorgeous pictures along with articles present the fashion world’s trendiest news, which is certainly selected carefully by H&M matching its new clothes style in stores. And some of the spreads in the magazine are just advertising for H&M products, with good look on models and price marked in the corners. When being involved by those ideas and new items, meanwhile, consumers are also pleased to get lot of other fashion information and knowledge. By keeping informed with this kind of information, consumers will not only be involved more in the brand, but also in fast fashion.

Moreover actually not every individual is involved in the same degree, so it will be benefit if the marketers can find out the group of consumers who have high degree of involvement, and take advantage of this group of people. The group as we mentioned in chapter 4.3.2 is called opinion leader. For fast fashion, there are some young people are extremely involved, they spending considerable time and money for latest style, and have passion to share their experience or their own fashion opinions with others. And the very important fact is that they are accessible in many ways for the so-called “followers”, such as in Lookbook.nu the readers can click the bar “leader” to find the top high hype gainers, and increasing fans of some fashion bloggers. But the marketers can not just hire those “fashion opinion leaders” directly to put on the brand’s clothes, show around and sing the company’s praise to their follows, because as we know that the word-of-mouth recommendation is more reliable and trustworthy only when not get through formal marketing channels. So to take advantage of the opinion leaders to drag more consumers get involvement, the first step is to naturally involve the opinion leaders as such as possible. The marketers should identifying the

opinion leaders, which is also a big work, and then focus on keep touch in them, by sending subscribed emails of new arrivals, recently discount, or just fashion trend to keep the brand image in their minds. For example, Ginatricot offers special discount to those who consumed over certain amount of money, which can keep the potential opinion leaders and encouraging consumption. Though it is an effective way to involve more consumers through opinion leaders' social circle, there are still some consumers are not in touch of those reference groups, in this case, some campaigns or project are necessary, such as H&M has done a lot of social responsible projects and cooperation, for example one is "Fashion Against AIDS", to joined forces and launched a fashion collection called Fashion Against AIDS, aiming to increase awareness about HIV/AIDS among youth and 25% of sales is donated towards HIV/AIDS prevention projects. By these activities, the good brand image is built in consumers' mind, and probably further attract people to try to find more information on their own initiative.

- Improve the store situation

Concluded from Chapter 4.1.3, store environment is important for fast fashion brands, not only from the respect of the consumers feeling and awareness of their feelings, also from the perspective of brand's sales strategy, elaborate store display and environment can help the marketers to emphasis the point-of-purchase materials and communicate brand image and brand fashion ideas to consumers without extra high promoting fee. Many consumers regard that most fast fashion stores have not done good job in store environment and atmosphere build, which in some way has influence the consumers' desire to shop in the fast fashion stores, such as that mothers feel stressful about their kids when shopping, or that there are often lots of people waiting for the fitting room before you. So aware of the negative impacts of certain situational influences for a fast fashion brands should never be ignored, the fast fashion brands can try to gain consumers' feedback about their purchasing situation, though many brands now are just focus on their consumers' feedback of the products.

So to improve the store situation, it can be conducted in 3 respects: First from the respect of consumers' feeling, the brands can try to make more fitting room in order to save consumers' waiting time, set a small care room for taking care of consumers' kids during their shopping period, or to put more mirrors inside stores to save consumers energy in searching for them, and some decorating and arrangement of the layout of the store to make consumers feel more comfortable when choosing garments is also helpful, because from the individual point-of-view, even the down-market's consumers also want to be treated with respect and good service. Second from the respect of the brands' sales strategy, emphasize the point-of-purchase materials can promote the sale and also kind of solve consumers' problem of "too many choices" by leading the consumers get certain ideas of styling, in this way the brand can emphasize certain collection or item, such as H&M did to emphasize a collection of jeans this spring season and Zara did to put their latest main items on the

models in the most visible position near entrance, so that the consumers will be guided to buy those items. Third from the respect of the brands' image building, a satisfying store situation can enhance a brand's relationship marketing at retail level, and the brand's decoration style will also reflect the brand's style.

- Influence consumers' attitudes to the brand

To change one's attitude is quite hard, because once the attitude is formed, then people there will be a belief of the attitude, and become part of people's mentality and the basis of people's behavior. Though campaign can be used to work on it, still word-of-mouth will be a more effective way in really changing people's attitude, because people think the words from someone we know or someone who say them without aiming in certain business benefit are much more reliable. In this case the fast fashion brand can try to take advantage word-of-mouth communication in order to improve the consumers' attitude. For instance, consumers' attitude to Ginatricot's quality is not good, although the brand indicates its good quality in all respects, on the assumption that Ginatricot's quality is actually not that bad, then to let consumers accept it and change their attitude, Ginatricot has to do some very practical activities to let some consumers be aware of the improvement, such as show consumers their product test process and try to offer them motivation to talk about it with their friends, in fact, from the previous analysis in Chapter 4.3.2 we see that people would like to hear information about a brand's clothing quality from their friends.

5.2 Further Research

The present research findings show the characteristics of fast fashion consumers, and how the general consumer behavior theories apply to the fast fashion consumer. The main limitation in this research is the lack of geographic coverage among many others. However, recommendations for future research are provided below:

- 1) If the geographic coverage can be extended in further research, then the culture difference and ethnic influences on fast fashion consumer behavior can be considered in.
- 2) Fast fashion nowadays has been indicated by environmentalists an industry that drive third world workers into negative conditions and bring bad effect on planet environment. For the consumers, how it will change their behaviors if they regard fast fashion consumption an unsustainable consumption can be a new topic for the fast fashion consumer behavior research. Actually, there are already many discussions about this subject, but if the consumers will try to reduce their cheap fast fashion consumption or not still hang in doubt. Like some reader's comment on an article "Fast Fashion's Effect on Planet Isn't Pretty":

- I don't believe the average person will give that up, or buy less so to say. Though I agree in

buying higher quality things that will last longer in order to be more eco-friendly, I seriously doubt people will sacrifice the news fads of the age in order to be more green (Angie 2009).

- 3) Since only female consumers are supposed to be studied in the thesis, so we tend to focus on female brands and stores, and did not pay much attention to household decision making, though a little research is done about the children's in-store reaction influence to the mothers and boyfriend's/ husband's influence during purchasing, but still there are lots of contents can be further studied about the family as a decision-making unit in fast fashion consumption. As a matter of fact, stores specializing in family clothing in the clothing retail industry occupy 50 percent of industry sales, while women's clothing is 25 percent and 6 percent for men's.

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Appendix - Questionnaire



Questionnaire for Consumer Behavior in Fast Fashion

The questionnaire focuses on retail brands that are defined as fast fashion, for example H&M, Ginatricot, Zara, and Topshop.

Name _____ Age _____
Education _____ Occupation _____
Interest _____
Family status _____
Income (Monthly): Personal _____ Family _____
Where do you live? _____

1. How often do you shop in H&M, Ginatricot, Zara or Topshop?
 - a. twice a week
 - b. once a week
 - c. twice a month
 - d. once a month

2. Before shopping for clothes, do you have expectation about what you are going to buy? Yes No

3. Comparing with other fashion brands, what makes you choose fast fashion brands? (Multi-choice)
 - a. brand identity
 - b. cheap
 - c. trendy
 - d. more options
 - e. store environment
 - f. habit

- 4.1) Before shopping, do you have knowledge about the latest fashion trends and what's in/out in fashion?
 Yes No
- 2) Where do you get information about trend and fashion?
 - a. Magazine & Newspaper
 - b. TV show
 - c. Internet
 - d. Shop window
 - e. Celebrities
 - f. People around you
- 3) Do you learn it during your shopping experience? Yes No

5. How significant is fast fashion clothes for your self-image?
Very important important less important but have a certain influence not important

6. Do you have brand preference when shopping fast fashion? (Why?)
 - Yes, I am loyal customer of H&M / Ginatricot / other brand _____
 - Yes, I prefer H&M / Ginatricot / other brand _____
 - No, I don't care which brand it is.

7. Would you wait to buy a garment until its on sale? Yes No
8. Do you think the display and store atmospherics is important for a fast fashion store? Yes No
Does it really influence your purchase decision? Yes No
9. The cloths you buy in fast fashion stores are mostly for? (choose 1~2)
a. weekends b. work days c. basic daily needs d. parties e. others _____
10. You shop fast fashion cloths because they are _____ (please sort by importance).
a. comfortable b. good looking c. ready/easy-to-wear
d. good price e. in latest trend
11. What do you feel about the shopping experience in fast fashion stores? (like tired, boring, enjoyable, excited, stressful, relax and other feelings) why?
And do you always feel like this? Yes No
12. What's your feeling now about the products you purchased in the past half year?
13. Do you think you are good at styling or have certain ideas about fashion? Yes No
14. Can you tell the different between H&M and Ginatricot's brand image? Describe with few key words
what you associate with: H&M _____
Ginatricot _____
15. What is your fashion style?
a. Casual b. Official c. Sport d. Elegant
e. Sexy f. Stylish g. Trendy h. Street / punk
16. Do you need to wear more formal cloths during work time? Yes No
17. How much percent of your income do you spend on fashion averagely? _____
18. Mostly you go shopping _____
a. alone b. with boy/girl friend or husband/wife
c. with friends d. with other family members
20. In general, do you like to talk about fashion with your friends?
21. What kind of information or advice from your friends would you listen to?

- a. a brand's new collection
- b. a brand's social responsible work
- c. a brand's clothing quality
- d. some pieces of dress they strongly recommend you
- e. fashion trendy information in general
- f. their own fashion opinions

19. When you are fitting or considering about a garment, a stranger who's also shopping come to tell you that he/she think it fit you well, will it influence you even more than people you know? Yes No

..... The End

Thank You!

