

Dress to Impress or Distress! The Value Conflict Behind Gen Z's Fast Fashion remorse

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to investigate the factors determining Gen Z's intention to discontinue fast fashion (FF) brands. The conceptual model is based on cognitive dissonance theory and push-pull-mooring (PPM) framework. Young buyers in developing nations often experience remorse due to a conflict between their fashion aspirations and values. According to the results, ascribed responsibility (AR) significantly impacts buyer remorse (BR), whereas knowledge of greenwashing (KW) has no significant impact on BR. Both quality of product (QP) and social influence (SI), have a significant impact on BR. Environmental concern (EC) does not significantly influence BR. BR has a significant impact on both the willingness to pay for sustainable alternatives (SA) and the intention to discontinue fast fashion. Brands must prioritise social influence, community development, and accountability to align with the values of Generation Z. FF brands may reduce buyer's remorse by following sustainable methods and encouraging transparency in their marketing communications.

Keywords: Fast fashion brands, cognitive dissonance theory, willingness to pay for sustainable alternatives, ascribed responsibility, greenwashing, Gen Z

1. INTRODUCTION

The fast fashion industry characterizes itself through the quick production of cheaper and trending garments. Market leaders like Zara and H&M have explored this model by offering runway-inspired styles at cheaper rates with extremely quick turnaround times (Bick et al., 2018). The fast fashion market was valued at over 106 billion U.S. dollars, with a projected increase to approximately 185 billion U.S. dollars in 2027 (Statista, 2023). Apart from being a popular trend, this has also resulted in a "throwaway" culture, where apparels are frequently disposed of after minimal use (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

The FF sector has a substantial negative impact on the environment, contributing to approximately 10% of the world's carbon emissions and ranking as the second-largest global consumer of water (Quantis, 2018). Being aware of the issues mentioned, a respectable proportion of consumers are switching to sustainable or "slow" fashion, which places importance on ethical labour and environmental practices, and the durability of the product (Fletcher, 2014). In the domain of FF, young customers may experience guilt following a purchase that contradicts with their values (Hinojosa et al., 2017). This often results in cognitive dissonance (CD). CD is defined as discrepancy between the values, such as sustainability and ethical buying, and actual purchase behaviour results. People are transitioning to sustainable fashions for various reasons like environmental concern, ethical work practice and product durability (Grazzini et al., 2021). Consumer also feel cheated when FF brand makes greenwashing (GW) claims. GW practices are when brand fail to deliver on their socially responsible initiatives, and mislead consumers (Jones, 2019). FF remorse is complex, as it involves the interaction of individual and societal values along with social acceptance and quality (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

This research examines the factors that drive Gen Z consumers to switch from their fast fashion purchases. It focuses on the psychological mechanisms of cognitive dissonance resulting from awareness and concerns and the resulting buyer's remorse. The age group known as Gen Z is born between 1997 and 2012. They are often called as digital natives, as they grew up in a time of fast technological innovation, widely spread internet and use of social media (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). This demographic frequently embraces trends at an early stage (Gazzola et al., 2020). Previous studies have indicated a discrepancy between attitudes and behaviours in Generation Z regarding fashion consumption. While they exhibit a preference for sustainable products compared to previous generations, 57% of Gen Z customers in emerging nations prioritise affordability and convenience over sustainability (McKinsey & Co., 2023). Other significant studies also indicated that although Generation Z is environmentally conscious, they frequently indulge in excessive shopping sprees (Ronda, 2024). Lastly the study context is India, characterised by the largest youth population globally and a rapidly expanding middle class. Research shows that more people in developing nations like Brazil, China, India, Mexico, and Russia are increasing their consumption of fast fashion apparel while developed nations like Canada, Germany, the UK, and the US are growing eight times slower than emerging ones (Remy et al., 2016).

Responding to the call with respect to Gen Z attitude- behaviour gap, this study explores buyer remorse in the context of the fast-fashion industry, its effects, an analysis of Gen Z consumer behaviour, and potential resolutions to ethical challenges commonly encountered in the FF industry. The research focusses on the examination of push factors, such as ascribed responsibility (AR) and awareness of greenwashing (GW), pull factors like apparel quality and social influence, and mooring factors including environmental concerns. Collectively, these factors lead to increased post-purchase dissonance, resulting in buyer's remorse. BR is identified as a significant indicator of the willingness to pay for sustainable alternatives (Grazzini et al., 2021) and the intention to discontinue fast fashion (Rosely

et al., 2024). Consequently, the study evaluates willingness to invest in sustainable alternatives and the decision to shift away from fast fashion as response.

The study presents the subsequent research questions derived from the argumentation.

RQ1: Do factors such as ascribed responsibility, knowledge of greenwashing, quality of fast fashion apparel, social influence, and environmental concerns contribute to buyers' remorse towards fast fashion brands within the context of the PPM framework?

RQ2: In what ways does the feeling of regret among the young generation influence their willingness to pay for sustainable alternatives and their intention to discontinue support for FF brands?

This study deepens understanding of how the younger generation perceives fast fashion apparel, navigates ethical dilemmas, regrets purchasing inferior-quality products, and increases awareness of sustainable practices while managing social pressure and trends.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 COGNITIVE DISSONANCE AND BUYER'S REMORSE

Cognitive dissonance theory posits that when individuals experience inconsistencies in their thoughts, beliefs, values, attitudes, and/or behaviors, they are motivated to change one or more of these cognitions to regain consistency and alleviate discomfort (Festinger, 1957). In general, the buying processes include the post-purchase evaluation stage, where customers assess their satisfaction or dissatisfaction after the consumption of product or service (Niinimäki et al., 2020). The post-purchase dissatisfaction often leads to the feelings of remorse which might be experienced in the form of regret or anxiety and may alter the future attitudes and behaviour of the consumer (Rosely et al., 2024). The recent focus on sustainability (Mukendi et al., 2020; Dabas & Whang, 2022) and the growing awareness of the adverse environmental and societal impacts by the fast fashion industry (Adamkiewicz et al., 2022; Farghaly et al., 2024) have prompted consumers to prefer sustainable products and gravitate towards slow, sustainable fashion over fast fashion brands (Grazzini et al., 2021; Busalim et al., 2022). Customers who engage with fast fashion may experience remorse for their consumption patterns and feel compelled to address the disparity between their cognitions and the discomfort associated with such overconsumption. To explore this phenomenon, we apply cognitive dissonance theory to identify the stimuli that contribute to buyer's remorse and examine the actions undertaken to mitigate the remorse resulting from cognitive dissonance.

2.2 PUSH- PULL - MOORING (PPM) FRAMEWORK

The PPM framework, which analyses human switching and shifting behaviour, has its roots in the migration literature. The PPM concept comprises three pertinent dimensions influencing a person's intention to switch: firstly, the push dimension prompts individuals to discontinue their current choice; secondly, the pull elements encourage them to adopt an alternative option; and thirdly, mooring elements relate to social concerns that influence people to change their opinions (Hazen et al., 2017).

2.3 PUSH FACTORS

2.3.1. Ascribed responsibility (AR)

Prior research indicates that individuals who attribute responsibility for a specific global concern to themselves, known as internal ascription of responsibility, are more likely to address the problem (De Groot & Steg, 2009). When an individual perceives a detrimental outcome for others and attributes accountability for that outcome to them (ascription of responsibility), a corresponding personal norm is activated (Gao et al., 2017). In the fashion industry, marketers advertise about sustainable fashion on social media platforms to garner customer awareness, trust and favorable attitudes towards brands (Kong et al., 2021). Such sustainability related communications awaken a sense of responsibility in customers, prompting them to actively monitor their actions when making purchasing decisions (Grazzini et al., 2021). Customers quite often are encouraged to be environmentally conscious, consume wisely, and be aware of the malpractices followed by organizations which cause harm to the environment (Khalil & Adnan, 2021; Thakkar, 2021). As a result, customers tend to favour organizations that strive for sustainability and demonstrate environmental concern (Arslan, 2020). We suggest that when customers become aware of sustainable business practices, they develop a sense of responsibility to protect the environment. Consequently, when individuals having a heightened sense of ascribed responsibility encounter or learn about unethical practices by fashion brands, they may feel remorse. We therefore hypothesize that:

H1: Ascribed responsibility towards the environment will increase the buyer's remorse (BR) towards the consumption of fast fashion brands.

2.3.2 Knowledge of greenwashing (KG)

Greenwashing (GW) exemplifies deceptive advertising and false sustainability claims that mislead consumers, investors, and the public, ultimately affecting trust and prompting decisions to switch brands (Al-sharouf & Naesae, 2022). Initially, the term greenwashing was applied within an environmental context, but in present times it includes a wider concept of sustainability that also covers social and ethical aspects (Promalessy & Handriana, 2024). Many organizations today engage in sustainability reporting which serve to draw attention of customers who care for the environment (Kaur et al., 2022). However, many consumers lack awareness of greenwashing practices, resulting in a gap between their environmental beliefs and their real fashion purchasing behaviours (Hesse & Rundau, 2023). Hesse and Rundau (2023) opined that if customers are educated about the detrimental effect of brands engaged in greenwashing, their attitude towards such brands would be negative. Prior research on fast fashion has highlighted the prevalence of greenwashing practices; however, the literature does not fully explore how awareness of these practices influences consumer guilt. We propose that when consumers learn about greenwashing in the fast fashion industry, they are likely to feel remorse over their purchases. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H2: Knowledge of greenwashing will increase the buyer's remorse (BR) towards the consumption of fast fashion brands.

2.4 PULL FACTORS

2.4.1 Quality of fast fashion products (QP)

Numerous fast fashion brands create products with a lifespan limited to fewer than ten uses, and they tend to deteriorate quickly due to low quality (McNeill & Moore, 2015). The poor quality of garments produced by fast fashion results in their quick disposal by customers, which increases waste and the cycle of consumers purchasing fast fashion brands to refresh their wardrobes continues (Camargo et al., 2020). Long and Nasiry (2022) reported that while

implementation of waste disposal policies and production taxes could help reduce a company's leftover inventory, but these measures might inadvertently lead to lower product quality, potentially increasing the firm's environmental impact. Reports suggest that excessive purchasing of fast fashion brands also leads to a range of consumer behaviors, including hoarding (Mrad et al., 2020), sharing with friends and family, donating to charity, selling online, or swapping items (Agbebo, 2020), all of which indicate a sense of dissatisfaction with these purchases. Researchers have identified poor quality as the main reason behind the high return rates of fast fashion apparel (Guo et al., 2020). We assume that such behaviors of customers linked to FF brands are indicative of buyer's remorse upon experiencing a sub-standard quality, and therefore we hypothesize that:

H3: Low quality of fast fashion brands will increase the buyer's remorse (BR) towards the consumption of these brands.

2.4.2. Social influence (SI)

Social influence leads individuals to transgressive consumption situations which they might regret at a later stage and experience post purchase dissonance (Martins et al., 2024). Fast fashion (FF) consumption is often fuelled by the satisfaction of gaining others' approval, the need to conform within social groups, and the persistent dissatisfaction with current possessions (Shah & Asghar, 2023). Many consumers exhibit 'flexible' consumption habits, as they occasionally choose ethical options, such as buying second-hand, while still purchasing fast fashion at times which might be either due to easy availability at low price or to be a part of the social group (Bröcher, 2022). Furthermore, according to Rosely et al. (2024), the presence of social media live streaming platforms has led to wasteful consumption, as the strong sense of connection experienced during such live streams, compels consumers to engage in extravagant, irrational and impulse purchasing behaviors, particularly in fast fashion. However, study conducted by Tran (2020) did not report a positive relationship between the social media marketing and purchase decisions for fast fashion brands. Bläse et al. (2024) reported that the fear of missing out (FOMO) directly impacts consumers' intentions to purchase fast fashion products. Research on fast fashion brands has indicated that social influence shapes consumer behavior; however, the literature lacks discussion on whether social influences leads to feelings of guilt and regret. While numerous studies have pointed out towards the social circle of consumer influencing purchasing FF brands, studies on how social influence can deter consumers to buy fast fashion brands is lacking in literature. Thus we hypothesize that:

H4: The social influence (SI) may increase the buyer's remorse (BR) towards the consumption of fast fashion brands.

2.5 MOORING FACTORS

2.5.1 Environmental concerns (EC)

EC signifies the degree to which individuals grasp environmental challenges and are committed to addressing them through activities like reusing and recycling, purchasing eco-friendly products, and supporting environmental initiatives (Wang et al., 2021). Consumers exhibit their EC by avoiding the products manufactured or distributed by unethical organizations which exploit natural resources and emit toxic chemicals into the environment thereby harming it (Kim, 2018). The expressions like "anti-consumerism", "sustainable consumption", and "ethical consumption" frequently refer to consumer attitudes and behaviours related to resistance, boycotting, and choosing not to consume products that are detrimental to the environment either during their production or while consuming (Martin-Woodhead, 2022; Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2023). Individuals with low EC are less likely to participate in environmentally conscious behavior and pay more for sustainable products (Kautish & Sharma, 2020). Previous studies have indicated that customers'

environmental consciousness negatively affects their intention to purchase fast fashion brands (Cairns et al., 2022; Guo et al., 2020). However, whether increased environmental awareness leads to buyer's remorse remains unexplored in fast fashion literature. To explore this relationship, we hypothesize that:

H5: Environmental concerns (EC) will increase the buyer's remorse (BR) towards the consumption of fast fashion brands.

2.5 WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVES AND FAST FASHION DISCONTINUATION INTENTION

Sustainable fashion refers to clothing made using environmentally friendly raw materials and production methods that minimize pollution (Aschemann-Witzel & Stangherlin, 2021). Studies have reported that environmental concerns and perceived value of sustainable products positively impact the willingness of customers to pay for sustainable products (Dangelico et al., 2022). However Lavuri (2022) stated that the price of a product can influence a consumer's intention to purchase it and it is not necessary that the consumers who express environmental concerns would buy green or sustainable products. On similar lines Feuß et al. (2022) reported that those who profess to care about the environment may not engage in environmentally friendly purchasing behaviors if green products are priced higher than conventional ones. Verbal and visual nudges on retailers' websites serve to create awareness amongst customers to opt for sustainable fashion (Roozen et al., 2021). While buyers are concerned about the opinions of others regarding their purchases which shapes their future attitudes and behaviours (Agarwal et al., 2021), there is lack of knowledge whether the remorse arising from fast fashion purchases positively impacts the buyers' willingness to pay for sustainable fashion brands. Since, the relationship between buyer's remorse arising of fast fashion consumption, the willingness to pay for sustainable fashion and the discontinuation intention is not explored extensively in prior studies, we hypothesize that:

H6: Buyer's remorse will increase the willingness to pay for sustainable alternatives.

H7: The willingness to pay for sustainable alternatives will increase the buyer's fast fashion discontinuation intention.

H8: Buyer's remorse will increase the buyer's fast fashion discontinuation intention.

Based on the extant review of literature and the hypotheses developed for the study we propose the conceptual model as depicted in Figure 1.

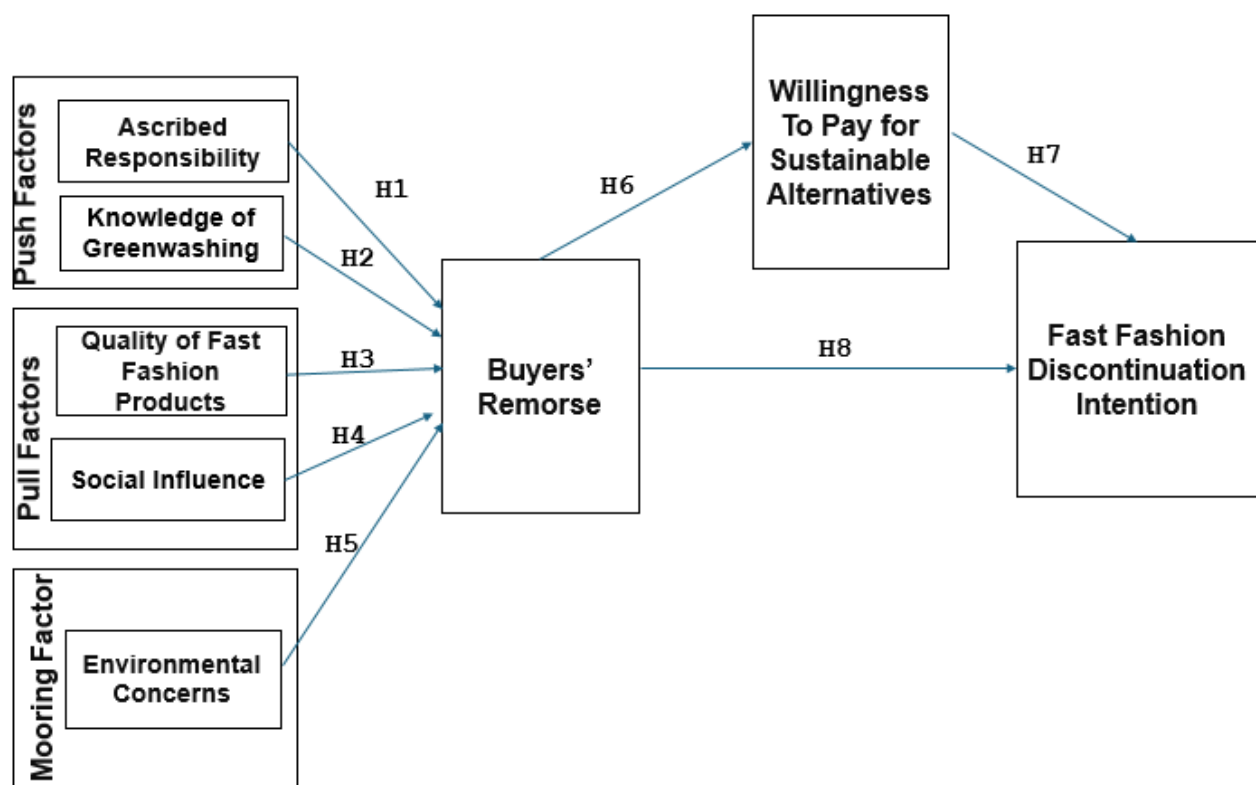


FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL MODEL

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH MEASURES

The conceptual framework includes eight constructs. The study employed the three-item measure of AR established by De Groot and Steg (2009). The five-item KG scale was developed based on the work of Schmuck et al. (2018). The perceived quality scale for fast fashion products was adopted from Choi et al. (2010), while the four-item scale of social influence was evaluated using a scale developed by Lee and Hong (2016). The methodology for evaluating EC was adapted from the work of Kim and Choi (2005). The willingness to pay for sustainable alternatives utilises a scale modified from Jang et al. (2011), a four-item scale for buyer's remorse (BR) is based on Sweeney et al. (1999) and used a three-item scale from Bhattacharjee and Lin (2014) to measure the discontinuation intention (DI) fast fashion brands (see Appendix 1). All the items were measured on a five-point scale where 1 means complete disagreement and 5 means complete agreement to the scale item.

The study collected data via a cross-sectional survey using a non-probability based judgemental sampling method. As a non-probability sample does not select a sample on a random basis, the findings cannot be generalised to the entire population and often introduce bias. The Gen Z respondents are screened based on two criteria: Firstly, the awareness of fast fashion brands, and secondly, they have purchased an apparel or accessory from an FF brand in the last 6 months. G*Power 3 software was utilised to calculate the appropriate sample size (Tan & Ooi, 2018). A pilot study tested the questionnaire with 55 respondents. We effectively incorporated their suggestions regarding the language and length of the questionnaire. We administered 385 questionnaires and received 251 valid responses with a 65.19% response rate. Before collecting the data, an informed consent was obtained from all the respondents. The survey form also mentioned the academic objective and anonymous nature of the study.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

We examined the data with the PLS-SEM methodology proposed by Hair et al. (2022). PLS-SEM was chosen due to its appropriateness for complex models. It involves the two-stage procedures of data analysis, specifically the measurement and structural models. This approach is also suitable when the data distribution deviates from normality. CBS-SEM is preferable when the sample size is large, and the data distribution is normalised.

4.1 ASSESSMENT OF MEASUREMENT MODEL

Table 1 presents the reliability of indicators, including internal consistency measured by Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, as well as convergent validity assessed through average variance extracted (AVE). The factor loadings of the indicators surpass the threshold criterion of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2022). The Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values of all the measured constructs exceed the threshold of 0.70 (Henseler et al., 2016). The AVE value of all constructs exceeds 0.5, confirming convergent validity (Hair et al., 2022).

TABLE 1. CONSTRUCTS RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Construct	Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	Average variance extracted
Ascribed Responsibility	AR1 AR2 AR3	0.770 0.869 0.854	0.777	0.785	0.693
Knowledge of Greenwashing	KG1 KG2 KG3 KG4 KG5	0.805 0.852 0.847 0.791 0.746	0.868	0.878	0.655
Quality of Products	QP1 QP2 QP3 QP4 QP5	0.766 0.811 0.817 0.802 0.680	0.835	0.844	0.603
Social Influence	SI1 SI2 SI3 SI4	0.850 0.843 0.852 0.769	0.848	0.853	0.687
Environmental Concern	EC1 EC2 EC3 EC4	0.804 0.853 0.843 0.798	0.844	0.847	0.680
Buyer's Remorse	BR1 BR2 BR3 BR4	0.822 0.827 0.867 0.800	0.849	0.849	0.688
Willingness to Pay for Sustainable Alternatives	SA1 SA2 SA3 SA4 SA5	0.791 0.746 0.775 0.742 0.774	0.824	0.826	0.586
Discontinuation Intention	DI1 DI2 DI3	0.894 0.918 0.879	0.879	0.884	0.804

The HTMT criterion and the Fornell-Larcker criterion were the two criteria that were used to analyse the discriminant's validity. Table 2 shows that the square root of AVE for each latent variable is greater than its association with another latent variable (Fornell-Larcker, 1981). All the correlation values in Table 3 fall below the 0.90 threshold value as prescribed by Henseler et al. (2016).

TABLE 2. FORNELL-LARCKER CRITERION

	AR	BR	EC	DI	KG	QP	SA	SI
Ascribed Responsibility	0.832							
Buyer's Remorse	0.580	0.830						
Environmental Concerns	0.382	0.363	0.825					
Discontinuation Intention	0.468	0.665	0.274	0.897				
Knowledge of Greenwashing	0.444	0.407	0.585	0.341	0.809			
Quality of Products	0.456	0.509	0.538	0.303	0.442	0.777		
Sustainable Alternatives	0.460	0.591	0.482	0.413	0.469	0.483	0.766	
Social Influence	0.490	0.634	0.365	0.489	0.413	0.526	0.714	0.829

TABLE 3. HTMT CRITERION

	AR	BR	EC	DI	KG	QP	SA	SI
Ascribed Responsibility								
Buyer's Remorse	0.711							
Environmental Concerns	0.467	0.426						
Discontinuation Intention	0.563	0.767	0.321					
Knowledge of Greenwashing	0.532	0.469	0.687	0.392				
Quality of Products	0.569	0.599	0.645	0.35	0.523			
Sustainable Alternatives	0.572	0.702	0.583	0.478	0.56	0.594		
Social Influence	0.605	0.743	0.428	0.564	0.476	0.622	0.851	

4.2 ASSESSMENT OF STRUCTURAL MODEL

Table 4 displays the results of evaluating the relevance of path coefficients using the inner model. We infer the absence of collinearity, as the VIF values were below 3.33 (Hair et al., 2022). The R-square value was analysed to judge predictive power and found to be 0.515 for buyer's remorse. The R -square value of buyer's remorse is 0.515, indicating 51.5% variance in buyer's remorse is due to AR, KG, QP, SI, and EC maintaining the threshold level (equal to or greater than 0.10) of R-squared values (Falk & Miller, 1992). The Standardised Root Mean Square Residuals (SRMR = 0.061) were assessed to determine the goodness of fit index and were found to be below the critical threshold of 0.08 (Hair et al., 2022).

TABLE 4: TESTING OF SIGNIFICANCE OF HYPOTHESES

Hypo. no.	Relationship	β values	T value	P value	Significance	VIF
H1	AR->BR	0.302	4.039	0.000	Yes	1.511
H2	KG-> BR	0.048	0.686	0.493	No	1.716
H3	QP-> BR	0.145	1.938	0.050	Yes	1.772
H4	SI-> BR	0.390	5.872	0.000	Yes	1.589
H5	EC -> BR	0.001	0.011	0.991	No	1.789
H6	BR -> SA	0.591	11.694	0.000	Yes	1.000
H7	SA-> DI	0.031	0.445	0.656	No	1.537
H8	BR-> DI	0.646	11.125	0.000	Yes	1.537

Source(s): Authors' Analysis

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In response to RQ1, it was found that one of the two push factor determinants, ascribed responsibility (AR), significantly impacts buyer remorse (BR) ($\beta=0.302$, $p = 0.000$, supporting H1), whereas knowledge of greenwashing has no significant impact on BR ($\beta=0.048$, $p = 0.493$, not supporting H2). The findings of the current study extend previous research, indicating that persons having ascription of responsibility experience will have more positive behaviour towards mindful consumption (Grazzini et al., 2021). The study results indicate that the association between awareness of greenwashing and customer remorse is not significant. This could be because young people, especially those from Generation Z, are motivated by basic principles like sustainability, fairness, and social responsibility (Cosgrave & O'Dwyer, 2020). Their buying decisions are mostly based on their own moral beliefs. Prior research has led to inconclusive findings concerning the association between awareness of greenwashing and emotions of remorse or guilt (Lu et al., 2022; Neureiter & Matthes, 2023). In India the concept of greenwashing is still emerging and needs more awareness and understanding.

Similarly, especially in the context of Indian customers, both pull factors, quality of product ($\beta=0.145$, $p = 0.050$, supporting H3) and social influence ($\beta=0.390$, $p = 0.000$, supporting H4), have significant impact on BR. Consumer are criticising FF brand to produce inferior quality products that wear out much faster (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Cheap quality is one of the prime reason for avoidance of FF products (Kim et al., 2013; Guo et al., 2020). Our study results suggest that individuals influenced by societal norms and have a desire to express their prosocial values will experience more remorse after purchasing fast fashion apparel. Social pressure has frequently been observed to lead individuals to alter their purchasing decisions significantly (Shah & Asghar, 2023). Our findings support previous studies, confirming that Indian consumers, particularly the younger generation from urban areas, are more concerned with social approval in their purchasing decisions (Martins et al., 2024).

However, environmental concern (EC), as a mooring factor, does not significantly influence BR ($\beta=- 0.001$, $p = 0.991$, not supporting H5). Prior investigations have demonstrated that individuals exhibiting increased ecological responsibility were more attuned to environmental issues and supported green purchasing behaviours (Wang et al., 2021). Nonetheless, studies within the Indian context have highlighted that individuals prioritise functional factors such as price, convenience, and quality more than environmental concern in addition to social acceptance (Kautish &

Sharma, 2020). The findings of our study similarly indicated that quality and social influence significantly affect buyer remorse, whereas EC does not play a significant role.

In addressing RQ2, the influence of buyer's remorse (BR) was determined to be both positive and important regarding the willingness to pay for sustainable alternatives (SA) ($\beta=0.591$, $p=0.000$, supporting H6) and the intention to discontinue fast fashion (DI) ($\beta=0.646$, $p=0.000$, supporting H8). The results indicate that consumers of fast fashion brands who experience remorse regarding their purchases are willing to pay a premium for sustainable alternatives and intend to discontinue buying fast fashion brands. Numerous prior research studies indicate that the premium pricing of green products adversely affects the willingness of Indians to purchase them, asserting that India is a price-sensitive market (Misra & Singh, 2016). However, recent research indicates that young Indian customers are willing to pay a premium price for environmentally friendly products, particularly those that comply with stringent policies (Statista report, 2023).

Conversely, the willingness to pay for sustainable alternatives was not found to significantly influence the intention to discontinue fast fashion ($\beta=0.031$, $p=0.656$, not supporting H7). A buyer could rationalise their involvement with fast fashion by highlighting its affordability or their need for diversity, therefore mitigating emotions of regret (Cengiz & Şenel, 2024). Despite a growing awareness of environmental issues and fake green promises from FF brands, the ascription of responsibility, quality, and social influence are more important factors in influencing buyer remorse.

6. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The outcome of this study has important social as well managerial implication for the fashion industry. This study highlights ascribed responsibility as the significant push factors leading to buyer's remorse. Practitioners and government could emphasise more on campaigns that promote conscious consumerism, transparent supply chain policy and responsible fashion choices. This aligns with the growing trend toward sustainable shopping resulting in reduce post-purchase regret. For example, the Indian government has recently launched Sustainable Fashion and Indian Textiles (SUIT) program. Such initiative assists and encourage sustainable fashion enterprises and advocate for environmentally friendly textile production.

Another important observation is that the brands should emphasize the reusability, and quality of the apparels. Following the same many emerging fashion brands in India such as Iro, Lovebirds, and Doodlage are following a sustainable manufacturing model. They are utilising organic dyes, recycling methods, and ensuring a descent working environment for their employees. Another sustainable initiative by Decathlon's for sustainable packaging involves the utilisation of recycled material for water bottles and trek-insulated jackets. Zara a popular FF brand has in their Life Campaign addresses the issue of recycling the apparels, their re-sales and promoting used garments for donation drives, thus advocating a more responsible business model.

As per the study findings social influence is significant pull factors. India is a collectivist country and young generation gets inspired by celebrity and influencers. Blog posts, vlogs can explain how sustainable materials, ethical production, and higher quality products reduce waste, making customers feel more confident in their decisions. Several sustainability influencers in India are using social platforms to educate, inspire, and empower others to embrace a greener lifestyle.

The study results also suggest that consumers are willing to pay more sustainable products and the retailer can explore this opportunity to promote environmentally friendly products. They can highlight the same in their marketing

communication. For instance, "Another Tomorrow" is a brand that uses technology for transparent ethical communication with its customer. Every piece of clothing has a QR code that lets them follow each step of the supply chain journey.

These kinds of brands are especially appealing to people who care about quality, ethics, and the environment and are willing to pay extra for them. For mass brands the concept is still evolving; for example, Fab India is a moderate premium brand known for its sustainable practice. Consumers can reduce remorse by prioritising quality over quantity, associating consumption with their values, and practicing mindful purchasing behaviours. Our study finding indicates that greenwashing claims and environmental issues does not have a significant impact in Gen Z buyer's remorse. Businesses, social media campaigns and sustainability influencers and community may help people make smart choices by telling them how their fashion choices affect the environment and society.

Our study results are particularly applicable in the context of emerging economies. As fast fashion consumption is still more in developing economy as compared to developed nations. The culture also promotes value for money, and the young generation often have to negotiate between their fashion aspirations and values. Our study with a theoretical lens of cognitive dissonance theory and PPM framework offers a detailed perspective on how Gen Z traverses the conflicting desires for ethical consumption and social acceptance. Our study findings implicates that both social norms and quality serve as significant "pull factor" within the PPM framework. The study findings indicate that young consumers in India demonstrate an ascription of responsibility and are willing to pay premium prices for them.

Buyer' remorse is found to impact both willingness to pay for sustainable alternatives and fast fashion discontinuation intention, it indicates that customers who regret their purchases may be more open to environmentally friendly options and less inclined to return to fast fashion brands. Managers could capitalize on remorse-driven interest in sustainable alternatives by offering eco-friendly product lines at a slight premium.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

Following are the limitations and future scope of the study. Firstly, we employed non-probability based purposive sampling for the quantitative analysis. The subjective nature of the sampling limits the generalisability of the results to a broader population on a random basis. Our study is limited to the perception of only age cohort that is Gen Z Indian customers. Future research may apply multi-group analyses to identify segment-level differences by age, career, and other demographic and psychographic factors. This may help fast fashion brand managers create segment-specific marketing strategies.

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