PARADOX OF FAST FASHION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this thesis entitled: **"Paradox of Fast Fashion and Environmental Sustainability."** submitted by Ayesha Tariq is accepted in its present form by the PIDE School Policy, Development and Governance, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), Islamabad as satisfying the requirements for partial fulfillment of the degree in Master of Philosophy in Development Studies.

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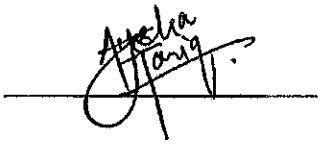
To my parents who have always shown immense support, paid for each and every single one of my outfits and sparked a realization that its high time we cared more about the planet than our next purchase.

Author's Declaration

I, **Ayesha Tariq,** hereby state that my MPhil thesis titled **Paradox of Fast Fashion and Environmental Sustainability** is my own work and has not been submitted previously by me for taking any degree from Pakistan Institute of Development Economics or anywhere else in the country/world.

At any time if my statement is found to be incorrect even after my Graduation, the university has the right to withdraw my MPhil degree.

Date: _____



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ABSTRACT

Fast fashion has emerged as one of the most rapidly produced and consumed industry – fueled by trend cycles, algorithmically tailored feeds, appealing content and an ever-evolving digital marketplace – has fundamentally transformed how consumers discover, desire and acquire clothing. These transitioning styles have readily rewritten the consumer's perception and manner of approaching trends. Within hyper connected environments, the anxiety emerging from social exclusion, appearing outdated, or missing out on a trend – readily accepted by the majority – solidifies into a strong psycho-social driver. Collectively, all such psycho-social and emotional drivers behave as powerful catalysts, driving consumers towards repetitive, unplanned and environmentally unsustainable purchasing decisions, despite significant environmental awareness about fast fashion aggravating environmental degradation. This study is divided into 2 parts, uses a descriptive research design and a mixed-methods approach to investigate the psycho-social mechanisms driving this irresistible consumption amongst Pakistani Millennials and Generation Z. The quantitative study deconstructs the roles of Bandwagon Effect, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Social Comparison, to explore the psycho-social interactions that convert trend awareness into unsustainable impulse buying. It employs Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with Multi-Group Analysis to map how these psycho-social triggers diverge across the two generations. The qualitative study has been used to gain an in-depth understanding of the unexplored psycho-social and emotional triggers behind the immediate gratification through unsustainable impulse buying of fast fashion, while overriding all ethical concerns and environmental sustainability information. Data collection was conducted through a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview from both Pakistani Millennials and Generation Z. The findings revealed that FoMO mediates the relationship between the Bandwagon Effect and the Unsustainable Fast Fashion Consumption, is true for Generation Z while the same does not apply to Millennials. Furthermore, the social cost of non-participation, emotional vulnerabilities and digital environments through influencer endorsements, algorithms and market mechanisms, generate purchasing desire. Both generations demonstrate attitude-behavior gap due to systemic insufficiency of the Pakistani market to provide sustainable alternative s to fast fashion, thereby creating extensive socio-environmental impact of unsustainable consumption.

Key Words: Fast Fashion, Unsustainable Impulse Consumption, Bandwagon Effect, Fear of Missing Out, Social Comparison, Trend Consumption, Digital Consumer Behavior, Attitude-Behavior Gap

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Fast Fashion, while brilliant in its alacrity and accessibility, carries an escalating burden across multiple facets of our world and our lives. Even though it appears to be a rapid solution to upholding latest style, it carries a deep systemic cost. While fast fashion has emerged as an opportunity for consumers to buy ever-changing trends, the human and environmental health risks associated with trendy clothing are hidden, especially in countries where environmental regulations are lacking or poorly enforced (Bick et al., 2018). To add to the severity, any awareness on the fast fashion industry's contribution to harmful emissions, micro-plastic pollution in water bodies and sustainability issues certainly do not influence or curb consumers from buying it (Sutha, 2024). Despite sustainability measures and recycling programs in place, their poor implementation leads to the failure in dealing with the problem of this nature (Meng, 2024). The problem further compounds when fast changing trends further give rise to resource exploitation (Fang, 2023) and consumer culture (Degli Esposti et al., 2024) which has nothing to do with self-expression at all. The challenge is further supplemented by psycho-socio drivers that hurl consumers into staying current with new styles which triggers patterns of unsustainable consumption behaviors (Bick et al., 2018). Immense social influence and unrealistic expectations set by the digital media play a huge role in transforming this trend driven fashion into a tool of performative survival for many.

Fast Fashion has become a social currency and its consumption has become desperate chase for belonging in digital arenas where being outdated means invisibility. Every outfit has become a reflection of who is up-to-date and necessitates recognition in the fast-moving digital bazaar of likes and follows. Behind every 'Did you see that outfit?' or 'I need it before it's gone' frenzy, is a desperate chase for social validation. This question is succeeded by the rise of social media and the fast fashion brands which have mastered the art of monetizing people's insecurities, weaponized human psychology and utterly ignored the environmental challenges for profit. This gives rise to the ruthless trio of psychological mechanisms; the Bandwagon Effect, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), and Social Comparison, which have turned harmless browsing into impulsive buying.

From consumers stockpiling behavior for trending brands, to addictive purchasing under the fear of not being up-to-date and socially validated, shall allow researchers to explore the consumption threats posed by such behavior. Various consumer psychology studies report that young consumers tend to be swayed by their need to belong (Kuan et al., 2014) thus, creating an anxiety around being outdated which results in increasing their tendency to bandwagon and herding behavior. Their desperation to fit in the

digital bazaar of fleeting trends in a herd allows them to imitate others in their choice of direction. This flocking behavior is consolidated by social media which intensifies psychological dependence, trend enthusiasm and impulsive purchasing, resulting in unsustainable impulsive consumption amongst young digital consumers (Alalwan, 2020). Apart from need to bandwagon, people tend to follow rapidly changing trends because of their fear of missing out (FOMO) which further compounds the problem leading to collective consumption (Chen et al., 2024).

Moreover, the excessive use of digital content shapes materialistic values that appeals consumers to respond in form of irrational unsustainable purchasing behavior, overshadowing any environmental considerations. While increased product accessibility and consumer culture have led to rise in overproduction and increased compulsive buying, it has also amplified the carbon footprint, created additional environmental challenges such as landfill waste and overproduction (Baek & Jin, 2023). Despite increased awareness about its environmental hazards, social comparison takes the lead and establishes material success as the ultimate bench mark for success. Peer influences, viewing advertisements and social comparison with public figures all promote materialism (Chan & Prendergast, 2007). Thus, the use of social media is a trigger for massive increase in levels of materialism (Ozimek et al., 2024), which intensifies impulsive purchase decisions. Increased digital exposure commands such excessive unsustainable purchases a tool of self-expression and social validation (Rodrigue, 2024). The same digital platforms are a source of triggering emotional factors such as low-prices, limited-time offers (Zeta et al., 2025), convenience and immediacy (Almahdi et al., 2023), increasing susceptibility towards impulsive buying (Nyrhinen et al., 2023).

Impulse buying tendencies also emerge when consumers engage in hyperbolic discounting, prioritizing instant gratification from impulsive purchase rather than contributing to a larger environmental and social benefit. In the process, the impulse behavior is aggravated due to consumer's willful ignorance to avoid the consequences of engaging in unsustainable buying behaviors. Hence, fast fashion consumption behaves as a temporary compensation for many to make up for the unfulfilling life and rapidly changing trends, only to find the feeling short-lived, leading to another purchase (Krueger, 1988). When fashion attitudes are strong, consumers potentially exhibit more compulsive hoarding behaviors to keep themselves fashionable and simultaneously do not experience difficulty discarding their fashion items due to their need to stay trendy (Bocti et al., 2021), thereby making it easier to make room for more current fashion. Therefore, this research intends to explore how these psycho-socio mechanisms like the Bandwagon Effect, the Fear of Missing Out and the Social Comparison manifest in the lives of Pakistani fast fashion consumers and what drives their unsustainable impulsive purchases amongst them. Moreover, the research shall focus

on identifying what other unexplored psycho-socio triggers create a demand for impulsive buying of fast fashion despite consumer awareness about the environmental impact of buying excessively.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Fast Fashion has emerged not merely as a modern trend-responsive solution to fluctuating consumer demand but as a significant socio-environmental challenge. Globally, the fashion industry contributes approximately 10% of the annual carbon emissions and an estimated 92 million tonnes of textile waste every year, which gets pushed around from one country to another with no textile waste management systems in place, leading to pollution and health risks (United Nations, 2025). The current system for producing and distributing clothing uses take-make-dispose model, where more than half of the fast fashion produced is disposed in under a year (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). This system is wasteful and polluting due to under-utilization and lack of recycling processes for such clothing. The environmental cost of accelerating fast fashion production and consumption is disproportionately borne by developing countries, where impacts of climate change are acutely felt on the ground. This puts pressure on resources, pollutes ecosystems and leaves a significant catastrophic impact (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). Despite growing environmental awareness, Pakistani consumers continue to purchase fast fashion and engage in repetitive trend cycles. This digitally connected population continues to grow and remains largely embedded in fashion culture – a process particularly concerning yet still remains under explored. While the impact on social-psychological well-being and environment sustainability are well documented and acknowledged, the ample consumer awareness often is insufficient and falls short to translate into a measurable reduction in consumption. The role of digital media is pervasive in amplifying the psychological triggers, specifically the Bandwagon Effect, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and Digital Social Comparison, for consumers to stay current and upgrade their wardrobe collection with every shift in trend. This digital environment fosters impulsive behavior and is manifested in their unsustainable fast fashion consumption. Therefore, this research systematically investigates a critical gap in understanding how these psychological and social triggers translate into concrete, unsustainable fast fashion consumption amongst Pakistani Millennials and Gen Z, despite awareness about the environmental concerns. It seeks to expose how the illusion of choice masks deep psychological and social conditioning, leading to emotional manipulation and peer driven conformity that shapes the buying patterns of consumers. Hence, this necessitates research to quantify the psycho-social impact on buying tendencies and to identify the unexplored reasons and triggers driving this unsustainable behavior.

1.3. Research Problem

Based on the narrative of Problem Statement as stated in the preceding text, the research problem has been narrowed down to explore the ‘The Paradox of Fast Fashion and Environmental Sustainability’ – a case of

psycho-social triggers on Gen Y & Z' and have operationalized this research into following research questions and objectives.

1.4. Research Questions

1. Do Gen Y and Gen Z understand environmental concerns?
2. How does the Bandwagon Effect, the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Social Comparison influence impulsive buying of fast fashion which is a kind of unsustainable consumption amongst Pakistani Millennials and Gen Z?
3. How do the unexplored psychological and social triggers induce impulsive fast fashion buying behaviors amongst young consumers indulging in strategic ignorance despite an awareness of the environmental impact of impulsive tendencies?

1.5. Research Objectives

1. To analyze environmental awareness amongst Pakistani Gen Y (Millennials) and Gen Z.
2. To examine effects of the Bandwagon Effect, the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Social Comparison, on unsustainable impulsive fast fashion purchasing behaviors amongst Pakistani Millennials and Gen Z consumers.
3. To identify the unexplored psychological and social triggers that compel young consumers toward impulsive fast fashion buying, and engage in strategic ignorance effectively disregarding their awareness of its environmental impact.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The norm of consumerism spans across cultures and generations around the globe, linking the pursuit of ever-lasting happiness to unrestrained consumption of material goods, which once acquired eventually fail to satisfy consumers psychological needs. Baudrillards (1968) critique on hyper-consumption behaviors highlight the practice of excessive consumption a result of an individual consuming the socially constructed idea of an object rather than the object itself. His argument suggests that consumption is less about fulfilling the basic needs and more about obtaining social recognition and shaping social identities. In today's world, such hyper-consumption of fast fashion – apparel that mirrors current fashion trends with latest collections launched every few weeks – raises serious concerns about the environmental sustainability, psychological potencies and consumption behavior (Rume & Islam, 2020). In line, the textile and fashion industries have been identified to be contributing significantly to environmental degradation accounting to 10% of global CO2 emissions (Brewer, 2019), toxic discharge of chemical dyes and heavy metals into water bodies and landfill waste. The high demand for this trend-driven apparel mounts the production and supply of environmentally unsafe fast fashion goods at an affordable price, enabling consumers to splurge on impulse buying, leading to the phenomenon of overconsumption and unsustainable consumption behavior (Rosely & Syed Ali, 2023). Such low-cost premium fashion alternatives, with a limited shelf life, leave negative social and environmental implications such as overconsumption of natural resources, waste mismanagement and pollution problems.

2.1. The Impact of Fast Fashion on Environment

Fast fashion has emerged as a rapidly growing business model that prioritizes speed and disposability over sustainability. It is characterized as non-stop production and consumption of inexpensive clothing that not only generates instant profits for textile companies but also heavily contributes to 10% of the global carbon emissions. While 85% of all such clothes end up being dumped off each year (Maiti, 2024), around only 1% of used clothes are recycled or upcycled into new clothes (European Parliament, 2020). Stressing the present state of affairs, the UN Chief Antonio Guterres called for an urgent action to curb the devastating impact of textile industry on the planet, on the International Day of Zero Waste. He emphasized that fast fashion is being produced and discarded at such an unprecedented rate that it can induce an irreversible environmental catastrophe, where an equivalent of one garbage truck worth of clothing is either incinerated or sent to a landfill every passing second (United Nations, 2025). Moreover, the emissions from textile manufacturing alone are projected to skyrocket by 60% by the year 2030 (UNFCCC, 2018). This industry is also regarded as the second-largest excessive consumer of freshwater

resources, requiring 2700 liters of fresh water to make a single cotton t-shirt, enough to fulfill one person's drinking need for the next 2.5 years (European Parliament, 2020). Simply washing clothes releases 500,000 tons of microfibers into the oceans, let alone non-biodegradable synthetic fiber run offs into water bodies, generated from dyeing, yarn preparation and fiber production in textile manufacturing industries (Maiti, 2024). The most toxic one amongst the fashion supply processes is the tanning procedure due to the chemicals including mineral salts, formaldehyde, and various oils and dyes which are non-biodegradable and excessively contaminate water sources (Maiti, 2024). The very process of making cheap textiles from these plastic fibers is a resource-extensive process that requires vast amounts of petroleum (Maiti, 2024). This results in deposition of clothes in landfills for hundreds of years, emission of greenhouses gases into the atmosphere and micro plastic shedding into oceans, making them fatal to plants and animals in vicinity.

In addition to the environmental risks, fast fashion industry poses serious risks for developing economies when wealthier nations shift their impacts to global south particularly low income countries. So, instead of discarding this waste, it is exported to low and middle income countries where they are further processed and sold in the second hand markets and perpetuate the cycle of textile waste, creating immense environmental concerns for the countries of import (Brooks, 2025). UN Chief Antonio Guterres expressed the involvement of developed nations in flooding the global south with garbage, from computers to single use plastics (United Nations, 2025). This waste exacerbates greenhouse gas emissions, water pollution and global warming, leading to rising sea levels and extreme weather events. Fast fashion is at the heart of this problem. The import and the production of vast amounts of fast fashion in under-resourced countries, that are ill-equipped to handle cheap and harmful clothes, creates health hazards and environmental concerns (Dissanayake, 2023).

2.2. Environmental Concerns

Human behavior has largely contributed to multifaceted degradation of the environment stemming primarily from unsustainable practices like overconsumption, resource exploitation and pollution. With rising greenhouse gas emissions, the climate change is intensifying and accelerating at an alarming rate, with frequent extreme weather events like droughts, flash floods, ocean acidification, and rising sea levels (United Nations, 2025). Modern lifestyles have given rise to heaps of waste (including non-biodegradable plastics), water pollution, and the depletion of resources like water and metals (European Parliament, 2025). The swollen climate crisis resulting from human behavior is what necessitates a response in form of Sustainable Development Goals. To achieve SDG 13 (Climate Action) targets – such as integrating climate measures into policies and strengthening resilience to climate-related hazards – requires a dynamic behavioral change (United Nations Environment Programme, 2025). This encompasses moving away from

fossil fuels, adopting sustainable consumption and production patterns, and improving awareness and education.

The United Nation Environment Programme (UNEP) identifies this climate crisis as one of the most pervasive issues making the entire planet vulnerable to its compounding risks, with potentially irreversible impacts – intense heatwaves, rising sea levels, famines, flooding, wildfires and more at a record rate. By 2050, coral reefs could disappear, biodiversity might erode, 90 per cent of coastal cities might submerge in water and up to 70 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa will be forced to migrate. To address the crisis at hand, all stakeholders must work together towards sustainable production and consumption patterns (United Nations Environment Programme, 2025).

Despite measures being taken to make climate sustainability work, the MNC's and Industries present alternatives like climate safe products which fail to deliver the stated impact. While industry continues to debilitate the resources and the environment, the fashion business imprints an exponential depletion of ecosystems, aggravated by the extensive usage of resources (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Instead of traditional 4 seasons, brands produce more than 52 micro-seasons a year, creating a never ending loop of resource overconsumption and waste generation, without any systems of waste management. This industry not only generates more than 92 million tonnes of garbage but also excessively utilizes 79 trillion liters of water per year, leaving a devastating influence on the environment with its resource consumption as well as waste disposal (Niinimäki et al., 2020). The disproportionate water use, the release of vast amount of toxic wastewater and chemicals into the water bodies, open dumping in landfills where synthetic materials take forever to decompose, all contribute to environmental degradation significantly. Moreover, the CO2 emissions have been estimated around 8-10% of global (4-5 billion tonnes annually) greenhouse gas emissions often due to energy-intensive manufacturing of the products. It is undeniably true that the fast fashion industry is famous for providing accessibility to street style trends and for its affordability, but this inexpensive alternative makes consumers overlook its harmful effects, such as excessive production, exploitation of resources and increased waste generation (Fang, 2023). Fast fashion is a massive business and its environmental costs are considerable. It is the consumer attitude towards purchasing fast fashion that can mend or break the sustainability cycle. The looming climate cataclysm requires urgent behavioral shifts and policy interventions to curb the production, consumption and waste generation that fuels environmental degradation.

The unsustainable model of buying in-expensive trendy alternatives, characterized by high production volumes, excessive water usage and substantial textile waste generation, all which are carried out without any compliance with social and environmental standards, necessitate fundamental shifts in production and consumption choices (Rani et al., 2025). Prior literature explored that it was the very

development of fast fashion industry that contributed to the phenomenon of over-consumption amongst consumers which led to unsustainable consumption (Hasbullah et al., 2020). It leaves a detrimental impact on environmental, social and economic well-being that deters responsible consumption behaviors in the face of environment deterioration. This arena demands serious attention because instead of focusing on sustainable practices, it has triggered a different outcome and inadvertently driven to overconsumption (Revlon et al., 2020). Despite tremendous awareness about the alarming effects of chains of production and rapid consumption of fast fashion, consumers continue to remain socially yet psychologically driven to repetitive purchasing episodes and wasteful consumption practices for their primarily social value rather than their functional utility. To understand this dilemma, this research will dig deep into this challenge through a quantitative and a qualitative study:

Study 1:

This quantitative study is positioned to investigate the influence of the three psycho-social triggers i.e. the Bandwagon Effect, Fear of Missing Out and Social Comparison that thrive in the current digital and trend-driven environment, fueling heavy consumer reliance on unsustainable impulsive fashion consumption, despite their awareness about environmental impact of such fashion. Prior researchers have identified a significant gap in the extent to which the consumers bring environmental sustainability into consideration when making buying decisions. Despite expressing a deep concern for the environment and the willingness to purchase green products, consumers end up buying the cheapest and the most convenient product, ignoring the environment component (Elmor et al., 2024). By employing a rigorous quantitative framework, the upcoming section will review the established theoretical relationships of these three constructs and empirically test their influence on unsustainable impulsive fast fashion purchasing amongst Pakistani Millennials and Gen Z.

2.3. Unsustainable Impulse Buying

It is a common human behavior characterized by unplanned purchases driven by multiple factors including emotional, psychological and social etc., often resulting in feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. This buying behavior results from consumer's specific choices, preferences and brand or trend attachments. Kotelr et al. (2005) argues that the motivation for buying and consumers attitude towards a product plays a significant role in framing their decision making process, coming down to either a favorable or unfavorable approach. The individual impulsive buying tendencies for any product is the consequence of psychological factors, behavioral attitudes, social pressures and lifestyle. The phenomenon of unregulated and unrestrained buying is a prevalent aspect of consumer behavior and hyper-consumerism. Despite being regarded an irrational behavior; impulsive buying continues to be a major aspect of consumption realm being strategically capitalized over by companies, and consumers constantly falling in

the trap laid out for them. Studies have found that such irrational buying is the failure of behavioral regulation, overpowering social/psychological triggers and financial resources (Manandhar et al., 2024). Recent researchers have proven that unsustainable impulsive buying influences 20% - 30% of consumer purchasing decisions, with younger consumers aged 18-35 demonstrating higher incidences of such purchase tendencies. Unsustainable consumption constitutes all the things that are not environmentally, socially and economically viable in the long term (Liu, 2023). It stems from a complex interplay of both systemic and individual factors. Factors like the lack of efficient mechanisms to manage and understand the future environmental and social impacts of consumption and policymaker's failure to balance economic growth and environmental consideration leads to choices that favor short-term benefits over long-term sustainability. The pursuit for material goods to fulfil one's needs might not always translate into satiation rather drive excessive consumption further. Lack of awareness and prioritization of environmental issues results in behaviors that disregard ecological impact entirely. Additionally, one's disbelief in the ability to make a meaningful change through sustainable choices can curb them from adopting a more environmental friendly practices. Moreover, unsustainable impulsive purchasing behavior is majorly a result of emotions, digital accessibility, credit availability, social influence and shopping modes (Hamza & Elsantil, 2024). The easy access to market through e-commerce, mobile retailing and cashless payment methods compel consumers to drive gratification through unsustainable overconsumption practices (Gawior et al., 2022), with manufacturers and the consumers being least concerned about the environmental implications of their purchases, minimizing welfare and maximizing resource exploitation in the process. This research tends to explore various psycho-social and unexplored triggers responsible for this in particular impulsive buying behavior.

2.4. Bandwagon Effect

Within consumer context, individual's psychological mechanism of bandwagon surfaces making them follow the trend instead of making independent decisions. Leibenstein (1950) was the first to discuss bandwagon effect in economic terms suggesting that when more consumers buy a product, it becomes attractive to the rest. He defines this effect as the extent to which the demand of a commodity increases for the very reason that others are also consuming the same commodity happens because of their desire to fit in, social pressure or fear of not being part of the majority. In terms of consumer trends, people follow the crowd, involved in environment degrading fast fashion purchasing, believing the group to be well informed, ignoring the environmental impact. Instead of being skeptic about trends, they assume adopting the trend would make them part of the crowd. Individuals purchase based on the popularity of a good and for its immense social value rather than personal preference, believing others could never be wrong and this desire

for social acceptance leads to untenable decisions, resulting in unsustainable consumption frenzies and herd psychology (Altun & Çıldırım, 2025).

Sabir et al. (2020) in their empirical research on young consumers in Sialkot Pakistan, found a strong positive relationship between the bandwagon effect and the consumption of fashion goods, driven out of their fear of being unable to keep up with the trends, revealing that youth make purchasing decisions heavily influenced by the perceptions and preferences of their reference or peer groups. Their social positioning of self, defines their inclination towards a particular group that is largely accepted and validated across social spheres, compelling others to become a part of this group. In form of herds, consumers trail rapidly changing trends so they are not left being behind and missing out, compounding the challenge of collective unsustainable consumption (Chen et al., 2024). Bandwagon propels individuals to conform to trends to avoid feeling socially excluded from the pack, creating anxiety around missing out on social experiences leading to a copious impact on purchasing decisions (Kang & Ma, 2020). As a result, consumers develop high susceptibility to FOMO and their increased attachment to fashion brands, compels them to engage in excessive buying and herd consumption behavior (Asif, 2020).

Hypothesis 1: Bandwagon Effect influences the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO).

Hypothesis 2: Bandwagon Effect influences unsustainable impulsive purchases.

2.5. Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

The Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) amplifies tendencies in consumers to purchase fast fashion, because it induces anxiety and fear in people from socially being excluded and invalidated for their very choice of fashion (Bläse et al., 2023). Bläse et al. (2023) supports that Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) directly increases excessive purchase of fast fashion because consumers buy not because of need, but to avoid exclusion from trends. The very fear of missing out directly boosts the buying of fast fashion and overrides any rational cues such as environmental degradation, product quality and brand credibility. Resultantly, high FoMO consumers rely less on sustainability information and more on impulsive buying of fast fashion items because it induces anxiety about being left behind socially or stylistically. As fast fashion brands and influencers curate a continuous stream of ‘newness’, young consumers experience social pressure to keep up, transforming fashion into a digital race for peer validation, relevance and acceptance, prioritizing social belonging over ethical choices (Bläse et al., 2023). The purchase of limited edition products like Labubu, is driven by the fear of missing out on rare items indicating the role of social pressure on consumption behavior (Rofiah & Arrahima, 2025). The products’ very consumption was due to the fear of missing out on the opportunity to get what rarely shelves the market, social pressure from community and the motivation to gain social recognition. Thus, the fear of missing out (FoMO) creates a sense of urgency prompting

consumers to make unsustainable choices, amplifies their urgency to buy and consume excessively (Hodkinson, 2019).

Yu, Wang and Li (2025) investigated that the fear of being excluded emotionally triggers consumers to such an extent that not only do they engage in compulsive buying but also develop an affinity with their purchased items. The desperation to measure up to the standards of the digital approvals for conforming with the fashion trends develops a psychological charm for fashion items that leads to hoarding of them. Chu (2018) explored that psychological ownership distinctively manifested in compulsive hoarding behavior exhibit consumers' strong emotional attachments to possessions and their perception of the possessions as an extension to themselves. In fashion contexts, as consumers invest more 'the self' into acquiring possessions, they strengthen psychological ownership over fashion items they purchase which in turn intensifies compulsive hoarding tendencies (Yu et al., 2025). But, fast fashion items lead to clutter buildup and are easier to discard when no longer needed also posits a problematic cycle of frequent acquisition and disposal that pose significant sustainability challenges and underscores a need for systemic change in fashion consumption and production (Yu et al., 2025). Hence, consumers impulsively purchase and get rid of fashion items to make space for more, depending on the evolving trend dynamics and social acceptance by the majority, ignoring all environmental challenges arising due to disposal of these garments. There is an intense pressure for validation and social acceptance established through fashion items which gains a symbolic value that signify belonging and success. The constant desire to maintain a social image requires repeated acquisition, leading to excessive consumption, hoarding and bandwagon.

Hypothesis 3: Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) influences Impulsive Buying.

Hypothesis 4: Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) mediates between Bandwagon Effect and Impulsive Buying.

2.6. Social Comparison

Sabir et al. (2020) in their empirical research on young consumers found that social comparison involves individuals' assessment of their social standing based on others' appearances and possessions, leading to increased materialism and conspicuous consumption. Together, these phenomena form a cycle of performative consumerism, where buying decisions are shaped less by need and environmental consideration rather by the desire for digital and social validation, contributing to unsustainable consumption habits among Pakistan's younger generations. It exemplifies that individuals tend to evaluate themselves by comparing their traits, abilities and opinions to those of others. In the context of fast fashion, consumers conduct a self-assessment based on their possessions of fashion items of immense social value, creating an anxiety-driven by fear of exclusion. This becomes a powerful motivator to conform to the

group's style standard and feel an irrational urge to stay trendy like the majority to mend the perceived inadequacy. It is the status and social importance that the possession can bring to a consumer to be validated and socially included. Hence, consumers engage with fast fashion by staying up-to-date with current fashion trends, while ignoring the environmental challenges arising from excessive production, consumption and disposal that leaves a serious impact on the environment (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). They are actively driven to stay current, enabling them to join the race of purchasing up-to-date styles, from which they feel temporary rewarded in form of social alignment and relief from anxiety.

Individuals experiencing high fear of missing out (FoMO) are likely to make more unplanned purchases and indulge in unsustainable buying when they perceive products to be of high social value (Christin et al., 2025). Once a social or symbolic value of a commodity is established, consumers engage in social comparisons which leaves a significant impact on consumption choices. This means that higher an individual's tendency for making comparisons and experiencing FoMO, the greater the likelihood that they will embrace materialism, which encourages impulsive purchasing behaviors. Hence, these comparisons incline a consumer towards extensive unsustainable impulsive buying (Verawati & Anwar, 2025). The strong desire to acquire possessions, that consumers view as high value, make them spontaneous to impulsive purchases which they believe are necessary for immediate gratification and social standing. Their pro-material tendencies make them responsive towards social comparisons which ultimately determines their passion for impulse buying (Pradila & Sari, 2024).

Hypothesis 5: Social Comparison moderate's the relation between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Impulsive Buying.

2.7. Digital Factors; a facilitator of impulsive buying

Increased exposure to digital media ignites the idea that material success is the ultimate criteria for fulfillment, happiness and success (Ozimek et al., 2024) which not only drives social comparison amongst youth but also incites excessive purchasing tendencies. Alalwan (2020) emphasizes that digital platforms such as Instagram and Facebook amplify the cycle by offering instant social validation, pushing consumers to engage in repetitive, impulsive buying behaviors to reaffirm their social relevance. Through online engagement and purchase intention, consumers often emulate influencers or socially superior peers, leading to status-driven consumption. This conformity-based consumption exacerbates the dominance of fast fashion and luxury trends, where identity and worth are symbolically constructed through visible possessions. Alalwan (2020) posits that social media creates an ecosystem that intensifies psychological dependence, impulsive decisions, and trend conformity, making it undeniably a major driver of unsustainable consumer culture among young digital natives.

Moreover, Falajunah & Dewi (2025) in their study explored the influence of psychological and social factors on purchasing behaviors amongst Gen Z Shopee users (Shopee: online shopping platform) in Indonesia. They configured that while low self-control, fear of missing out and materialism significantly contribute to triggering impulsive buying amongst users, pleasure seeking tendencies (i.e., hedonism) and online reviews also play vital roles in encouraging unplanned unsustainable purchases. Therefore, there is a substantial likelihood that digital media coupled with internal psychological effects amplify the consumption behaviors (Falajunah & Dewi, 2025). Resultantly, modern marketplaces shape and reinforce FOMO amongst consumers through social media and user-generated content, and in the process impact users' psycho-emotional states and purchasing behavior (Ulyanova & Tsymbal, 2025). So, digital environment shapes consumers' fashion related behaviors, and missing important events and opportunities induces fear of missing out in individuals, prompting them to engage in purchases to avoid social exclusion. Additionally, digital payment systems like Spendception, reduces the visibility of consumer transactions, leading to increased spending without consumers realizing the financial impact. In this way, diminished visibility of digital payments alter consumer spending perceptions which in turn aggravates their unsustainable impulse buying tendencies (Faraz & Anjum, 2025). Studies on consumer behavior also argue that frictionless purchasing environments like one-click purchasing and seamless checkouts, accelerate the purchase of desirable products and lower the chance of consumers to reconsider their purchase decisions (Kaur & Sharma, 2024). This convenience engineered architecture consequentially enables frequent and unreflective consumption. Such consumer behavior, driven by digital and social imperatives, necessitates a closer examination of the underlying psycho-social mechanisms that link digital engagement with unsustainable consumption patterns in emerging economies (Ciocodeică et al., 2025).

2.8. Theoretical Framework

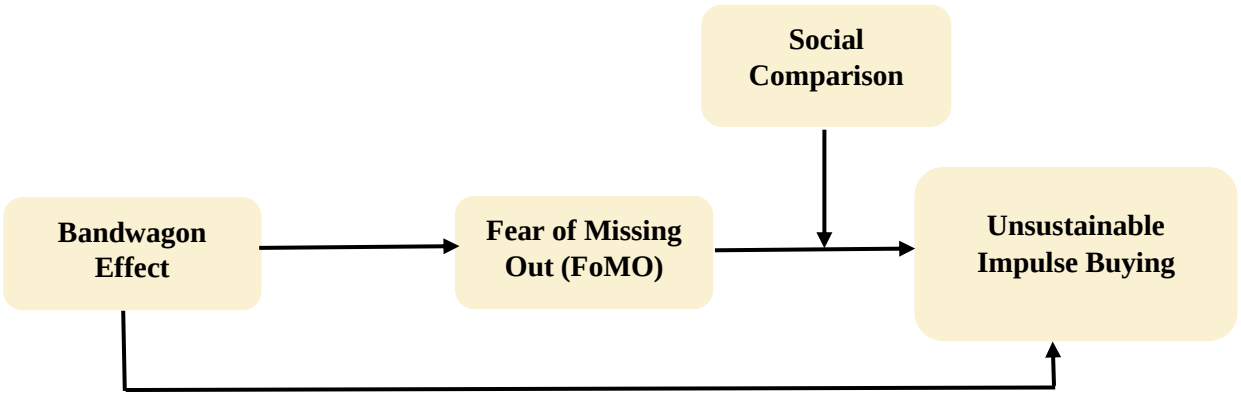


Figure 1: Theoretical Model (Source: Author's Construction)

In the first tier of the study, there is a significant emphasis on how the rise of fast fashion reflects a deep interplay between psychological and social forces such as the Bandwagon effect, the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Social Comparison, which collectively sustain its demand despite rising environmental consciousness shaping Pakistani Millennials and Gen Z purchasing behavior. Herding Behavior is a demonstrable psychological phenomenon where individuals tend to align their preferences or behaviors and affiliate with perceived majorities, while influence of mass media is significant and crucial at the backend in shaping public opinion (Luckhoff, 2021). With higher social visibility of the fast fashion product, greater is the products popularity amongst buyers, often disregarding the actual quality (Knyanzev & Oosterhuis, 2022), fueling the impulse buying of the fast fashion. Wilfred Trotter identified the Herd Behavior in his seminal piece 'Instincts of the Herd in War and Peace' (1914) positing that individuals conform to a particular behavior of the majority without their own sense of direction. Instead of exploring more avenues, alternative ways or information on the matter, they mimic others in their choice of direction assuming it to be a sound judgement and engage in unsustainable impulse purchases. The impulsive purchase tendencies sustain due to another psychological mechanism i.e., the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), that reinforces the Bandwagon Effect, which creates anxiety around being socially excluded and unfitting in the digital bazaar of approvals, for not being up-to-date like the rest. Additionally, Leon Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954) analyzed how digital peer pressure also influences moderate impulsive purchasing intentions, because social media provides a constant, amplified stream of upward social comparison targets (people who appear "better off," more fashionable, or wealthier). This comparison process is fueled by the advertising and idealized images that can make one deem their own possessions insufficient and create a feeling of dissatisfaction towards their assets. This social comparison can eventually intensify the feeling of relative deprivation and social stratification. In this case, consumers might develop an increased interest in buying compulsively, to make up for the absence of goods, leading to unhealthy purchase intentions. The comparison also ignites the already looming fear of missing out on the only socially acceptable trends, eliciting consumers to actively jump on the trend and become part of the better lot of the society.

Environmental concerns and ethical consumption maybe outweighed by other needs and desires shaping the daily decisions and actions of consumers (Touchette & Nepomuceno, 2020). These few psychological mechanisms play a key role in driving unsustainable purchase behavior amongst many Millennials and Gen Z. Bläse et al. (2023) also asserts that FOMO acts as the emotional trigger, social comparison as the psychological mechanism, and the bandwagon effect as the behavioral outcome. Together, they explain why young consumers continue unsustainable purchasing despite sustainability awareness. This triad fuels impulsive consumption**,** where purchases are driven by social approvals and optics, not intrinsic need and environmental considerations.

Study 2:

This qualitative study explores the influence of subjective processes that create a significant disconnect between the environmental awareness and actual buying behaviors particularly pronounced among Pakistani consumers. Therefore, the subsequent review will set the context for an in-depth qualitative exploration of psycho-social triggers behind the immediate gratification through unsustainable impulse fast fashion buying, while overriding all ethical concerns and environmental sustainability information. In addition to the aforementioned triggers playing a significant role in driving unsustainable purchasing choices towards the buying of fast fashion, there are a number of unknown mechanisms unexplored to be studied in this second tier of the research.

2.9. Climate Safety/Environmental Sustainability

The ecological balance of the world is headed towards destruction due to a number of factors, including urbanization, technological development, hazardous waste from factories, air and water pollution etc., all primarily stemming from human activities. These factors disrupt the natural habitats of various species, steering the planet towards ecological risks and biodiversity loss (Gaur et al., 2024). The rise in global population and the demand for materialistic lifestyles has fostered excessive consumptions that seems to have no limit. The materialistic values and purchasing patterns lead to excessive production and consumption of goods which harms the environment through resource exploitation and waste generation (Orecchia & Zoppoli, 2007). Consumers continue to make choices that are known to be environmentally harmful despite considerable awareness of the impact and there is no indication of consumption reaching a point of satiation. There is an intention-behavior gap that results in unsustainable consumption of catastrophic nature, the consequences of which are very harmful. Given that, they choose to act based on convenience, cost or societal norms without fully realizing the environmental impact of their decisions (Thøgersen, 2014). In a prior study conducted in Malaysia on sustainable fashion consumption, researchers found that regardless of whether consumers believe sustainable fashion delivers high value and worthy of investment, there is an attitude-behavior gap, where purchasing behaviors often override environmental considerations at the point of purchase (Hasbullah et al., 2022). While being generally knowledgeable about the purchasing decisions, the awareness never truly translates into widespread sustainable fashion practices. This disparity exists even though consumers recognize the environmental degradation, the convenience and accessibility of fast fashion maintains its dominance over the purchasing decisions (Hasbullah et al., 2022).

Despite growing consumer preference for sustainable products due to increasing environmental awareness and climate change concerns, their positive attitude does not always translate into purchasing decisions. There exists a significant gap between consumers' intentions to purchase climate-safe products and their actual buying behavior, often due to perceived high costs, lack of availability and inadequate knowledge, which hinders consumers from making sustainable choices (Panchasara, 2024). There is an attitude-behavior gap that emerges due to a large number of external stimuli which differ from region to region and generation to generation (Carrington et al., 2010). The consumer intentions fail to translate into purchases irrespective of increasing awareness and calls for pro-environmental behavior, which is paradoxical given the concerns about sustainability (Bialkova, 2025). It is important to note that social contexts and interactions significantly impact the relationship between intentions and implementation, suggesting that simply having pro-environmental intentions is not enough to ensure eco-friendly purchasing, the intentions should be reflected in behaviors to bridge the intention-behavior gap (Willows & Grimmer, 2013).

2.10. Hyperbolic Discounting

Hyperbolic Discounting is a behavioral economic concept that describes an accurate representation of human behavior and inconsistent decision making over time. This inconsistency is associated to the psychological perception of time, value and the uncertainty of the future gain that results in rapid loss of subjective value of delayed rewards. In terms of consumption, individuals tend to be more inclined towards immediate benefits like impulsive consumption of fashion items towards which they feel a strong urge to buy, over delayed or future benefits like saving money for a better commodity or environmental sustainability. George Ainslie's (2012) explanation of hyperbolic discounting in his work on Pico economics and self-control explicated that human preference for smaller and immediate rewards is ignored for a larger, future promised reward when both choices are dragged further into future. This concept highlights reduced individual's perception of value of future rewards, because of their temporal proximity resulting in irrational decisions regarding future utility, leading individuals to perceive future utility as decreasing (Nir, 2004). The impatience causes individuals to make irrational decisions, due to a number of psychological and social triggers (which could be in multiple cases digital too), that makes them prioritize short-term gratification over what would be beneficial for them in the long run. The overabundance of fashion items can create fatigue around decisions, making consumers impulse buy for immediate emotional rewards. Consumers seek to engage in low effort decision immediately to escape the confusion of choice from overly saturated retail environments (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). Hence, when purchasing fast fashion, consumers are inclined towards instant gratification from immediate reward of purchase, leading to

impulsive buying tendencies. In the process, they forego the future rewards like environmental conservation, better budgeting and efficient decision making. This environmental ignorance can be a very calculated move to avoid accountability for the damage resulting from their unsustainable choices.

2.11. Strategic Environmental Ignorance

The deliberate avoidance of information or choice to stay ignorant about the ecological impact of one's actions is done to feel better when making a selfish choice is strategic or willful ignorance. It is a deliberate and selfish choice to avoid consequences and escape guilt of acting selfishly or immorally. This behavior is driven by positive self-image of oneself while engaging in profit generating outcome. By choosing to ignore the environmental impact, one creates a moral wiggle room creating a space to justify one's choice by remaining ignorant to avoid the moral obligation that comes with a choice like that (Lind et al., 2018). Impulsive buying often involves limited deliberation, negotiation and a reduced search for products environmental impact. Consumers tend to deliberately ignore the environmental impact to justify their impulsive consumption. Matthey and Regner (2011) posit that a choice to stay ignorant increases prevalence of willful ignorance, with a strong desire to escape responsibility, and lowers levels of generosity to such an extent that ignorance becomes the default choice. This is particularly relevant for impulsive purchases because they are a product of low cognitive control and instant gratification. When consumers buy impulsively, they choose to ignore the environmental consequences, gaining them a moral wiggle room which allows them to rationalize their impulsive purchase, thus avoiding responsibility and reducing immediate guilt. There are a number of internal and external influences impacting individual decisions regarding environmental responsibility. Consumers often believe possession of material objects contribute to life's satisfaction, enabling them to overcome regret (Ozdamar Ertekin et al., 2020) they possibly have regarding their unsustainable purchases, resultantly regarding their behavior as rational. Such consumers train their brain to develop strategies to silence their conscience around actions by framing them as acceptable (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Through rationalization strategies, consumers reduce the cognitive dissonance that arises from knowing about environmental implications of excessive fast fashion buying by internally justifying their purchases (Rosely & Syed Ali, 2023). Most consumers ignore information about the negative environmental impacts of their actions, allowing them to engage in less pro-environmental behavior. Their ignorance diminishes the likelihood of taking responsibility for their carbon emissions and stronger tendency for information avoidance (Thunström et al., 2014). There is a desire to escape responsibility when the personal cost of being generous rises, leading to the motivation for remaining ignorant. Hence, this ignorance transforms the uncomfortable choice into a guilt-free unsustainable splurge purchase behavior.

2.12. Psychological/Social Triggers

Unsustainable Impulsive Buying is a complicated human behavior influenced by a number of psychological and social factors. Individuals with low self-control struggle to resist instant gratification and are compelled to buy spontaneously. Irrational consumption behavior can be observed in case of emotional lows and discomfort, compelling consumers to ease out their distress through consumption (Atalay & Meloy, 2011). In addition, in order to avoid any future guilt that a consumer might experience as a result of failure to buy something that they desired at an instant (Gilbert & Wilson, 2005). Thus, to avoid feeling that consuming guilt, people end up making the purchase that might not even fulfil a functional need or have enough utility. Such buying behaviors are more prevalent in digital settings creating mixed emotions such as regret, satisfaction, and dissonance, a key to regulating emotions for many consumers (Kalpana & Krishnan, 2025). Unsurprisingly, the rapid growth of social media use significantly influences buying behaviors in shaping materialistic values, where passive consumption of digital content constantly increases the drive to accumulate possessions (via online shopping) and compare them with others (via social media). This kind of social media use can be very addicting (Andreassen & Pallesen, 2014), especially in form of reading comments, viewing influencer profiles and paying frequent attention to what's trending – affecting consumer well-being, leading to stressful experiences and poor mental health – in absence of which one would otherwise feel discomfort. Once absorbed by the social media, consumers highly inclined towards material possessions become more prone to bringing attention to superiority or inferiority of circumstances, instigating social comparisons. These comparisons foster unhealthy relationship between consumers and fashion items (Bick et al., 2018), leading to impulsive purchases to feel inclusive and validated. Additionally, at times, when more self-investment (money, time, effort) goes into selection and purchasing of up-to-date fashion items, stronger the psychological connection consumers build with the acquisition and hoarding of fashion items.

2.13. Conceptual Framework

Impulsive consumers are by far more inclined towards immediate gratification of their psychological yearning through impulse buying, while ignoring all the greater future benefits like environmental sustainability and decent consumption behavior. This primarily results from reduced perception of the value of future gains because the immediate gains seem way more valuable. Despite considerable awareness about the environmental safety and the need for sustainable practices, which form the future rewards, consumers engage in strategic environmental ignorance to escape the consequences or guilt around their excessive consumption habits. Therefore, most consumers neglect environmental impact of the fast moving consumer goods and prioritize immediate benefits through impulse buying. When

influenced by cognitive accessibility, they always end up choosing a less eco-friendly path (Elmor et al., 2024), like impulsive buying.

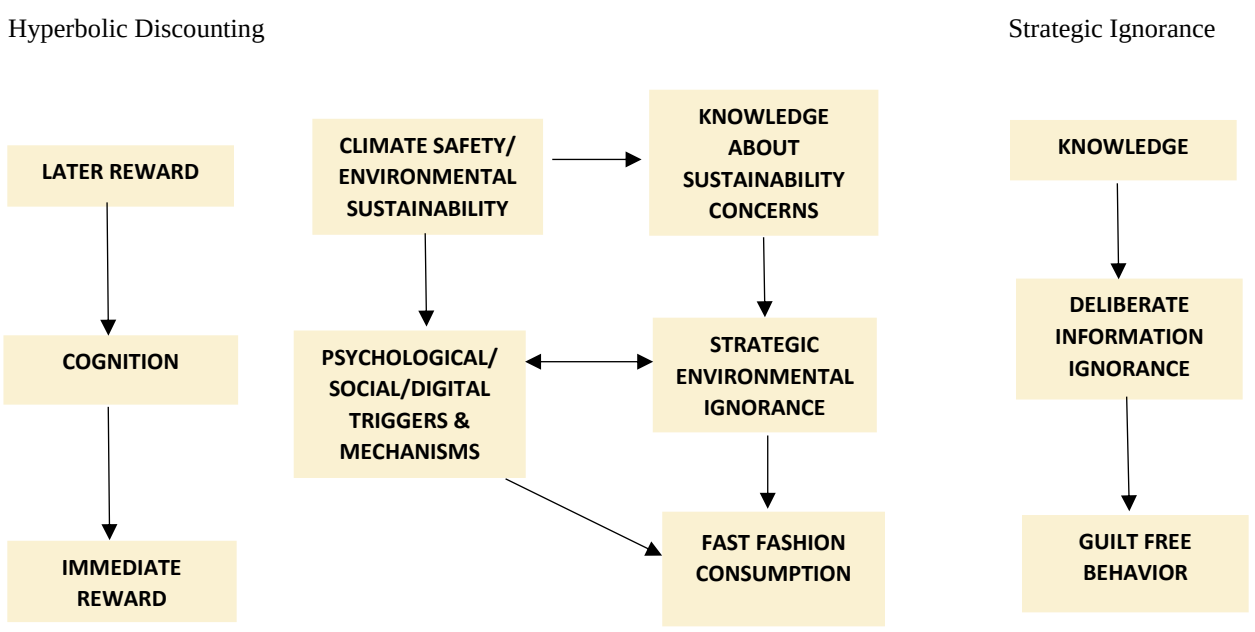


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework (Source: Author's Construction)

2.14. Gap in the Existing Literature

Despite tremendous global documentation and research on fast fashion industry's increasing involvement in the environmental degradation, there is a significant gap in the existing literature to understand why environmental awareness remains insufficient in the face of unsustainable consumption – particularly in developing countries with emerging and growing textile markets. Despite recognition of environmental degradation, the convenience, opportunity and accessibility to fast fashion overrides sustainable purchasing decisions of consumers (Hasbullah et al., 2022). The existing literature underscores the role of psycho-social triggers like Bandwagon Effect, Fear of Missing Out and Social Comparison in driving the consumers towards impulsively purchasing trends **(**Sabir et al., 2020, Bläse et al., 2023, Pradila & Sari, 2024). The effect of these triggers on fast fashion consumption despite knowledge about environmental deterioration emerging from overconsumption and overproduction of fast fashion, has not been a focus of examination within the Pakistani landscape – especially with a focus on Pakistani Millennials and Gen Z – leaving a gap that this study pursues to fill. Furthermore, while the triggers have been studied in isolation, this study seeks to explore the impact resulting from the interaction between these triggers and the consumer behavioral changes witnessed across the two generations.

Additionally, there are a number of reasons giving rise to consumption, but exploring the drivers of fast fashion consumption and why awareness regarding sustainability concerns does not really translate into pro-environment behavior in the domestic landscape, remains almost absent from the academic literature. Pakistan holds a complex social design with changing expectations and obligations of the society. These expectations and social networks play a tremendous role in rationalizing one's consumption choices and engaging in fast fashion purchasing. The context-specific drivers of unsustainable fast fashion consumption have not been captured in studies previously conducted, especially with awareness about growing environmental concerns in the country and contribution of the fast fashion industry in expediting this degradation. The absence of literature in this regard shows a meaningful gap that calls for a qualitative study that addresses the reasons for fast fashion consumption through thematic analysis grounded in the lived experiences of Pakistani Millennials and Gen Z consumers. Moreover, Strategic Environmental Ignorance through which environmental awareness fails to trickle down to sustainable behavior remains unexplored, particularly in fast fashion context in Pakistan. While the awareness-action gap has been studied extensively (Willows & Grimmer, 2013), the processes through which consumers neutralize their purchase guilt and rationalize their consumption while deprioritizing environmental consideration, have not been examined through the lens of Pakistani fast fashion landscape. This study bridges the gap by offering both quantitative schema of psycho-social influences and qualitative accounts of unexplored mechanisms due to which environmental awareness remains dissociated from being translated into their consumption behavior. Hence, this research provides a contextually grounded understanding of fast fashion consumption where awareness of environmental concerns is not absent rather actively sidelined.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A path through which researchers formulate a research problem, an objective for the study and the right means to present their findings from the gathered data, is referred to as a research methodology (Sileyew, 2019). To expand further, the RQ2 is meant to be explored through study 1 while RQ3 by study 2. In this section, the research methodology outlines the approach towards gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data. It includes the following components:

3.1. Research Design

A research design is meant to provide an appropriate framework though which a research approach is decided upon since it determines how relevant information is to be collected for a particular study (Sileyew, 2019). For this purpose, a descriptive research is conducted through a mixed-method approach utilizing both research instruments i.e. survey and interviewing. The insights into RQ1 and RQ2 are developed through a quantitative study while the RQ3 is addressed using the qualitative study. The purpose is to examine the influence of psycho-social triggers on consumer's fast fashion buying tendencies and to understand why consumers opt for instant gratification through impulsive buying and engage in willful environmental ignorance, that aggravates the unsustainable compulsive consumption practices amongst Pakistani Millennials and Gen Z. Qualitative data was collected through interviews with Millennials and Gen Z. Whereas, quantitative data was collected through a consumer survey, disseminated online to be filled by Pakistani Millennials and Gen Z.

3.2. Research Approach

A blueprint or plan, emerging from both research purpose and questions, by which a certain activity of data collection and the interpretation of the information found is carried out is called a research strategy (Malhotra, 2017). To comprehend the research approach at hand, it is of primary importance that its two tiers of study are explicitly understood:

Firstly, a deductive strategy has been utilized in the first study to explain the decisions that can be framed from already established knowledge. This approach initiates the study from hypothesis testing built out of existing theories (Wanji et al., 2025) of herd behavior and social comparison. It is applied because it contributes to a better understanding of the impact of psycho-social triggers like bandwagon effect on the fast fashion impulsive buying tendencies, the effect of fear of missing out (FOMO) as the mediating entity on the buying behaviors and the moderating role of social comparison in inciting urges for unsustainable

impulsive behaviors amongst Millennials and Gen Z. The goal is to explore the role of psychological mechanisms in influencing consumers need to stay trendy by purchasing fast fashion and resulting behavioral outcomes that lead to unsustainable compulsive consumption.

Secondly, an inductive approach towards the second study is applied to explore the interdependencies of multiple behaviors that drive the researcher to broader generalizations and ideas (Blois, 2022). Here, the inductive approach seemed a good fit to identify the unexplored psycho-socio triggers and mechanisms for instance, digital media use in driving compulsive buying behaviors amongst fast fashion consumers, and willful environmental ignorance despite tremendous awareness regarding the impact of fast fashion consumption on environments sustainability. The focus of study is on exploring the cognitive factors and their contribution in exacerbating consumers need to express their identity and gain social validation through the purchase of fast fashion items, ignoring all significant environmental considerations.

Lastly, a mixed-method approach is employed, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research focus using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The frequency of bandwagon, fear of missing out (FoMO) and social comparisons to explain consumer's compulsive consumption, is meant to be explored using the quantitative approach for understanding their purchasing preferences. Whereas, a qualitative approach is used to investigate the impulsive consumption driven out of consumers need to attain immediate gratification from unsustainable impulsive buying tendencies and ignoring pro-environmental practices.

3.3. Methods of Data Collection

Data collection entails a significant point in research where the approach towards collecting data determines what a researcher intends to find and later design research instruments to implement what needs to be known. This encompasses a number of ways like structured interview, used in survey investigations, which involves a host of survey questions meant to explore the research questions (Bryman, 2012). Other methods include participant observation and semi-structured interviewing that sanctions a researcher to explore broad avenues of what a researcher needs to know about. Once method is identified, the researcher can determine how open ended or close ended the implementation of the method is (Bryman, 2012). Following are the methods of data collection used for the 2 study tiers of the research:

3.3.1. Method for Study 1

The purpose of online consumer survey was to explore the individual perceptions and behavior of Gen Z and Millennials when it comes to buying fast fashion unsustainably. The goal was to examine the frequency of the psycho-socio triggers i.e., bandwagon effect, fear of missing out (FOMO) and social

comparisons to understand the impact of these mechanisms on the unsustainable buying tendencies of consumers. The purpose was to explore the role triggers in creating a demand for fast fashion driving social comparisons which in turn influence impulsive consumption decisions of Millennials and Gen Z. For this very reason, a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions was developed and circulated online via different social media platforms.

For the study 1, the survey has been adapted to collect responses using Likert Scale from both Millennials and Gen Z. The suggested model is validated using trustworthy metrics adapted from previously validated scales. To ensure the variables and their influence on impulsive buying is measured properly, the scale for bandwagon effect (Eastman & Iyer, 2023), the fear of missing out (Przybylski et al., 2013) and social comparison (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999) have been adapted to measure the impulsive buying behavior (Rook & Fisher, 1995).

The scale was adapted in accordance with the current research requirements, without sacrificing the intended meaning of the questions. For this purpose, the scales were first identified and the selected from the existing literature based on their relevancy. This step is important in determining the reliability and validity of constructs in contemporary consumer behavior research (Churchill, 1979). After selecting these scales, the survey questions used a processual methodological approach, a recommended practice in existing researches. This approach encompasses the identification of the frame of reference. For this study, the unsustainable fast fashion purchase was defined as the reference to shape these scales. Within the stated context, the scale items were rephrased in context of fast fashion consumption and psycho-social triggers, while consistently upholding the respondent comprehension, Pakistani generational context, theoretical relevance and semantics of the original constructs (DeVellis, 2017). Each statement was adapted by replacing the general words with language that is specific to fast fashion consumption, to ensure that the construct being measured – whether bandwagon effect, fear of missing out, social comparison or impulse buying behavior, should retain its intended meaning throughout the survey. Once this step was successfully completed, each contextually adapted item was cross-checked for its relevance with the source scale, to confirm the meaning being communicated is valid post word replacements (Hair et al., 2019). Rather than recreating scales from the scratch, this structural procedure of scale adaptation is highly prioritized in consumer behavior research due to the ease of such scale developments. This process is widely accepted because theoretical items are operationalized using a structural procedure, while ensuring a purposeful scale is developed without compromising the intended meaning (Hinkin, 1995).

3.3.2. Method for Study 2

The goal of interviews was to investigate the unexamined psycho-social triggers, that override any awareness regarding the environmental impact of unsustainable consumption, and compel Pakistani

consumers to impulsively buy the latest trends. The primary rationale for utilizing in-depth interviews in the research is to gain a deeper understanding, of the psycho-social elements that drive unsustainable buying behaviors, allowing the interviewer to understand the participant's subjective experiences comprehensively. The selection criteria for the interviewing includes Pakistani Millennials and Gen Z, because they make up the perfect proportion of the population that is impulsively buying less-environment friendly up-to-date fashion.

A semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions was designed to facilitate discussion regarding consumer's emotional triggers that lead to social comparison, psychological stimuli, which further impulsive purchase tendencies despite environmental awareness. Interviews were supposed to be conducted by both online and offline means depending upon interviewees convenience.

3.4. Unit of Data Collection

A unit of data collection is an entity, element or a group from which the data is gathered and which constitutes the focus of the entire study (Morin et al., 2021)). The selection of appropriate tools and methods for effective data collection enhance the reliability and validity of the data (Slater & Hasson, 2024). For this research, the data has been gathered through primary sources to gain a deeper and reliable understanding of how individuals psychological mechanisms drive unsustainable impulse fast fashion purchases. Additionally, the primary data collection focused on psychological and social factors responsible for exacerbating the problem of fast fashion consumption amongst Pakistani Millennials and Gen Z, despite a handsome awareness about the environmental concerns these purchases raise. Hence, the data has been collected from individual consumers [Millennial: 1981 – 1996; Gen Z: 1997 – 2012] for understanding psychological mechanisms, self-reported perceptions and intentions towards buying Fast Fashion, measuring the frequency of bandwagon effect, fear of missing out and social comparisons. Furthermore, interviews have been conducted to explore the unobservable factors responsible for driving the unsustainable buying practice amongst Millennials and Gen Z.

Table 1: Survey Respondents (Source: Author's Construction)

Generation	No. of Respondents	
Gen Z	248	
Millennial	89	
	337	Total

Table 2: Interview Respondent Profile (Source: Author's Construction)

Sr. No.	Code	Age	Gen	Gender	Fast Fashion consumption	Brand experience	Current Status
1	R1	21	Generation Z	Female	Impulse buyer of jewelry and phone cases and buys fashion that suits her. Believes there is no point in buying useless trends	Sapphire, Ethnic	Currently pursuing BS
2	R2	22	Generation Z	Female	Not a spontaneous buyer of trends, but buys a lot according to her taste	Batik, Ethnic, Sapphire	4th year MBBS student
3	R3	22	Generation Z	Female	Her mother spontaneously buys for her, really likes fashion, a difficult shopper, takes forever to decide	Abpara, F7, Breakout, outfitters, KOA	4th year MBBS student
4	R4	23	Generation Z	Female	Spontaneous buyer, really likes spending money on clothes, jewellery and anything that catches her eye	Lama, Outfitters, Zara, Ethnic, Khaadi, Outfitters, CrossStitch	4th year MBBS Student
5	R5	24	Generation Z	Female	Frequently buys, atleast once or twice a week, borrows money for purchases if she has to	CrossStitch, Sapphire,	Actively pursuing MPhil
6	R6	26	Generation Z	Female	Buys occasionally, on sales or when something really nice catches her eye, but does not mean she will buy it no matter what	Batik, Insignia, Outfitters, Lama	Presently pursuing MPhil with 2 years of work experience
7	R7	27	Generation Z	Female	Spontaneous Buyer. Buys whenever she likes something without affordability concerns. Sees something, likes it and just orders it. Does not repeat if something is not looking good on her, rather discard it.	Ethnic, Sapphire, Outfitters, Nike	Actively pursuing MPhil

8	R8	26	Generation Z	Female	Spontaneous Buyer but is slowly shifting towards rational buying, buys what looks good on her	AghaNoor, Khaadi, Sapphire	Presently pursuing MPhil with a couple of months of work experience
9	R9	23	Generation Z	Female	Buys thrice a year only. Does not follow trends, only buys what she likes. Impulse buys when she makes some money, likes to buy shirts, trousers and lipsticks.	Outfitters, Ethnic, Ego	Presently pursuing MPhil
10	R10	28	Generation Z	Female	Consciously putting an effort to not over purchase. Likes trends but does not follow them. Very picky.	Ethnic, Sapphire, Beachtree, Generation	Currently working as a Research Associate
11	R11	28	Generation Z	Male	Buys 2-3 times in a month. In addition, he is involved in a lot of thrifting. Attracted to colors. Ends up always buying after trying outfits.	Outfitters, Cougar, Sunday Bazaar	Currently pursuing MPhil with 6 months of work experience
12	R12	24	Generation Z	Male	Buys frequently, aligns with trends sometimes. Makes unplanned purchases.	Uniworth, Cambridge, Monarch	Currently pursuing MPhil
13	R13	24	Generation Z	Female	Shops based on changing seasons, possesses likeness for trends, buys clothes she likes if her budget allows, comfort is her priority.	Sapphire, Ethnic, Generation	Currently pursuing MPhil
14	R15	29	Generation Z	Female	Not a frequent buyer, but buys for occasions, for sales and under social influence	Commercial, Saddar, Khaadi, Borjan, ECS, Ethnic, Sapphire	Currently employed with 2.5 years of teaching experience

15	R14	31	Millennial	Female	Buys 5-6 outfits per season but purchases when the styles good. Impulse bought on multiple occasions.	Zara, Ethnic, Sapphire, H&M, Marks and Spenser, Khaadi, Bandana, Koa, Generation	Currently working as a Research Associate
16	R16	31	Millennial	Female	Buys makeup impulsively, rest does not buy from brand with ethical issues	Sapphire, Nishat	Employed at an NGO with 7 years of work experience in development sector
17	R17	37	Millennial	Female	Buys out of need, is a working lady so goes out to shop to look presentable, does not adopt trends.	Centaurus, Alkaram, Ideas, Limelight, Aneelas	Employed as a Teacher with 13 years of work experience
18	R18	32	Millennial	Female	A discount that feels like too good to miss, pauses before buying to not spend unnecessarily, trends capture her attention but she buys what compliments her personal taste	Khaadi, Beachtree, Batik, Sapphire, RangJa	Currently pursuing MPhil
19	R19	42	Millennial	Female	Never misses sales, hoards a lot of outfits for future events, outfit repetition is rarely sighted, believes shopping is the charm of life.	Sapphire, Khaadi, Nishat	Employed as teacher with 4 years of work experience

3.5. Sampling

Sampling signifies collecting data from a smaller targeted group of individuals or a representative subset of larger population instead of the entire group (Miller & Whicker, 1999), aiming to eliminate bias

and ensure generalizability (Slater & Hasson, 2024). Following are the sampling techniques utilized for both study 1 and study 2 of this research:

3.5.1. Sampling for the Quantitative Study

The study 1 of this research employs criterion-based purposive sampling to select respondents who meet specific, pre-defined criteria relevant to examining the influence of psycho-social triggers i.e. the bandwagon effect, the fear of missing out and social comparison. Purposive sampling allows researchers to deliberately select participants based on their relevance to the research objectives and their ability to provide valuable insights (Memon et al., 2020). This highly effective method has been purposefully chosen to gather focused and relevant insights that directly address the impulsive buying behaviors driven due to the aforementioned psycho-social triggers. This method is particularly interesting because participants who are selected and central to the study should share the same characteristics to meet the purpose of the research (Memon et al., 2020).

The predefined inclusion criterion for this study is the age component, filtering Pakistani Millennials (1981 – 1996) and Gen Z (1997 – 2012) sample from the rest of the population, which is directly relevant to the research objectives. The participants were required to be from given age frame to provide most informed perspectives and to ensure their insights were directly relevant to the study's focus (Memon et al., 2020). This threshold ensures that the selected participants i.e., Millennials and Gen Z are the most appropriate sample to yield data regarding the impact of psycho-social triggers in driving impulse buying of fast fashion to ensure meaningful insights.

The data collection was conducted over a period of 1 month i.e. January 2026. The survey was disseminated online to be filled by the respondents and their networks falling in the defined age frame were approached online. Two filter questions were included at the start of the survey to confirm the respondent's eligibility, asking, 'Are you a Millennial or a Gen Z?' and 'Do you have an awareness about the environmental challenges of ones buying behaviors?' This screening ensured that respondents are aligned with the predefined criteria, upgrading the sample for relevance and precision (Memon et al., 2020).

3.5.2. Sampling for Qualitative Study

The study 2 of this research utilizes criterion-based purposive sampling to filter out the most relevant individuals for the interview purpose. This sampling concedes researchers to deliberately select participants in accordance with the relevance to their research objectives and ones that bring the most valuable insights to address the research problem (Memon et al., 2020). Through this method of sampling, we can ensure that every individual gets an equal chance at selection and a chance at reliable response about

the psycho-social triggers that induce impulsive buying of fast fashion, despite an awareness about the environmental consequences of their purchasing tendencies.

Based on that, a pre-defined inclusion criterion to sample the most relevant participants for the study was established within a particular age frame because it can secure the most indispensable responses about the additional domestic psycho-social triggers hurl them into buying fast fashion, despite tremendous awareness about the environmental concerns that their purchases raise. Hence, Pakistani Millennials (1981 – 1996) and Gen Z (1997 – 2012), irrespective of gender, are sampled out for the Interviews because they make the most appropriate and representative individuals under the heavy influence of factors like digital media, psycho-social triggers, social media comparison and unexplored triggers.

The reason to sample the two age groups resides in these generations i.e. 'digital natives' with increased engagement rates across multiple digital media platforms. Their high exposure to digital transactions, product marketing, social media platforms and online shopping makes them highly susceptible to impulse purchases driven by digital influences. Additionally, this age bracket includes individuals who are at a crucial stage of establishing their careers and navigating their social identity formation. Their high exposure to continuous consumption cycles fuels social pressures, driving the need for constant wardrobe updates, thus accelerating the fast fashion cycle. This makes them highly vulnerable to the psychological and social needs (e.g., status signaling, sense of belonging, instant gratification etc.) that triggers their impulsive fast fashion consumption in the face of significant environmental awareness.

3.5.3. Sample Size

The final sample size for the quantitative study was determined using the G Power sample size calculator. The confidence interval was set at 95 percent and effect size at 0.15. The suggested sample was 129. Further, the rule of thumb for selecting sample size states that number of questions in a survey instrument can be multiplied by 10 which in case of this study is 270. Therefore, this study considers 270 as the appropriate representation of the population since it is well above the recommended sample size generated by the G-power. The entire sampling process, from disseminating survey to receiving the final responses, took approximately 1 month. This survey necessitated the responses from diverse perspectives and behaviors that trigger the impulsive buying of fast fashion.

Thus for the quantitative study, the survey responses were collected from a total of 337 Pakistani Millennials and Gen Z respondents. Initially, the targeted sample size was set at 270, but upon disseminating the survey online, 337 responses were received. Given that a larger sample size reduces sampling error and improves the reliability of the data (Hair et al., 2019), the 337 responses received were retained for further analysis. This decision was consistent with the methodological practice in quantitative researches, where

surplus of responses are treated as a methodological asset of the study because they strengthen the reliability of the findings.

For the qualitative part, the sample for the interviews was not fixed, rather strategically flexible to align with the core principle of qualitative rigor i.e. achieving thematic saturation. This meant that no new or relevant psycho-social themes, triggers, or justifications for impulsive fast fashion purchasing were emerging from the interview data. This ensured that the findings were rich, comprehensive, and fully captured the spectrum of experiences and motivations within the target population, lending strong credibility to the qualitative findings.

Thus for the qualitative study, the interviews were conducted with 19 Pakistani Millennials and Gen Z respondents. These interviews were conducted until thematic saturation was established – the point where additional responses ceased to generate new themes or conceptual insights besides those which were already identified in the previous interviews. As the interviews progressed, it became evident that participant responses converged around consistent thematic patterns, with no new information emerging from successive responses. Hence, the data collection was concluded when information obtained was sufficient to fulfil the study's research objectives.

Moreover, the interview respondent profile sample comprised of a higher female participation compared to 2 male participants. This imbalance in the composition of the qualitative sample emerged due to the purposive sampling strategy designed around the generational rather than gender based comparisons. The primary objective of the research was to compare the influence of psycho-social triggers on the unsustainable fast fashion consumption across Millennials and Generation Z. This qualitative study prioritized participant selection guided by generational preferences rather than gender representation. Since the study was not focused on examining influence of psycho-social triggers on individual genders, both female and male respondents of the study were equally capable of providing valuable accounts of their unsustainable consumption of fast fashion. The participation of male participants ensured inclusion of male perspectives within the wider discussion, while the findings remained focused on examining the influence of psycho-social triggers across generations rather than across genders. A meaningful examination of gender differences would have required a separate sampling strategy, more balanced representation across genders and substantially expanded the scope of the research beyond its stated objectives. The participants were selected irrespective of the gender, with more emphasis placed on their relevance to research objectives, their awareness of environmental concerns and the influence of psycho-social triggers on their unsustainable consumption.

3.6. Analysis

3.6.1. Survey analysis: SEM modeling (SPSS/PLS)

The survey was analyzed using the SEM Modeling, which is a statistical method normally used in social sciences (Bhattacherjee, 2012) to identify and test relationships between multiple variables and for modeling theoretical frameworks. For this purpose, the relationship between the variables like bandwagon effect, fear of missing out and social comparison was tested to understand their impact on the unsustainable impulsive buying behaviors. SEM-PLS was employed to extract the multivariate qualities of the data to ease the analysis of the measurement and structural models.

3.6.2. Interview analysis: Thematic Analysis

The interview responses were analyzed using a qualitative technique to identify patterns and themes in the text form of data. It involves a systematic approach to conduct thematic analysis of interview transcripts due to its ability to provide rich, detailed, yet complex analytical accounts (Garrydilger, 2022). For this purpose, the unexplored elements facilitating the impulsive buying tendencies in consumers were identified for their contribution towards unsustainable buying. This analysis encompasses familiarizing with data, to combining codes to identifying themes, searching for supporting and refuting data and ultimately culminating the data in the final report (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The interviews were conducted keeping the respondents consent in consideration, and upon completion transcribed and translated as well. Upon collection, to further understand and build familiarity with the data, it was repetitively visited to identify and interpret the varying factors affecting the unsustainable buying of fast fashion amongst both generations. The transcripts of both generations were separated into different folders in order to avoid confusion.

The thematic analysis of the detailed interviews was carried out through an easy to follow 6-step of Braun and Clarke Method (2006):

1. **Familiarization with the collected data:** After transcription and translation, the analysis required familiarization with the corpus of the collected data, about the varying experiences and psycho-socio triggers experienced by Millennials and Gen Z, through maintaining notes that were made during the process and reviewing and revisiting the data.
2. **Generating codes:** An initial manual coding where a special code will be assigned to a section of text which would define what was said in the text.
3. **Identifying a theme:** Using these codes, several themes will be identified, regarding environmental awareness and consumer buying philosophies, extracted from the interview guide. Rubin & Rubin (2012), described these themes as “summary statements, causal explanations, or conclusions.” In case

there are new themes, about the psycho-social triggers influencing consumer buying behaviors, identified within the collected data, additional coding for these themes will be done as well.

4. **Reviewing themes:** The list of already established codes is utilized to understand the similarities and differences and draw patterns among the already existing themes and processes. This method is open to wide interpretations of all the themes already laid out in the survey and the ones identified through the collected data.
5. **Defining themes:** The validity and reliability of these themes will be ensured by determining that it resonates with the research questions. Once it is well aligned, the finalized themes will be defined and represent the data in the most optimum way.
6. **Producing the report:** The most relevant quotations regarding consumer experiences and awareness to be selected for the final writing process. Hence, the most representative quotes that represent the essence of the phenomenon will be utilized.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS & RESULTS

4.1. STUDY 1: QUANTITATIVE STUDY

The rise in production and consumption of Fast Fashion continues to leave a significant imprint on the changing environmental landscape especially in the developing countries where oversight and waste management systems are highly inefficient. The over-consumption of fast fashion is understood to be driven out of multiple psycho-social triggers that significantly influence the buying tendencies of consumers. The purpose of this quantitative analysis is to examine the impact of psycho-social triggers, i.e., Bandwagon Effect, Fear of Missing Out and Social Comparison, on Pakistani Millennials and Gen Z consumers' need to stay trendy and their role in exacerbating the problem of impulsive fast fashion consumption, despite a handsome awareness about the environmental concerns their purchases raise. The data collected through dissemination of an online survey was subjected to Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using the SmartPLS4 software because it encompasses the contemporary standards, making it a great tool of choice for complex models with multiple constructs and high impact research (Kang et al., 2025).

PLS-SEM method was an optimal choice for this research because of its ability to identify key drivers of the target constructs like Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Impulsive Buying Behavior (IBB) (Darwisman, 2025). It is highly efficient and powerful in determining the hypothesized effects of the constructs; BE, FOMO, SC, even if the sample size is small but adequate. Once the data was collected and prepared, the analysis of the model was managed in two sequential stages. Only after the satisfactory measurement model was established, the analysis procedure moved towards structural model evaluation, where hypothesized relationships between BE, FOMO, SC and IBB and models explanatory power was evaluated. The evaluation and interpretation of the model, constructs and indicators were conducted as follows:

4.1.1. Stage 1: Measurement Model Evaluation

The primary goal of this stage is to substantiate that the indicators used for each construct (BE, FOMO, SC, IBB) are reliable and valid. This is when a credible and well-supported measurement model becomes a necessity to make meaningful interpretation of this study's structural model. For this, a systematic assessment of three main features is carried out to explain the measurement quality: indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability and construct validity (both convergent and discriminant).

1) **Indicator Reliability** of the model is assessed by examining the 'outer loadings' which represent the correlation between construct (variable) and each of its indicators (survey questions). The construct Bandwagon Effect is represented through BE and the indicators which explain the construct BE are BE1, BE2, BE3 and BE4. By examining the outer-loadings of the Bandwagon Effect, the reliability of the indicators that explain the Bandwagon Effect construct are justified. The ideal threshold for outer loadings is 0.708 and the value should be greater than this number as it ensures that over 50% of variation in indicators is explained by the construct (Hair et al., 2022). This signifies that the indicator is mostly measuring the construct intended to be measured. Having value above 0.708 means that indictors are robust and completely aligned with the construct they are supposed to measure (Darwisman, 2025). In case any indicators are falling below 0.40, they shall be eliminated from the model (Darwisman, 2025). Table 3 allows us to examine the indicators specific to their constructs and their outer loadings measuring their intended constructs.

Table 3: Outer loadings before removal and after removal of Indicators

3(a)

Indicators	Outer Loadings
BE1 ← BE	0.808
BE2 ← BE	0.822
BE3 ← BE	0.827
BE4 ← BE	0.794
FOMO1 ← FOMO	0.775
FOMO2 ← FOMO	0.825
FOMO3 ← FOMO	0.860
FOMO4 ← FOMO	0.857
FOMO5 ← FOMO	0.840
FOMO6 ← FOMO	0.591
IBB1 ← IBB	0.764
IBB2 ← IBB	0.731
IBB3 ← IBB	0.805
IBB4 ← IBB	0.795
IBB5 ← IBB	0.811
IBB6 ← IBB	0.755
IBB7 ← IBB	0.620
IBB8 ← IBB	0.704
IBB9 ← IBB	0.049
SC1 ← SC	0.740
SC2 ← SC	0.784
SC3 ← SC	0.792
SC4 ← SC	0.833
SC5 ← SC	0.776
SC6 ← SC	0.791
SC7 ← SC	0.813
SC8 ← SC	0.760

3(b)

Indicators	Outer Loadings
BE1 ← BE	0.808
BE2 ← BE	0.819
BE3 ← BE	0.829
BE4 ← BE	0.793
FOMO1 ← FOMO	0.801
FOMO2 ← FOMO	0.843
FOMO3 ← FOMO	0.877
FOMO4 ← FOMO	0.853
FOMO5 ← FOMO	0.838
IBB1 ← IBB	0.780
IBB2 ← IBB	0.747
IBB3 ← IBB	0.819
IBB4 ← IBB	0.794
IBB5 ← IBB	0.821
IBB6 ← IBB	0.746
IBB8 ← IBB	0.685
SC1 ← SC	0.739
SC2 ← SC	0.784
SC3 ← SC	0.792
SC4 ← SC	0.833
SC5 ← SC	0.777
SC6 ← SC	0.790
SC7 ← SC	0.812
SC8 ← SC	0.759

According to Table 3(a), majority of the indicators supporting and explaining their specific constructs exceed the 0.708 threshold which signify that constructs explain more than 50% of the variance in the indicators, suggesting strong reliability. The Bandwagon Effect (BE) and Social Comparison (SC) constructs are very robust, with all loadings well above the threshold level. Whereas, the outer loadings for the indicators the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) i.e. FOMO6 and for the Impulse Buying Behavior (IBB) i.e. IBB7 and IBB9 fell below the stated threshold levels. As a result, they are considered to be noise in the data and their removal boosts the internal consistency of the constructs. Table 1 shows the indicators before their removal, whereas table 2 presents the indicators after the removal. Hence, Table 3(b) shows the outer loadings for all the indicators that are reliable and measure their specific constructs.

2) **Internal Consistency Reliability** measures the reliability of indicators ensuring that every indicator is measuring a specific underlying construct assigned to it. For this purpose, Cronbach's Alpha is the preferred metric for the assessment because it acknowledges and assesses how closely are indicators related to one another, with a recommended threshold of 0.70 or higher.

Table 4: Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
BE	0.828	0.830	0.886	0.660
FOMO	0.898	0.898	0.924	0.710
IBB	0.887	0.896	0.911	0.596
SC	0.912	0.914	0.928	0.618

Table 4 shows that all 4 constructs (BE, FOMO, IBB, SC) show excellent internal consistency reliability because every single value is above the recommended threshold of 0.70. Hence, confirming that the indicators (survey instrument) for Bandwagon Effect (BE), Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Impulsive Buying Behavior (IBB), and Social Comparison (SC) are consistently measuring the same underlying constructs, making them stable and reliable.

3) **Construct Validity** seeks to ensure that a scale actually measures the specific concept it claims to measure. In PLS-SEM, validity is identified through a two-step process: convergent and discriminant validity.

3.1 Convergent Validity:

This stage assesses the degree to which a set of indicators intended to measure a specific construct correlate or share a high proportion of variance (dispersion around the mean value). The primary metric for this is the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) to be 0.50 or higher, which confirms the construct to be more than half of the variance of its indicators, a necessary criterion for validity (Darwisman, 2025). To establish validity AVE>0.5. Table 2 shows the AVE for all the constructs to be greater than 0.5 representing that on average the constructs explain more than half of the variance of its indicators i.e. the convergent validity

exists. Hence, just like Bandwagon Effect BE explains more than half of the variance in its indicators, similarly all other variables explain the variance in their indicators too.

3.2 Discriminant Validity:

This step ensures that each construct in a model is statistically unique and explains a phenomenon distinct from other constructs. In this study, it confirms that when the construct BE is being assessed, it explains a phenomenon that does not overlap and is completely different from phenomena of SC, FOMO or IBB. In SEM Modelling, the Fornell-Larcker Criterion is widely considered to be a standard for establishing discriminant validity. According to the Table 4, the AVE for the 4 constructs are BE: 0.660, FOMO: 0.710, IBB: 0.596 and SC: 0.618. The Fornell-Larcker rule states that the square root of the AVE for each construct must be higher than its correlation with any other construct. When this condition is satisfied, it indicates that a construct shares more variance with its own indicators, than with other constructs, confirming discriminant validity. For every column, the top (diagonal) value must be higher than all the values below it. If it is, then the validity of the constructs in the model have been successfully justified.

Table 5: The Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	BE	FOMO	IBB	SC
BE	0.812			
FOMO	0.588	0.843		
IBB	0.455	0.592	0.772	
SC	0.641	0.786	0.599	0.786

The Diagonal: These are the square roots of the AVE that was calculated earlier.
The Off-Diagonal: These are the correlations between constructs.

Table 6: The Fornell-Larcker Criterion Results

Construct	$\sqrt{AVE}$	Highest Correlation in Column	Status
BE	$\sqrt{0.660} \approx 0.812$ (for BE)	0.641 (with SC)	Supported
FOMO	$\sqrt{0.710} \approx 0.843$ (for FOMO)	0.786 (with SC)	Supported
IBB	$\sqrt{0.596} \approx 0.772$ (for IBB)	0.599 (with SC)	Supported
SC	$\sqrt{0.618} \approx 0.786$ (for SC)	0.786 (self-correlation)	Supported

Detailed Analysis:

For the Bandwagon Effect (BE), the square root of its AVE is 0.812. Since 0.812 is greater than 0.588, 0.455, and 0.641, BE is a distinct construct and that respondents did not confuse it with another concept. There exists a lot of differentiation between these constructs because the urge to follow a trend (BE) and the anxiety around it (FOMO) is statistically very different from the actual act of impulsive purchasing (IBB). For the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), the square root of its AVE is 0.843. This is higher

than 0.592 and 0.786. Hence, FOMO is distinct ensuring that the model successfully separates the emotional state of anxiety regarding missing out from the physical behavioral response of an unplanned purchase or social comparison with others. For the Impulsive Buying Behavior (IBB), the square root of its AVE is 0.772, which is higher than 0.599. IBB is distinct. It suggests that the tendency to compare oneself to others is a unique precursor that is statistically separate from the behavioral outcome like impulsive buying. For the Social Comparison (SC), the square root of its AVE is 0.786. Since this is the bottom of the matrix, across its row it is higher than (or equal to) all associated inter-construct correlations i.e. BE, FOMO, and IBB.

Hence, discriminant validity here ensures that a construct is unique and encapsulates phenomenon that other constructs in the model do not. This analysis provides strong empirical evidence that the respondents were able to distinguish between different kinds of questions and perceived these constructs as different ideas. For instance, they didn't confuse "wanting to buy what others buy" (BE) with "buying on a whim" (IBB) or "drawing comparisons amongst age fellows" (SC) with "following the trends that others follow" (BE). Based on the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the analysis supports discriminant validity. While the constructs are theoretically and statistically related, they are distinct concepts. The model successfully differentiates between the psychological drivers (BE, FOMO, SC) and the resulting behavioral outcome (IBB). This marks the end of the measurement model, validated completely to this point, making the analysis reliable enough to proceed to the structural model evaluation phase.

4.1.2. Stage 2: Structural Model Evaluation

Once the measurement model of this study is established and rigorously validated, it's important to evaluate the structural model for assessment. It is a standard metric for an assessment that ensures the stability of the results if the VIF value for each predictor construct is strictly below 3.0, though 5.0 is sometimes acceptable (Darwisman, 2025). By the use of Bootstrapping tool in the SmartPLS4, the significance of all model parameters can be estimated. It begins with examining the structural model for the following:

1. **Collinearity Testing:** This acts as a significant setback when two or more predictor constructs, like BE, FOMO and SC, are exceedingly correlated, as this can artificially intensify standard errors, destabilize the path coefficients and draw flawed conclusions about hypothesis tests. This is where the 'Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)' comes in. The fulfilment of this criteria, prior to hypothesis testing, indicates that multi-collinearity is not an issue in the structural model. The test carried out ensured if the predictor variables of the study like the Bandwagon Effect, Fear of Missing Out and Social

Comparison are too similar to one another to create a bias within the interpretation of the hypothesized results.

Table 7: Collinearity Statistics: Measuring the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

Indicator	VIF
BE1	1.821
BE2	1.836
BE3	1.831
BE4	1.683
FOMO1	2.032
FOMO2	2.577
FOMO3	2.908
FOMO4	2.796
FOMO5	2.569
IBB1	1.795
IBB2	2.135
IBB3	2.503
IBB4	2.096
IBB5	2.403
IBB6	1.893
IBB8	1.580
SC1	1.789
SC2	2.064
SC3	2.422
SC4	2.726
SC5	2.011
SC6	2.258
SC7	2.464
SC8	2.084

The collinearity assessment test conducted using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), in table 7, show all values ranging from 1.580 to 2.908. Because all values of the indicators are below the stringent 3.0 threshold and distinct enough to represent their respective constructs without redundancy issues, there is no indicator co-linearity, let alone multi-collinearity. This confirms that multi-collinearity does not create partiality in the models path coefficients, which represents the strength and direction of relationship between constructs and their indicators. Hence, each indicator is uniquely and perfectly contributing value to the measurement of its construct (variable). In short, all indicators for Impulsive Buying Behavior i.e., IBB1, IBB2, IBB3, IBB4, IBB5, IBB6 and IBB8, uniquely contribute value to IBB.

Table 8: Collinearity Statistics – Inner Model

Model Pathways	VIF
BE → FOMO	1.000
BE → IBB	1.761
FOMO → IBB	2.909
SC x FOMO → IBB	1.129

The collinearity test carried out to assess the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) in the inner model, refers to the relationships between the constructs themselves, demonstrate distinctiveness of the predictor variables (BE, FOMO, SC) ensuring they do not exhibit multi-collinearity and the model accurately identifies the specific influence of each variable on Impulsive Buying Behavior (IBB). According to Table 8, all values are perfectly acceptable and since all values are within the given requirement, the model is deemed stable enough to interpret the hypothesized paths.

Having verified that multi-collinearity is absent, it can be accrued that the model is stable and reliable. Consequently, the analysis proceeds to its primary stage i.e. critical assessment of the significance of the hypothesized relationships using the bootstrapping procedure.

2. **Hypothesis Testing:** Bootstrapping technique, a non-parametric technique primary to structural model evaluation, is applied to test the significance of the hypothesized path relationships by generating p-values for each path coefficient (β) in the model (Darwisman, 2025). The path coefficient characterizes the strength and direction of the relationship between the constructs (variables). The model and the path dependencies of the constructs can be understood from the final path model illustrated in the figure 3:

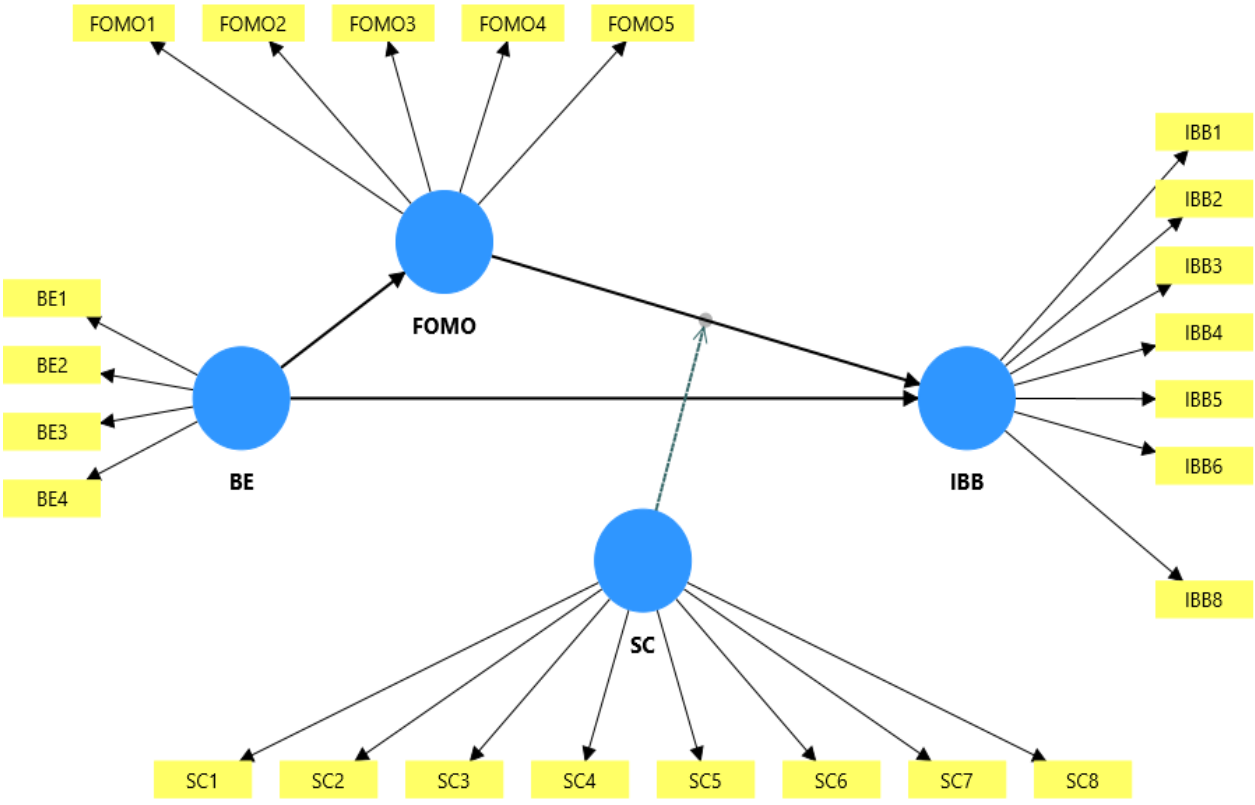


Figure 3: Structural Model for the Theoretical Framework

A hypothesis will be statistically significant if its corresponding p-value is less than 0.05. Table 9 provides the hypothesis testing result and the final evidence derived from the bootstrapping technique. It provides the statistical basis for testing the hypothesis and determining which of the hypothesized relationships are statistically supported.

Table 9: Reporting Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	P-Values	Decision
H1	BE → FOMO	β = 0.588	0.000	Supported
H2	BE → IBB	β = 0.084	0.215	Not supported
H3	FOMO → IBB	β = 0.263	0.005	Supported
H4	BE → FOMO → IBB	β = 0.155	0.006	Supported
H5	SC x FOMO → IBB	β = -0.075	0.071	Not supported

The relationship between **Bandwagon Effect** and **Fear of Missing Out** (H1: BE → FOMO; β=0.588, p<0.05) shows the strongest positive relationship, indicating a strong positive influence. It suggests that when BE increases, it influences the fear of being excluded within people, significantly increasing their chances of having a FOMO. The given results provide a strong statistical evidence for positive relationship between BE and FOMO constructs. Hence, the hypothesis stands true and strong for this pathway.

The relationship between **Bandwagon Effect** and **Impulsive Buying Behavior** (H2: BE → IBB; β=0.084, p=0.215) shows a weak direct relationship potentially suggesting that there is no direct effect of BE on IBB rather it is primarily mediated through FOMO. Hence, the evidence does not support a direct path from BE to IBB.

The relationship between **Fear of Missing Out** and **Impulsive Buying Behavior** (H3: FOMO → IBB; β=0.263, p=0.05) shows that FOMO has a positive impact on IBB. When people fear missing out on experiences that others find valuable, they tend to buy more impulsively. Hence, FOMO influences peoples buying behavior. The results provide a strong statistical evidence supporting a direct and strong path between FOMO and IBB constructs.

The relationship between **Bandwagon Effect**, **Fear of Missing Out** and **Impulsive Buying Behavior** (H4: BE → FOMO → IBB; β= 0.155, p<0.05) shows that FOMO plays a mediating role here. BE drives IBB by creating FOMO amongst the consumers. People do not purchase impulsively because everyone else is engaged in the purchase, rather they do so because the urgency and necessity framed around a trend, creates a fear of being left behind, which then triggers the purchase.

The relationship between **Social Comparison** and **Fear of Missing Out** on **Impulsive Buying Behavior** (H5: SC x FOMO → IBB; β= − 0.075, p>0.05) did not meet the threshold for significance, suggesting Social Comparison does not positively moderate the effect of FOMO on impulsive buying in this model. Rather it influences FOMO to leave a completely different influence on IBB.

3. Once a structural model is evaluated and the its core relationships proven statistically significant, it's important to assess its Explanatory Power (how much it explains) to prove the model actually matters in the real world (Darwisman, 2025).

Explanatory Power R^2

The R^2 (Coefficient of Determination) shows the expanse of the process. It measures the proportion of variance in dependent variables (like FOMO or IBB) that is explained by the predictors of these constructs, signifying the in-sample explanatory power of the model. It seeks to find that "Of all the reasons people buy things unsustainably, what percentage is caused by the variables in the given model?" According to Table 10, when $R^2 = 0.346$ for FOMO, the model explains 34.6 % of variance in FOMO. This is a moderate to substantial effect, showing that social pressure, peer influence and trend conformity is a primary cause of FOMO. When $R^2 = 0.407$ for IBB, the model explains 40.7% of variance in Impulsive Buying. Hence, the model depicted a solid portion of variance, confirming the relevance of the chosen predictors and characteristic strength of the model because it properly explains the consumer behavior.

Table 10: Explanatory Power: Variance in Dependent (Endogenous) Variables

Variable	R-square	R-square adjusted
FOMO	0.346	0.344
IBB	0.407	0.400

However, R^2 does not explain which specific variable is the heavy lifter, rather f^2 effect size is utilized to clarify which variable excessively influences the target construct. This is because it measures which indicator has the most muscle, adds a unique contribution and supports the involvement of the indicator in driving the assumed behavioral outcome.

Effect Size f^2

Reporting f^2 is a prerequisite to distinguishing between relationships that are statistically significant and those that are also practically meaningful. Table 11 provides information about the effect size of the predictor. An individual predictor will have a small effect if $f^2 \geq 0.02$, medium effect if $f^2 \geq 0.15$ and large effect if $f^2 \geq 0.21$ (Darwisman, 2025).

Table 11: Effect Size of the Predictors

Predictors	f-square
BE → FOMO	0.529
BE → IBB	0.007
FOMO → IBB	0.040
SC x FOMO → IBB	0.011

The model explains that BE is the most substantial predictor in the model showing a large effect size (f^2 =0.529) on FOMO. It means that BE is the dominant predictor in this process and has the most influence in driving FOMO within respondents. In short, it is the most critical factor in creating FOMO. Conversely, FOMO and SC were significant predictors of IBB, their unique effect sizes were small, indicating that they are part of the broader set of influences. In case of FOMO, it means that FOMO is significant but has small unique contribution to the final purchases. Similarly, SC contributes to impulsive buying but it is a secondary driver. The effect size f^2≥0.011 where SC moderates FOMO is very negligible. Hence, for people who might engage in high levels of Social Comparison, FOMO has a very small impact on their buying. While SC is a significant moderator, its unique contribution to the variance is very small, suggesting other environmental or personal factors influencing impulsive buying.

Once the hypothesized paths are validated and their strengths evaluated, it is important to run a mediation and moderation analysis to check for the variables specific to these analysis types to explore the influence of variables on one another in driving a particular outcome that the research seeks to explore.

4. Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis is powerful tool to add theoretical depth to study by explaining the process through which an effect takes place. It is defined by indirect effect and meant to understand the underlying mechanisms of a relationship. It explores the mediator variable that intervenes in the casual pathway of a predictor variable and an outcome variable. To test the mediating role of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) between the exogenous construct Bandwagon Effect (BE) and endogenous construct Impulsive Buying Behavior (IBB), a mediation analysis is conducted using the bootstrapping technique, and a significant result confirms the presence of mediation.

Table 12: Specific Indirect Effects; Confidence Interval (Evaluation of Pathway)

Pathway	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Bias	CI 2.5%	CI 97.5%
BE → FOMO → IBB	0.155	0.158	0.003	0.045	0.265

If the range between the LLCI and the ULCI does not include zero, the mediation is statistically significant. If a range includes zero (e.g., -0.05 to 0.15), it means there is a mathematical possibility that

the mediation effect is negative. Because the entire range (0.045 to 0.265) is entirely above zero, there exists 95% confidence that a positive mediation effect truly exists.

To test the mediation hypothesis BE →FOMO →IBB, a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was used to generate 95% confidence intervals for the indirect effect. The results indicate that FOMO significantly mediates the relationship between the Bandwagon Effect and Impulsive Buying Behavior ($\beta = 0.155$). This is confirmed by the 95% confidence interval [LLCI = 0.045, ULCI = 0.265], which does not include zero, indicating a statistically significant indirect effect at the $p < 0.05$ level. This confirms that Bandwagon Effect does not compel people into making purchases just because everybody else is engaged in the activity. It specifically works by triggering a fear of being excluded (FOMO), which further drives the impulsive purchase amongst the consumers.

5. Moderation Analysis

To test for and understand conditional effects for a relationship, moderation analysis is utilized. The moderator, here SC, is a variable that alters the strength or even the direction of a relationship between 2 variables. According to the study's data and hypothesized pathways, Social Comparison acts as a volume knob and moderates the relationship between FOMO and IBB. To test this relationship, an interaction term is created, i.e., SC x FOMO, and then significant path coefficient on the dependent variable IBB is assessed. A significant interaction effect will confirm that the relationship is not constant but contingent upon the moderator.

From table 9, negative path coefficient ($\beta = -0.075$) for SC x FOMO → IBB indicates a negative interaction effect. The relationship was not supported which shows that SC is not a factor leading towards IBB when people are feeling FOMO. The negative sign indicates a weakening effect, signifying that higher levels of Social Comparison would theoretically weaken the positive impact of FOMO on IBB. The interaction is statistically non-significant and the hypothesis is not empirically supported. The relationship between FOMO and IBB stays constant regardless of whether a consumer's level of social comparison remains high or low. This means FOMO drives IBB for everyone with the same strength, regardless of how much consumers compare themselves to others.

The findings of the study empirically evidence the mediating role of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in the relationship between Bandwagon Effect (BE) and Impulsive Buying Behavior (IBB). The result discloses that the Bandwagon Effect does not simply trigger a trend-copying purchases, rather it inculcates anxiety around being excluded i.e. FOMO, which further serves as the primary driver for Impulsive purchases. It is the dominant mechanism through which social trends translate into consumer action. The inclusion of Social Comparison (SC) as the moderator generates interesting results. While SC was expected

to amplify impulsive behavior amongst the people, the negative interaction term revealed a counter effect. Despite the general assumption about individuals with high levels of Social Comparison as 'brand-conscious', their urge to buy impulsively might be moderated by another force that makes them evaluate whether their purchase aligns with the desired social status or curated identity. Whereas, those who are less likely to socially compare, may lack the status-filter, leading to more direct and impulsive reactions when FOMO is triggered. In short, while the BE significantly predicts IBB, this relationship is largely indirect, operating through the FOMO bridge. The push of the crowd is most effective for impulse buying when it generates a fear of exclusion and missing out on experiences that others are having, though this intensity is largely conditioned by the consumer's level of social comparison.

6. Multi Group Analysis (MGA)

In order to draw generational differences between Gen Z and Millennials, Multi-Group Analysis is conducted using SmartPLS5. This comparison is drawn to explicate how the impact of psycho-social triggers on the impulse buying differs for both generations. (Note: $p<0.05$: significant results).

Table 13: Bootstrap Multi Group Analysis for Gen Z (Group 1) & Millennials (Group 2)

Pathways	Original (Group_1)	Original (Group_2)	t value (Group_1)	t value (Group_2)	p value (Group_1)	p value (Group_2)
BE → FOMO	0.571	0.649	12.239	11.131	0.000	0.000
BE → IBB	0.059	0.155	0.769	0.954	0.442	0.340
FOMO → IBB	0.225	0.384	2.296	1.688	0.022	0.091
BE → FOMO → IBB	0.129	0.250	2.246	1.708	0.025	0.088
SC x FOMO → IBB	-0.071	-0.061	1.432	0.794	0.152	0.427

6.1 Bandwagon Effect → Fear of Missing Out

The BE strongly influences FOMO in both generations. When people observe others purchasing frequently changing trends and switching between styles, they feel an anxiety around staying behind and failing to experience what is familiar to most people. This fear of being excluded from a meaningful experience drives them to become part of majority. Hence, when a group of people is engaged in buying trending products, it induces FOMO within many other consumers. This effect is stronger for Millennials ($\beta = 0.649$) than for Gen Z ($\beta = 0.571$).

Group	β	p value	Interpretation
Gen Z	0.571	0.000	Significant
Millennials	0.649	0.000	Significant

This suggests that social conformity cues strongly trigger FOMO across generations. Millennials may increasingly be more responsive towards the bandwagon effect, which reinforces feelings of exclusion. Their desire to bandwagon translates into an intense fear of missing out.

6.2 Bandwagon Effect → Impulsive Buying (IBB)

The Bandwagon Effect does not directly influence unsustainable impulsive buying for either generation.

Group	β	p value	Interpretation
Gen Z	0.059	0.442	Not Significant
Millennials	0.155	0.340	Not Significant

Although individuals may notice trends being constantly updated and adopted by others coupled with a feeling of social pressure, bandwagon cues alone do not trigger impulsive buying within people. Instead, a likely involvement of psychological mechanism FOMO indirectly drives their influence. This means that social influence must first create emotional urgency before leading to impulsive buying.

6.3 Fear of Missing Out → Impulsive Buying (IBB)

For Gen Z, FOMO significantly increases unsustainable impulsive buying. This psychological trigger greatly influences them to engage in impulse buying of constantly changing trends. For Millennials, this relationship is not significant.

Group	β	p value	Interpretation
Gen Z	0.225	0.022	Significant
Millennials	0.384	0.091	Not Significant

This suggests that Gen Z is more vulnerable to FOMO-driven consumption in comparison to Millennials. Gen Z has an increased exposure to social media trends and environment. They have rather more familiarity and interest in the shifting trends. The constant visibility of emerging trends and frequent exposure to rapidly evolving styles creates psychological pressure to make a purchase impulsively. That compulsion leads to the unplanned and unsustainable impulse buying. But as the generation matures and develops greater financial responsibility, despite experiencing FOMO, Millennials may exercise greater purchase control due to higher decision maturity and cautious financial behavior. This implies that while both generations feel FOMO, only Gen Z converts that anxiety into immediate, impulsive purchases.

6.4 Mediation: Bandwagon Effect → Fear of Missing Out → Impulsive Buying (IBB)

For Gen Z, the Bandwagon Effect significantly drives IBB and this results from triggering an emotional response like FOMO amongst the consumers. Without FOMO, the BE would have much weaker impact on IBB and will not induce unplanned purchases. Because the consumer feels anxiety around being excluded, they make the purchase to alleviate the feeling. For Millennials, this relationship is not significant.

Group	β	p value	Interpretation
Gen Z	0.129	0.025	Significant
Millennials	0.250	0.088	Not Significant

The Millennials appear less affected by the Bandwagon Effect inducing an impulse purchase pressure. This BE does not create FOMO within the millennials, possibly due to a number of reasons like greater financial planning, numerous priorities, responsibilities and reduced reliance on social validation. Hence, the effect could potentially be non-existent.

6.5 Moderation: Social Comparison x FOMO → Impulsive Buying (IBB)

The interaction between Social Comparison and FOMO does not significantly influence impulsive buying for either generation.

Group	β	p value	Interpretation
Gen Z	-0.071	0.152	Not Significant
Millennials	-0.061	0.427	Not Significant

Although both variables individually influence behavior (particularly for Gen Z), their combined moderating effect is not supported. This indicates that FOMO and social comparison may operate independently rather than reinforcing each other in driving impulsive purchases. The generational differences in the determinants of unsustainable impulsive buying are visibly stark. While FOMO and SC significantly influence Gen Z's purchasing decisions, these factors leave a less significant effect among Millennials, suggesting that younger consumers are more susceptible to social and emotional triggers in digital consumption environments.

Moreover, the data was also analyzed to understand the consumer awareness. It highlights a considerable environmental awareness amongst consumers regarding the massive production and consumption of fast fashion and the environmental foot print it holds. Table 14 shows the extent to which consumers are aware of the impact:

Table 14: Awareness About the Environmental Impacts of Fast Fashion Across the Generations (Source: Author's Construction)

Generation	Awareness	Total
Generation Z	228	246
Generation Y	83	86

The findings indicate that an overall high-level of environmental awareness regarding the impacts associated with the mass production and consumption of fast fashion across both generations.

Table 15: Awareness of Environmental Impacts Associated with Fast Fashion

(Source: Author's Construction)

Environmental Impact	Recognized
High water consumption in textile production	135
Chemical spill over polluting local waterways	176
Excessive landfill waste from discarded clothing	126
High carbon emissions from global shipping and rapid production	140
Micro-plastic shedding from synthetic fabrics (like polyester)	143

The survey respondents demonstrated an awareness of multiple environmental consequences associated with the fast fashion industry. According to table 15, the most frequently identified impact was the chemical spill over in the local waterways accounting for a total of 176 mentions. This was followed by 143 mentions of an awareness of micro-plastic shedding from synthetic fabrics, 140 mentions for high carbon emissions from global shipping and rapid production, 135 mentions for high water consumption in textile production and 126 mentions for excessive landfill waste from discarded clothing. While environmental awareness appears to be widespread among consumers, particularly regarding the impacts of fast fashion, it does not automatically assure that they will reduce their consumption or make more sustainable and environmental friendly choices.

While the current quantitative data highlights that Bandwagon Effect, Fear of Missing Out, and Social Comparison trigger the unsustainable buying in consumers, it does not fully capture the specific lived experiences, emotional states and environments that lead to a consumption amongst Gen Z and Millennials. They have the necessary environmental awareness, but it fails to be reflected in their consumption behavior. Hence, to explore other unforeseen psycho-social reasons influencing both generation's behavior, this study will transition into a qualitative study. Through in-depth inquiry, the research will map the diverse experiences and reasons that the statistical model alone cannot fully articulate.

4.2. STUDY 2: QUALITATIVE STUDY

While, the psycho-social triggers i.e., Bandwagon Effect, Fear of Missing Out and Social Comparison discussed in the quantitative study explained their wide contribution to unsustainable buying amongst Pakistani consumers. This qualitative study seeks to explain additional and relatively unexplored factors contributing to unsustainable buying of fast fashion amongst the two generations; Millennials and Generation Z. The purpose of the study is to examine what factors are responsible for influencing the unsustainable consumer engagement with fast fashion. This section provides a comprehensive analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with a total of 19 respondents belonging to both generations. The purpose of these interviews was to gather in-depth qualitative data regarding the respondents' consumption, behaviors and purchasing patterns associated with fast fashion consumption.

The thematic analysis is put together through an examination of recurring patterns, ideas and shared experiences, extracted directly from the interview data. This thematic chart (Table 16: Annexure 1) signifies a major theme, corresponding subthemes, codes that have repetitively emerged and supporting excerpts obtained from the in-depth interviews. These subsequent themes and subthemes were generated through a comprehensive understanding of participant perceptions, attitudes and behaviors in association with fast fashion consumption. The chart illustrates the factors that contribute to continued engagement with unsustainable fashion. The target is to demonstrate how the consumption is frequently manifested amongst Gen Z and Millennial consumers, contrasted with the levels of environmental consciousness.

The data was thematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage method, which provided a systematic approach to identifying, analyzing and reporting recurrent patterns across the responses (Table 17: Annexure 2). Through repeated reading of the interview transcripts in the stage 1, familiarization with the data was developed allowing for an in-depth understanding. In the stage 2, recurring expressions, patterns were identified and grouped as codes. In the third stage, these codes were examined for broader patterns, from which themes were developed like social approval, peer pressure, emotional regulation, fear of product unavailability, influencer and peer endorsements that drive the consumption of fast fashion, which were consistently reflected across the data sets. These themes were further defined and reviewed against the study's stated research objectives to ensure the relevance and coherence was intact. By the end, a thematic report was generated to present each theme supported by the most illustrative respondent quotes, providing transparent grounding in the interview data.

Theme 1: Factors Influencing the Unsustainable Buying of Fast Fashion Amongst Generation Z

The Psycho-Emotional Factors

The analysis of Gen Z responses reveal that there are numerous immediate emotional and psychological reasons that override environmental considerations amongst the environmentally aware Gen Z consumers. It has been observed that the unsustainable fast fashion consumption is frequently a result of emotionally-biased decision making, rather an ignorance of environmental issues. These emotions create distress, making instant emotional gratification a key driver of continued over consumption. The responses showed that purchasing decisions amongst Gen Z are shaped by short-term emotional states rather than functional need of the product. One of the respondents R4 shared her experience from a stressful episode during her exam season which made her end up making a purchase:

"I think it happens in extreme exam stress, that I order something, and I realize later that, oh my god, I didn't need this thing, and I wasted a lot of money on this thing. But it's very rare, because I think everything that I've ever bought, has always come in handy for me…Sometime because emotions are out of the place, and you don't understand anything."

The respondent R4, a 23-year-old Gen Z student offered perhaps one of the most evident case of psycho-emotional regulation through the act of buying. Her account of buying during exam stress shows that purchasing for the sake of emotional regulation is a frequent activity. When Gen Z consumers are experiencing stress, they regulate it by making a few purchases. When their distress situations temporarily override cognitive control, it suspends rational consumer judgement, leading to impulse purchase decisions. This demonstrates a perfect instance when consumers resolve their distress through immediate emotional gratification in form of product purchase. For another respondent, the act of buying new things is not driven out of need, rather her strong desire to get rid of boredom, reinforcing frequent buying of fast fashion. Boredom acts as not a passive psychological state, rather an active trigger which drives consumer behavior. The respondent R3 adds that:

"It's not a need. It's more like I get bored easily. So, I do. I do change my fashion sense. So, I try to get new things as well. I do buy new things."

Here, the respondent R3, a 22-year-old Gen Z student, regulates her emotions by purchasing new clothes. It means clothing is less about a respondents need for it and more about her trying to regulate emotions, ultimately switching to buying new things. Similarly, respondent R9, a 23-year-old Gen Z student, communicated that her interest in changing her fashion style is driven out of her internalized desire for newness and change:

"Yes, I do feel like a need to change my fashion sense every now and then. I don't know if it's driven by something else. But, there was a time when I used to be like, I want to wear new clothes every day. I used to be like, I want new clothes every day. And, I still want to change my wardrobe, my style."

This shows that R9's repeated urge to change her style and reinvent her wardrobe, making frequent consumption not impulsive rather feel like a psychological need. The drive to update personal style suggests that consumption is tied to self-expression for the respondent. It is treated as an evolving need, making frequent purchasing feel more like self-improvement rather than overconsumption. Hence, the need for novelty upholds the demand for fast fashion, because it offers more ways to re-invent one's style of dressing up. Moreover, the overabundance of choices in retail spaces leads to frustration and failure to evaluate options carefully. For respondent R9, purchasing becomes overwhelming at times and a tool to avoid the stress she experiences due to presence of multiple choices. To save herself from the hassle, the respondent buys whatever she comes across, despite the quality being mediocre. This creates cognitive fatigue and confusion around one's decisions, supported by retail environments, making environment conducive for overconsumption. The respondent R9 adds here:

"Whenever I am shopping, there is a word I like to call, it's clothes-vomit. Wherever I go, it's just clothes, clothes, clothes. So, the moment I enter a store, I get overwhelmed. So, when I see something that I like, no matter what quality it is, I know that it will go bad or whatever. So, just to, like, you know, save myself from the hassle, I just buy it, that I might not find. Because of this clothes vomit, I don't like shopping. Because, it's just so much, that I cannot choose from it. Like, what should I look at?"

According to the respondent R9, a 23-year-old Gen Z consumer, impulse buying results from decision fatigue. She feels a cognitive overload in retail environments that lead to a sense of confusion and urgency, where instead of making an informed choice, she feels like escaping the decision, due to the fatigue arising around it. The pressure of buying something from numerous options results in rushed decisions. In addition, the visualization of a product and its utility cognitively satisfies and justifies impulse buying of fast fashion for respondent R2, a 22-year-old Gen Z consumer, reducing the likelihood of post-purchase regret. She shares her framing of satisfaction as:

"I impulse buy things that I like a lot and I have a picture of them in my mind that I can style them very nicely. So I buy those things and they never disappointed me and I never felt that way. I used them well and I have never felt bad about it."

Here the respondent, by planning and visualizing how an item will fulfil the imagined utility, neutralizes the awareness around over consumption, allowing her to perceive unsustainable buying as intelligent, rational and responsible decision making. This neutralization allows the respondent to make the purchase

without any unnecessary concern about the purchase being impulsive. Even R11 respondent, a 28-year-old Gen Z consumer, added that buying a coat felt emotionally reinforcing and transformed his whole personality. The respondent R11 shared his account of what he experienced when he tried a coat he liked:

"At an outfitter outlet, I impulse bought a long coat, even though I didn't need it. But, when I tried it, I liked the fit. So, that's why I bought it. My entire look changed. And, because of that, I felt courage in my personality, I felt strength. Although, it was only a coat, but I felt strength thinking I'm looking like someone else."

Here, fast fashion purchase acts as identity affirming and a source of emotional well-being. The purchase of clothing acts as an effective tool for confidence, transformation and empowerment as per the respondent. For most Gen Z consumers, emotional decisions justify impulsive purchases, making their purchase feel necessary and meaningful rather than extravagant and excessive. This emotionally rewarding experience convinces consumers of fast fashion to fixate on frequent consumption, rather than making financially and sustainably sound decisions. On the other hand, respondent R13, a 24-year-old Gen Z consumer, prioritizes comfort when she is about to make a purchase. She emphasizes her priority of comfort over trends, suggesting a selective approach towards consumption and limiting her engagement with fast fashion. She mentions that:

"If I feel comfortable, then I'll follow the trend. And if it's not comfortable for me and it's in fashion, then I won't go towards it. Comfort level is basically a priority for me. I don't think that I will lose my comfort because of the style. First, I will see that that thing is comfortable for me and then I will see its style and then I will buy it."

The respondent R13's assessment of comfort before the style, demonstrates that consumption is still part of the purchasing criteria, while comfort takes the precedence. While comfort behaves as a purchasing criterion, it still sustains frequent buying independent of trend pressure. These Gen Z fast fashion consumers consciously or unconsciously end up prioritizing their convenience, taste and emotional responses when shopping.

The Aesthetics Criteria

The responses reveal that aesthetic priority plays a significant role in decision making amongst Gen Z. The aesthetic judgment has emerged as a dominant theme where price becomes secondary, when they find something visually appealing. This means instant attractiveness can pressure consumers into making an impulse decision, prioritizing their interests when making purchase decisions. This shows that visual

appeal creates enough emotional urgency to ignore rationally sound decisions. To support this, the respondent R4 added that:

"I usually buy things from Sapphire West. But that black dress, I went to the shop, and I liked it so much that, I just got that dress. I did not look at the price."

Even respondent R11 shared his inclination towards aesthetic appeal in the following manner:

"The color attracts me a lot. I don't go for the price. If I need a certain color, I want to get it first."

Here, the respondent expresses that his primary desire for a purchase is driven by color aesthetics, which resultantly creates purchase urgency. This kind of purchase is totally disconnected from the practical need of the product and financial constraint of the consumer. Hence, the visual appeal and the thought of acquiring something appealing outweighs any other concerns for the respondents. In addition, the responses show that a few Gen Z respondents prioritize individual taste and personal style, rather than just buying trends passively. However, this does not minimize their consumption. They continue to purchase with their evolving concept of beauty and fashion standards. One of the respondents R3 shares her preference in the following way:

"Instead of trends. I follow things that are actually pretty. So, they go in every trend. So, every time I wear them, I feel pretty. But, even if it's out of trend. Still, it will look pretty on me. The corset trend was recently out. Everyone was talking about it. But, I didn't know what it was. And, I had already bought it. And, I didn't know that it was trending. So, in this way, I don't really know which trends are trending. But, I only buy stuff which I find beautiful. And, then I realize that it's trending already."

This shows that the respondents preference for fast fashion is driven by her personal standard and sense of style rather than blindly following trends. Indeed, this reflects her choice and rational decision making, but it does not negate the fact that she constitutes the crowd consuming trends. Despite no relation to the changing trends, the respondent purchases evidence that she consumes fast fashion, with only aesthetics criterion as her priority. She further added:

"I mostly judge things by aesthetic. I don't care about the brand. I don't care about the price. I just care about aesthetics. Will it look pretty or not? Is it a good color? Is it cute? And material as well. Will I wear it or not? Would I be comfortable wearing this again and again? Would it look cute?"

This shows the respondent's preference for aesthetic appeal framing it as a dominant and a frequent driver of fast fashion consumption amongst Gen Z consumers. The respondent R4 suggested that she was not willing to give up on her standards despite the brand or price:

"I know my standards that's why I won't lower my bar. I don't think, brands or price actually matters. I imagine myself in that dress, or whatever that thing is. And then I'm like, oh my god, I really look good in it I need that thing."

This means that aesthetic influence overrides rational judgement, making the appeal of an outfit strong enough to cause a purchase. The visuals of a fast fashion outfit matters to such an extent that it creates an active psychological need for that particular item, making the purchase a functional requirement to fulfil that need. In the same way R2, a 22-year-old Gen Z respondent, shared that she ensures that her purchased items are in alignment with her taste and personality:

"I don't just have to buy what is in fashion right now. I have my own style. I have my own personality and I have my own style. So, I prefer that… I don't see whether another person wore it or not. So, I have to get that. I just look for what I like and what I think I can carry and I can pull off nicely... Sometimes a fashion is according to your liking. Sometimes it's not… If I like something, I will follow it. But it's not like, if I like something, I have to blindly go after it… I just go after what I like."

Like the rest of the Gen Z respondents, R2 describes that her purchasing is frequently driven by personal taste, making personal aesthetic preferences no less unsustainable than socially and trend driven consumption. Even when respondents prioritize their personal taste, whether in trend or not, they remain embedded within broader fashion dynamics. To reiterate, the respondent R10, a 28-year-old Gen Z employee, shared her preference of fast fashion in the following way:

"I have this thing it's very personal as well like whenever I see something and I like it, I don't care if it's outdated or in the fashion but sometimes I do like just, for example baggy jeans, when this was in the trend and I liked that."

This shows that for respondent R10 personal visual preference functions as a persistent consumption driver. Trend relevance, affordability constraints and sustainability concerns fail to curb consumers from purchasing fast fashion. The attraction towards an item is enough to encourage a purchase of this sort. Hence, autonomy in style and prioritization of personal taste, still upholds frequent buying and ignores the passive trend following or other important considerations. The respondent R7, a 27-year-old spontaneous buyer of fast fashion, highlighted social aesthetics, referencing Iqra Aziz as a point of comparison based on body type. She adds:

"I do consider my short-heightedness so I'll purchase what Iqra Aziz is wearing rather than Sanam Saeed."

This shows that public figure references play an equivalent role in driving fast fashion purchases as do the aesthetic appeal of the products. The use of celebrity as a practical style guide, shows individualized preferences for certain styles. When Gen Z have a frame of reference like a celebrity, it makes the style and trend accessible and easier to adopt, increasing consumption resultantly. Similarly, other respondents focused on what suits them personally. This shows how consumption is tied to self-image and relatability, using clothing as a tool to construct a version of themselves that feels real, authentic, and socially acceptable. The respondent R7 shared that:

"I get very attracted to some cute design. When I see something and I really love it, and I pick it, and then I check the price in the counter. I really want to get it."

This highlights that the respondent's aesthetic attraction precedes other considerations. Which means that Gen Z's emotional commitment to a purchase is formed way before they rationally evaluate anything else. Hence, fast fashion consumption is not simply about following trends or making irrational decisions driven by lack of awareness, rather it is extensively rooted in emotional rewards, identity formation and self-expression. The decisions are readily made when one's values are subjected to social experiences and conditioning.

Impulse Decision Making

A key trigger understood from the responses was Fear of Missing Out and perceived scarcity, that is deliberately created around the products so consumers can make unplanned purchases. When scarcity is framed around a fast fashion product, it creates a sense of urgency, pushing respondents to make immediate purchases. One of the respondent R7, a spontaneous buyer of fast fashion, shared her experience around buying impulsively believing she won't find the item again:

"At Liberty Lahore, basically, there were replicas of branded dresses. So I saw them and I was like I won't get them in Islamabad. So I ordered them and they were very expensive when I came back to Islamabad and I saw another dress which was exactly like the dress I wanted to buy. So I bought that also and now I have wasted that money and I ran out of cash which I had for my treatment."

This illustrates that an assumption of scarcity drove two redundant purchases in this account, showing how the fear of unavailability creates irrational purchasing decisions. This irrationality can be recognized from the respondent's immediate purchase of the two dresses she found in different cities and different times. But, when fear of scarcity acts as an emotional trigger, it does not require consumers to revisit their purchase decisions. There is always an emotional urgency, that surrounds a long desired or rarely found product,

which quickly translates into immediate purchase. To express her account, the respondent R3 deliberates the scarcity driven unsustainable buying in the following way:

"I impulsively buy hoodies. And if I can't find them anywhere. So when I find something so unique, I go 'I finally found it. I finally found what I wanted.' So I'm like, 'Yes, I need it right now. I need it right this instant'."

The sense of immediacy and urgency the consumer feels for a product when they fear losing a unique find, overrides restraint. This can be understood from the language R3 uses to express her excitement upon finding the product, and her perceived scarcity instantly translates into making the purchase. She does not engage in any deliberative pause for an instant, to recalculate the impact of the purchase and help her reconsider her decision. The respondent R12, a 24-year-old Gen Z who frequents unplanned purchases, shared a similar experience with his purchase, where he assumed he will not be able to find a similar item again:

"Sometimes, it happens that I like something a lot and I assume that I won't get such a simple and nice looking thing again. So, obviously, I buy it. Mostly, I do it like this."

This account of R12 shows that scarcity-driven purchases are so widespread that their purchase is very normal for Gen Z consumers. So, purchasing is the behavioral response to fear of losing the product. This is further reinforced by another Gen Z respondent R8, a 26-year-old Gen Z respondents experience of buying an expensive bag, despite initial hesitation, due to the fear of regret and affordability concerns. She rationalized the experience in the following words:

"You must have seen the brand of Charles and Keith in Centaurus. We had gone to buy clothes. My friend and I went inside the store. I liked their bag. It was very expensive, but I didn't want to leave it. I didn't want to buy such an expensive bag. I didn't want to buy a bag, I wanted to buy clothes. Instead, I bought the bag. I looked at the bag later to see why I had bought it. It was very cute, so I thought it was okay. I purchased it in mid-2025. I used it only three times until now. It was for Rs. 28,000. I was getting relief because I liked it. I still like it a lot. But for a student, Rs. 28,000 is a big amount for a bag. I wanted to buy it. If I hadn't bought it, I would have regretted it. Once I bought it I realized, I shouldn't have bought an expensive bag. But when I see the bag, I feel good that I didn't waste the money. I used to do the same thing. I used to buy whatever I liked."

The respondent's account illustrates that to purchase a product right away is way more comforting than to regret later for not buying it. The regret of the future acts as a strong motivational force than financial considerations. Her failure to forecast the effectiveness of the purchase in the future, overrides the practical

considerations. The hesitation around purchasing the bag, affordability concerns and fear of regret were all overridden by emotional satisfaction derived from the very purchase. The possession helped justify the consumption, suggesting how unsustainable buying is actively running through Gen Z's lives and retrospectively rationalized through multiple excuses. For respondent R9, a 23-year-old Gen Z student, income or personal earnings reduce restraint on her purchasing decisions making her impulse buy:

"I have my own cash, so I think I do that. Like, I think that I went to Outfitters a while ago, and I don't know, like, I saw a shirt, it was so basic, I would never buy it, but I just bought it without thinking. I bought trousers without thinking, which I couldn't even see myself wearing, so I feel like whenever I am shopping, whenever I earn and shop, it translates into impulse buying."

Here, the respondent admits buying a shirt she would reject to purchase no matter what the circumstances may be, reflects the extent to which retail environments produce purchasing behavior. This kind of purchase is disconnected from any preference of the consumer or need of the product. The respondent R5, a 24-year-old Gen Z student who buys at least 2 to 3 times a week, feels being in overstimulating environments fuels her purchase decisions too:

"If I share the track record of my shopping from January up till now, from New Year till now, I mean it was like, without any second thought. It just came in front of my eyes. And I just went to the store. And ordered it."

The respondent explicates that impulse purchasing has become a habitual experience of her life, removing any form of deliberation from her life. Without consideration, frequent impulse purchases across an extended period of time become a routine, reducing consumption to rest of the day to day activities. Simultaneously, there are moments of self-regulation towards respondent's purchases, indicating conscious efforts but alternately, they only seem to be delaying the purchase until the right moment. A respondent R2, a 22-year-old Gen Z student, shares her technique of making a purchase:

"I do have it on my checklist that I want to get one in my cupboard but it's not that I have to get it right then. I don't have to buy it right away. I just feel that this thing is good. This is fashionably nice. I have to get it once and it doesn't have to be right away. It's just that it's good. You can get it whenever your budget allows."

This way of making a purchase does not mean the respondent behaves as a rational consumer, rather deliberately deferring one's purchase due to budget shows that financial constraint is the primary moderator of the respondent's impulse purchase. While, R10, a 28-year-old Gen Z respondent, added to this idea of conscious delay in purchases as:

"It's also my age factor due to which I feel like I want to buy more and that I want to get this and that, although I know it's not good but now I am consciously like putting an effort to not over purchase when I don't need it."

This shows that the respondent is deliberately trying to cut down on her purchases and her awareness is rooted in the idea that she should not purchase if the product does not have a functional utility. Despite her awareness, she attributes consumption to her growing age, a paradox which actually normalizes rather than challenges the very behavior that fuels consumption. Overall, the fast fashion consumption persists amongst the Gen Z not because of a lack of awareness for sustainability, rather due to their post-purchase rationalization, situational susceptibility and high exposure to retail environments, that repeatedly override environmental concerns.

Social Pressures

Gen Z's desire for fast fashion consumption is deeply embedded in social structures and expectations. Their reliance on social approval exhibits how choices are framed and consumption is reinforced. Considering how we are all social beings, it means that consumption would then be socially learnt and collectively dispersed. To explicate this, the respondents R3 and R12 highlight that their mothers and peer's approval formulates their tastes and preferences in the following words:

"I send it to my mom. Mom, this looks pretty. Then, she agrees and buys it for me."

"When I go to purchase mostly I get my mother's opinion. When she likes something, then I like it too."

For these 2 respondents, family endorsements and peer approval act as a pre-requisite to purchase decisions, where social validation from trusted kin functions as an approval for spending. Consumption decisions are highly influenced by the opinions of friends and close social circles, suggesting that personal preferences are not really that autonomous. Gen Z consumers constantly seek reassurances about the social acceptability framed through the purchase of the products. This recurring pattern has shown that purchasing decisions are shaped by peer opinions, social positioning, and desire to fit in. These respondents frequently shared relying on friends and acquaintances for reassurances and opinions before making a purchase, signifying that consumption is in itself a social process requiring mediation from other social actors. R15, a 29-year-old Gen Z respondent who is frequently driven by social influences, added that:

"The opinion of a person, my friend, or any close one who can advise, it's important, to take their opinion, that, how do they feel. Are they satisfied with the product, or is the thing suiting us, or in future how will it match our personality, and, for long term what is suitable for us, keeping all this in mind."

The response shows that R15 gives immense importance to external opinions before committing to a purchase. This has been observed in the behavior of respondents like R3 and R12 as well, where purchasing decisions are influenced by social referents. Such outsourced endorsements reveal the socially embedded nature of consumption amongst Gen Z. The respondent R15's focus hovers over appearance, personality improvement and social approval rather than functionality of the purchase. This suggests that while consumers may assume their purchases as reasonable choices despite taking opinions, they still constantly operate within the socially constructed consumption norms. Hence, peer validation regulates the legitimacy consumers feel around making a purchase. This influence is strong enough to tailor consumption decisions of Gen Z to align with the social norms. The respondent R3 emphasizes how peer pressure really shapes consumption preferences in these time:

"I feel like if I didn't have societal pressure, I would just wear whatever I want. I think it does a lot. Because, now you're at this age where everyone around you is so much into fashion. So, I used to hear my friends go. They were talking so much that this is also a brand. I never knew about certain brands. I was like, okay, I can buy from there as well. Yeah, peer pressure does affect you a lot."

The respondent emphasizes that in the absence of societal pressure, her clothing choices would be much autonomous, highlighting the conflict between personal preference and social conformity. She explicitly regards societal pressure as the governing power behind her purchasing decisions. This shows that knowledge construction around fashion is framed through all kinds of social interactions, reinforcing a particular kind of consumption. As a result, purchasing becomes a way to integrate into peer groups and maintain social relevance. To uphold this, an anxiety develops around styling and uploading pictures for peer validation. R2 shares:

"Whenever we're buying something, there's an idea in the mind, that I have to update my pictures in it. I think, in your subconscious, it happens that I have to upload my pictures and it should look nice. So, a little bit of validation, I would say, a very minimal percentage of it, but I think, digitalization has influenced you so much. Like, everyone is now on Instagram and all the other social apps that you upload your pictures and everyone comments and likes and those things, I think, influence you a little bit."

This shows that function of clothing is restructured from personal use to social performance. This motivation for social media visibility, exhibits how consumption is embedded within the public sphere. Similarly, shopping as a shared activity turns consumption into a conformity, where ones who initially resisted purchasing, ended up buying too. The respondent R10 shared her experience about resisting and complying with purchasing in the following ways:

"I was crazy on buying things. I used to go with my friends or family. My sister would be like; I need a bag. Let's go shopping. It's kind of a tradition. Yes. So we used to go for a bag and she was asking me, do you need something? And I was like, no, I really don't want to buy anything. And I would end up buying everything."

This highlights that collective purchasing behavior acts as a consumption trigger, that overrides individual control, irrespective of prior intentions. The collective act of purchasing creates a social momentum for continued purchase of fast fashion. When this social cue is visible, it becomes a driving force for some spending. Similarly, different observational cues reinforced by social spaces can also influence purchasing decisions by triggering unplanned purchasing, R10 explained:

"When I go to Centaurus, and I see a lot of people have ethnic shopping bag. I will feel like there is a sale in ethnic. Like even if I don't know it, so I do check the outlet. So people holding a bag, gives me an indication that maybe I should visit. Maybe there's something special there."

According to R10, observing others in retail or social spaces making the purchase is enough of a signal to induce a shopping activity. It makes the observer want to bandwagon and feel what others are experiencing in the most visible form. Such collective behavior creates a normative pressure around making an immediate purchase. Hence, these factors influence consumption to become a means of participation and bonding, making it difficult to opt out without social detachment. The fear of social criticism creates a pressure on Gen Z consumers to not repeat outfits, especially in the age of high social media visibility, where one's appearance is constantly under scrutiny and regulated by the social lens. The fear of being judged creates a need to constantly update one's style and wardrobe. The respondent R3 explicates the growing need amongst consumers in order to get accepted fashionably by refusing to repeat outfits:

"I think it does affect. Because, even if you don't like what others do, there is a pressure on you unconsciously. I just have to fit in. Otherwise, someone would point me out. Someone would say, you repeated that dress. Why didn't you buy a new one? And, you feel left out too."

This shows that the fear of social judgement is deeply entrenched in the obligation to bring something new every time. This forecasts a social survival mechanism where individuals must do everything to be included or else be prepared for anticipated consequences, if and when they do not fit in the society. For Gen Z, fast fashion operates as a means of social differentiation and validation, where appearance is closely tied to self-worth and external approval. The respondent R7 emphasizes that investing aesthetics and value into one's fashion yields social rewards, reinforcing the idea that clothing is not just functional but a tool for gaining appreciation and recognition:

"I think fashion is something that differentiates me from other people. Because whenever you put hard work in anything, you put your money, you put your effort, I think that will differentiate you from others and make you beautiful…So, if we invest on our looks, we will get more appreciation. You will like it yourself, others will also praise you which is something you'll like even more."

This means, fashion is assumed to be a social investment rather than a way of self-expression. When this logic stands true, then it requires the social actors to constantly consume and upgrade themselves to maintain a competitive edge within the social environments. At the same time, the concern about not repeating outfits, due to anxiety around social media visibility, shows how digital landscape intensifies pressure to constantly appear new. To explain this, the respondent R7 highlights the pressure around repeating outfits:

"In planned buying, everyone is looking at you. You can't repeat it. Once pictures are taken and posted on social media, we get confused about how to repeat it?"

This shows that Gen Z have internalized a social obligation to frequent their appearance as something new every time they post something. Their anxiety emerging from being left out, instills a continuous stream of bringing newness and upgrade into their fashion expression and how they come off as in public. When personal expression heavily influenced by the social dynamics and peer preference, it becomes a commodity which is governed by people's choices. Hence, for Gen Z this externalized self-evaluation determines what is acceptable to wear. The reliance on others opinion shapes the individual's confidence in personal choice and maintains a socially validated identity.

A frequent key driver of consumption observed amongst the Gen Z consumers was the social comparison, where individuals aligned their clothing preferences with those of others to achieve a sense of belonging and attraction. The respondent R3 shared that the desire to experience what others are experiencing in certain brands, is socially constructed, making consumption emotionally and socially motivated. The respondent R3 added:

"When I saw that they like certain brands, I was like, okay, I think I should buy from them too. If they like it, I think it should be normal for me to like it too. They feel so pretty with the new dress. Why shouldn't I feel that way?"

Here, the respondent's preference for a brand is influenced by peers rather than a personal evaluation. This shows that social comparison acts as a purchasing trigger, making Gen Z override their aesthetic judgement for social inclination. This form of comparison leads to a struggle to improve one's appearance. Consumption becomes a tool for competition and personality enhancement for Gen Z's, where following

the trends becomes necessary to socially belong and remain relevant. This suggests that consumption for many is not personal anymore, but driven by unnecessary comparisons with those around them, which reinforces frequent unsustainable purchasing. The respondent R11 explained how constant style update is necessary because purchases improve his personality:

"Fashion is a need so you can enter the competition. You cannot portray yourself in the way that others are seeing you. So, I think it is important to constantly change the style. It has a good impact on your personality. You compare yourself with other people."

The respondent illustrates that fashion has become a competitive necessity, where unsustainable consumption behaves as a smart social survival strategy. Similarly, in the process of drawing comparisons with others, the Gen Z respondent R7 argued that trends become collective standards, where following the dominant trends feel like an obligation, because when everyone is aligned with the trend, why must one stay out. This reinforces the cycle of uniform consumption and prioritizes alignment with the social requirements:

"If it's in the trend, then I have to wear it at all costs. Keeping that thing as the standard, like if it's a farshi shalwar or whatever is in trend, because everyone is wearing it, so we have to wear it as well. And tweak it in accordance with our height and weight a bit."

This shows how the external social pressure of fitting in is internalized amongst the Gen Z, to make participation an obligation and socially tenable. The bandwagon pressure and desire to be part of the trend following crowd, makes consumers participate in the culture of consumption. The context-specific expectations make consumption feel like a requirement rather than an individual choice, reducing time for reflective decision making and driving unsustainable consumption. The need to conform to the theme becomes more important than sustainability, as individuals prioritize theme alignment over rational decision making. The respondent R12 adds here:

"Sometimes you may be in a hurry when you have to go to an event or you have to wear a specific outfit on a specific event. You buy something impulsively… If it is a thematic event, you go with the theme, so that you can look like others. You know that it becomes a requirement."

As per R12, occasion based consumption becomes a social duty when Gen Z feel that they have social expectations to meet. This reinforces how occasion based pressures can override environmental awareness, leading to unplanned and often unnecessary purchases. This emphasizes an indirect consumption, where purchasing decisions are made by others, reducing an individual's control over what is purchased. Hence, clothing as a social currency signals identity, status and acceptance, which prioritizes social validation and

conformity. The unsustainable consumption of fast fashion is indeed driven by cultural and festive expectations, social synchronization and symbolic participation in events. Events like Eid, weddings, university event weeks and trips act as consumption triggers, where new outfit is established as situationally appropriate and a social expectation. This suggests a form of pressure where dressing up for the occasion becomes a social requirement, rather than an individual's personal choice. The Gen Z respondent R2 demonstrates how consumption is collectively reinforced through multiple ways:

"If there's Eid coming up, that would influence. Or if I have any university events, or any trips, or any shadi coming up, that would influence my buying opportunities and preferences. So, it can also be influenced by the environment, or the events that are coming up. Or if I'm going with my family, that can influence. For example, if one of my friends or one of my siblings is buying, I would be compelled to buy. Like, if they're buying, I'll buy too. Sometimes it happens that you just plan for window shopping, but if you like certain things, you get influenced by that as well."

This means that consumption is triggered due to events and social momentum of collective purchasing, making individual restraint over buying decisions difficult to maintain. The same consumption can become symbolic instead of being functional. One of the respondent deliberated that for hostilities, even though the Eid is not actively celebrated, the act of buying clothes persists. The respondent R8 adds here:

"Living in the hostel, we make dresses and keep them in the closet while we sleep through the Eid. Eid doesn't feel like one here. But we still buy clothes when we are here."

This suggests that purchasing is tied to cultural meaning of the event itself too, along with its functional use. This often leads to underutilization of clothes and over accumulation, i.e. the key properties of fast fashion. Hence, buying clothes has less to do with self-expression and functional utility, and more to do with fulfilling social expectations, status label and a symbolic sanction to stay intact with the social group.

Digitally Mediated Influence

Social media acts as an intermediary to accelerate the intentions and interest in the unsustainable buying of fast fashion, legitimizing the purchases and rationalizing the consumption decisions. It emerges as a primary trigger for unsustainable buying and a key indicator that dissuades Gen Z from reducing their consumption of fast fashion. The respondent R4 elaborates:

"It's basically the social media that actually tempts me to go and buy stuff rather than I'd actually need… trending stuff, I do get slipped away sometimes. I do, like, when I see a reel regarding anything which I find very tempting, so yes, I do go and buy that thing."

This shows that purchasing desire is formulated through social media rather than personal need of the Gen Z. Platform-induced consumption is prevalent and highly connected to generating individual desires that would not otherwise exist. The urge to buy anything that she finds tempting, the respondent R4 shared her experience of buying bangles in the following expression:

"I would say that if we talk about fashion trends, a little bit of it influences me in this sense. It influences me a lot in the sense of jewelry, makeup, and nails. If someone is doing a jewelry trend, I would get influenced easily… For example, those chunky bangles which are trending now. I bought them last year. And now I have so many of them. And I have them in every color. I used to have a lot of bangle craze, but now I have a lot of it. I've just overloaded my drawers with bangles. And there's so many bangles. Even though I don't need this much, but I still have them."

This illustrates that the momentary temptation comes from respondent's exposure to reels and trends, despite recognizing the futility of owning in excess. This desire to purchase a few bangles, fueled by platforms like Instagram, amplifies the yearning to an extent that the respondent fails to differentiate between liking and buying. This pattern of over accumulation through repeated exposure, gradually normalizes the excessive consumption driven by algorithmic repetition. This leads to unplanned purchase where intention is weak and easily manipulated when triggers like trends and social media reels moderate the respondent's attention. Moreover, influencers function as an active reference point for many Gen Z consumers of fast fashion, framing the desirability of trends and the urgency around purchasing them. They act as the visual signatories for social validation, bringing consumers to actively purchase based on desirability, while ignoring all sorts of social, economic or environmental considerations. They reduce uncertainty around any trend or fast fashion item and clarify any doubts around products while making the ease of purchasing a frequent option for many viewers. One of the respondents R4 deliberated that her liking for a product was reinforced based on influencer representation, highlighting their role as both enablers and filters:

"Once I wanted to buy one jacket. I already liked it a lot. I came home and thought whether I want it or not. And then I opened Instagram, and I don't know, for some reason, there was this influencer, she was wearing the same jacket. So when I saw her wearing it, I got an idea that, okay, she looks good in it. so she would look good on me as well. And most of the time, it happens that when I like something a lot, and then I see someone wearing it, and they don't look good at all. So, I don't buy that thing. So, from an influencer's point of view, I do get some help, that yes, this thing will look good on me."

Thus, the respondents account explicates that an existing likeness is validated through influencers endorsement, reducing the confusion and hesitation around the product and the purchase. Platforms like

Instagram shape both Gen Z consumers desire and confidence, making fast fashion consumption more likely and frequent. This reliance on external validation in form of social media and influencers, accelerates unsustainable consumption. Influencers highly contribute to aspirational consumption, driving Gen Z to develop a liking for trends and products, even when they are unaffordable and a purchase is not feasible. While, this might not always translate into direct purchase, influencers continue to shape taste, trend awareness and preference formation, indirectly fueling the demand for fast fashion. The respondent R9, a 23-year-old Gen Z student shares:

"I feel like, if I find an influencer pretty on Instagram. Pretty enough. Whom I follow. And, I've seen them wearing it. So, it makes me want to buy or at least wear it. But, the things that they tend to wear are really expensive. But, it does give me an idea to what's trendy, what's not. And, what I do like from the latest trends."

This shows that even when the items are expensive, influencers can curate preferences and desirability, guiding gen Z consumers towards unsustainable purchases. While this unfolds, the respondent R10 critiques the normalization of overconsumption by constantly updating styles, reinforcing a culture of frequent buying. She states:

"I am thinking that this social media and then this rise of social media influencers, Instagram celebrities, they can play a good role as well, but they are the people actually promoting a lot of overconsumption, staying in this style. I think people need to update their mindset and lifestyle rather than clothes and makeup maybe."

This shows that the respondent identifies the concerns regarding the impact of influencer culture while remaining embedded within it, highlighting that awareness about digital deceit does not translate into resistance towards it. Moreover, social media behaves as a persistent trigger environment where advertisements and curated content appear with high frequency. An impulse purchase when situationally activated, makes individuals vulnerable to make a purchase, increasing rushed decisions. One of the respondents R4 emphasizes that being alone and shopping online reduces all friction in her impulsivity:

"I impulse buy when I'm online. I have my phone, I'm alone, and my add-to-cart is running. But still, I think that online advertisements on social media, they influence me so much that I say, oh my god, I like this thing, I want this and that."

As per the respondent, digital platform environments and situational designs produce unreflective consumption. The repeated exposure transforms casual scrolling into prolonged engagement, ultimately leading to a purchase. This suggests that algorithms collapse the boundary between browsing and buying.

To support this, the Gen Z respondent R4 shared the drop in her consumption when a social media application was deleted, underscoring how one's behavior is platform-dependent rather than preference-driven:

"Everything is social media. Because, like, whenever I've deleted that app and I don't even go near Instagram, I don't shop at all. I rarely visit. Usually, when I open Instagram, like, after every two reels, there'll be like an advertisement about any other clothing or any jewelry thing. And then I'll go to the page, and then I'll scroll the whole website for two hours. And then I'll like a particular thing. And then I'll look for the same thing on some other pages. So, like, I think it's just such a waste of time and money."

Platform dependency is best represented here when the respondent shares that purchasing desire is not internally driven rather a product of digital exposure. When this exposure was cut short through app deletion, the purchasing desire ceased immediately. It is due to the platform maneuvering and the repetition of content that tailors the feed, leading to curated content to appear before Gen Z on their screens. The Gen Z respondent R9 elaborated on her awareness of this influence:

"I feel that if you're buying as much as you're seeing, so I just try to change my algorithm, my Instagram's algorithm to stuff that is not, like, you know, influencing me to buy something."

This means that the attempt to 'change the algorithm' reflects an awareness of the given influence, but simultaneously reveals how user agency is present and reactive to a limited extent, requiring active resistance to avoid being influenced. It takes both the awareness of digital mechanisms and an active effort to resist the content displayed on the feeds and ultimately the purchase decisions that are formed by such feeds. Similarly, the respondent R5's habit of opening pages' daily, shows habitual consumption patterns, where frequent exposure sustains desire and normalizes frequent shopping behavior:

"I buy once or twice a week, but I open store pages online daily."

This response shows a consumption pattern where browsing becomes habitual, preparing the consumer to make the purchase at any moment they are triggered. This state of purchased readiness pulls Gen Z into actual buying without realizing it. The algorithms play a significant role in amplifying the desirability of products, creating a perception that widely visible items are socially acclaimed and necessary. The respondent R7 shares how brand legitimacy is amplified by algorithms, reinforcing the necessity around buying the product:

"If the market says that it's a good brand and social media too. And similarly, if you know that Huda Beauty is a good brand, then you will buy it because it will make you appear well, whether they consider the environment factor or not."

This shows that sustainability awareness is actively displaced by social forces governing the criteria for individual assimilation into the group. It explicates that social appearance after all matters more than sustainability because it is acceptable by the society at large. Whatever is acceptable to the masses, shall be the driving force for the others too. Hence, when the digital cues frame preferences and priorities, via increased repetition, habitual browsing, amplified trends and continuous digital stimulation, it makes it difficult for Gen Z to ignore and restrain themselves from making the purchase. Here, the advertisements emerge as a persistent trigger of fast fashion consumption, heavily influencing the purchase decisions of Gen Z respondents. Consumers believe they are making financially sound decisions while they are actually increasing their overall consumption. According to R1, a 21-year-old Gen Z respondent, advertisement saturation amplifies her consumption of a product, leading to unnecessary purchases:

"I'm actually into very good jeans, but, like, at this point, I have a lot of pair of jeans and the reason behind it is those ads coming up every second, like these jeans and, the color of those jeans, you know, different types of jeans. Uh, so yeah, social media definitely influences my buying behavior."

It means that exposure to repetitive advertisements is the reason for accumulation of clothing. This reveals that algorithmic advertisements can result in overconsumption, transforming interest in a product into excess of the product. From brands multi-platform presence, *"sending sale alarms via social media, emails and WhatsApp",* to repetition and retargeting, in order to increase familiarity and gradually weaken resistance, to create a *'weak moment, you're going to order it'* scenario. The repeated exposure eventually leads to unnecessary buying. A Gen Z respondent R10 explicates that:

"Online, when I scroll a lot, I think that triggers. Like when I scroll a lot and then I see all these ads and I go visit the page, I really feel like I want to buy."

The respondents account illustrates that the path from scrolling and browsing to actually buying is traveled fast. These digital platforms are designed to facilitate the progression of passive digital engagement to active purchasing. Scrolling becomes a trigger, when exposure to ads transition one into browsing and straight towards buying. The sales and discount create urgency around the products, pushing consumers to act quickly without reflection. The respondent R7 elaborates on the perceived scarcity created around the phrases like sales and running out:

"Their sales also provoke you that it's running out. And it's 50% and you buy it immediately…But you order as much as you need because they are on sale."

This shows how price incentives coupled with perceived scarcity, override practical need, leading to overconsumption, while respondents acknowledge how these are impulsive rather than planned decisions.

For some time, the respondents shape a rational justification, where making the purchase feels economical, even when its unnecessary. The frictionless nature of online shopping accelerates unsustainable consumption of fast fashion too. The auto-filled checkout details reduce the time and effort required to complete an online purchase, leaving little room for Gen Z to show reconsideration or restraint. One of the respondents R5 added that:

"on the checkout, the information was already saved and it got filled automatically. And I checked out."

This shows that consumption is facilitated by frictionless digital spaces, reducing the energy that is required in navigating online retail markets and resulting in impulsive behavioral response. While a lot of Gen Z consumers prefer online shopping due to the convenience it holds, the same ease makes them more vulnerable to unplanned buying, especially when combined with advertisements and influencer recommendations. Hence, digital convenience comes at the cost of mindful consumption.

Perception of Green Fashion

The negative perceptions, limited information and inaccessibility of Green Fashion discourages Gen Z from adopting sustainable alternatives to environmentally degrading products. Gen Z's perception about sustainable fashion is that it is aesthetically inferior and poorly executed, reducing its visual appeal and selling potential. The question has not been posed on the sustainability itself, rather with how brands implement it. The perception has led Gen Z to believe that green clothing lacks desirability, which discourages consumers from looking for sustainable alternatives to fast fashion brands. The respondent R4 shares her experience with a green fashion brand in the following way:

"I would love to buy from green fashion brands. I don't think I have much awareness of green fashion brands. But Sapphire once claimed that our clothes are very recyclable and fashionable. They basically started and it was written on their clothes that this thing is recyclable, you can recycle it. I saw their catalogue for the whole series they started, But the quality was so bad. The clothes were designed so poorly that it seemed like the designer didn't want those designs to be sold or the clothes to be liked by the people. Because if fashion designers wanted, they could have made really nice dresses out of the recyclable material."

Her response shows that failure of green brands to meet aesthetic standards is a fundamental disqualifier. The sustainable fashion must meet certain quality and visual standards to merely survive in a pack of brands. Hence, when brands are unable to satisfy the 'aesthetic expectations' of Gen Z, which acts as one of the key driver of unsustainable buying, consumers are dissuaded from looking for sustainable alternatives. In addition, despite an active interest in availing the green brands, some respondents face difficulty in

identifying sustainable brands which leads to Gen Z ignoring the brands to save themselves from the hassle. So, instead of going out and looking for such brands, consumers completely ignore them and continue to make purchases from their usual fast fashion brands. The respondent R10 shares:

"So I do like green production. I used to search, like how many green brands are there, what do they do, how are their ways of production. But honestly, I didn't like too much comply with that. Because it's also very difficult for me to find a green brand."

This shows a blend of genuine environmental consideration with brand inaccessibility. It illustrates that despite the prevalence of sustainability intent amongst Gen Z, their behavior is rendered inert because of the absence of viable alternatives in Pakistani market. On a similar note, Gen Z collectively communicate low market visibility of sustainable options, where the absence of recognizable or accessible brands reinforce reliance on fast fashion. Gen Z respondents R5 and R6 clarified that in the following words:

"I haven't really seen any in Pakistan."

"I don't have much idea about green brands."

These responses depict the market invisibility of green fashion brands in Pakistan, where conventional fast fashion brands hold wide physical and digital retail visibility. In the presence of conventional brands, green fashion brands efforts for visibility fall really short. Gen Z respondents also revealed that sustainability has higher costs and limited transparency. They highlighted that from their experience, green fashion is financially exclusive, making its purchase discouraging for many consumers in the face of accessible and affordable fast fashion. The respondent R8 adds:

"I came to know that the products made for environmental sustainability are more expensive. After this awareness, I searched for a brand. But brands don't tell you all the details on their pages. They only tell you the percentage of polyester and cotton being used."

According to this response, Gen Z consumers are willing to seek and invest in sustainable options, but they are crushed by product cost and lower visibility of the green brands that also fail to provide information on materials. The lack of details and higher prices weakens trust, making consumers less willing to invest in green alternatives. The Gen Z's continued rejection or avoidance of green fashion is due to perceptual barriers surrounding their quality standards too. Their negative past experiences with sustainable brands damaged trust, leading to a disengagement from these brands. The respondent R4 highlighted poor durability of green brands, reinforcing the idea that green fashion is not worth the money:

"I once shopped from Generation, and all the clothes I bought from Generation after one wash, it was in such a bad condition, after that, I never shopped from Generation again."

This shows that Gen Z is fast in disqualifying the brand from consideration after poor brand experience, showing how quality assurance is a basic criterion for Gen Z consumers. R4 further demonstrates that sustainability is secondary unless it meets individual aesthetic criteria and standards:

"I used to love generation, but their like quality has deteriorated so much in the recent times. I used to wear generation a lot, like I wore a lot of generation and there used to be a lot of dresses in my closet. But again, the quality of the dresses is so pathetic that after two washes, it looks like it's a century old dress."

This shows that consumers place the responsibility of unsustainable consumption on brands and industry for not delivering environmentally sustainable products. Simultaneously, Gen Z consumers do not blame their repetitive consumption, rather justify their continued fast fashion purchases by passing the blame onto the brands for not presenting credible alternatives. Moreover, respondents believe that green brands reinforce the belief of inauthenticity when they do not place the required effort into them. Gen Z is not willing to support or pay for brands that does not deliver what it promises. The respondent R7 adds:

"Brands are not putting the effort. They are not doing it wholeheartedly. They are not promoting the environment properly."

Hence, Gen Z's reliance is not due to rejection of sustainability rather due to distrust in the quality and brand commitment. In the process, even environmentally conscious consumers are pushed back towards buying from fast fashion brands, which are assumed to be more reliable, accessible and aligned with aesthetic and functional expectations of the consumers.

Affordability and Accessibility

For Gen Z respondents, purchasing is shaped less by preference and more by limited economic choices. The economic limitations constrain sustainable choices, reinforcing continued reliance on fast fashion. For respondents, fast fashion becomes the most accessible and reliable option, especially in absence of affordable alternatives. The respondent R7 shared:

"I mostly consume this fashion because they come in my financial bracket. Because I do not have options."

This shows that financial constraint is one of the primary drivers of fast fashion consumption, showing overconsumption not as irresponsible but an economic necessity. Simultaneously, there exists a social normalization of frequent, affordable buying of fast fashion. The ease and accessibility leads to habitual and unreflective consumption patterns. The respondent R7 builds on her normalized consumption in the following manner:

"these fast fashion brands and I do get them as much as I can afford. I just see them and just order them. This is something which is normal for every other woman."

This illustrates that affordability is a critical factor that governs the fashion choices of Gen Z. Financial constraints normalize the impulse purchasing of fast fashion, regarding it to be a rationally sound decision. Collectively, these narratives show that even with environmental awareness, a number of factors influence Gen Z's choice of fashion and purchasing, increasing their reliance on fast fashion.

Theme 2: Factors Influencing the Unsustainable Buying of Fast Fashion Amongst Millennials

Psycho-Emotional Drivers

The analysis of the Millennial responses reveal that psychological drivers play a significant role in shaping unsustainable consumption patterns amongst Millennials, particularly decisions that are emotionally driven. Their purchasing decisions are driven due to interference of emotions in their consumption choices. The respondents frequently described buying as impulsive, especially in relation to shoes or makeup, showing a preference for immediate gratification. This aligns with the prevalent culture of fast fashion thriving on accessibility and emotional reward. Emotional decision making appears as a primary factor for Millennials consumption of unsustainable fashion. According to R14, a 31-year-old Millennial respondent, fashion should visually appeal:

"I wouldn't buy if the thing is not good, not appealing visually."

This shows that Millennial consumer attention is engaged with aesthetics at a superficial level, reinforcing the fast fashion reliance on visually stimulating products. This visual appearance is a non-negotiable criterion reflecting that aesthetic standards act as the primary motivator, with which other purchasing considerations are calibrated and evaluated. Additionally, perceived product scarcity fosters urgency and the fear around missing out on what most have access to. Respondents indicated that the limited availability or the possibility that they might not find a similar product again trigger an immediate decision when seen. This is often observed in retail strategy where scarcity is constructed to push consumers to impulsive decisions. One of the Millennial respondents R16 added that:

"Some things… that you might not be finding later, then you shop at that time."

"Impulse buying, I mostly do it, in the case of shoes. Specifically, for heels, which attract you a lot of times so you keep them in your mind, and you know you won't find them again, so, when you see them, you immediately take a decision."

This suggests that the fear of product scarcity drives Millennial consumers to make unsustainable purchases. This is driven by fear of future unavailability of a product that triggers a purchase, despite no immediate need of the product. Such emotional urgency overrides rational decision making. Moreover, respondents illustrated how emotional regulation is embedded within unsustainable impulse buying, leading to mood enhancement and psychological reward. While one Millennial R19 feels *"Shopping is the purpose of life and life's charm is present in shopping."*, another feels buying new items acts as a temporary relief during low emotional states, making fast fashion consumption emotionally rewarding. Moreover, the anticipated need for something in the near future acts as a rationalization for unnecessary purchasing, reducing any feelings of guilt. One of the Millennial respondents R19 exclaimed that:

"I think I will need it in the future, so I buy it. And sometimes, when the mood is low, I buy something to make myself happy."

Mood regulation amongst Millennials parallels the psycho-emotional regulation amongst Gen Z, substantiating that retail therapy is a coping mechanism that helps consumers deflect their moods. In addition to emotional regulation, the Millennials acknowledge their overconsumption through leisure buying, but they selectively minimize the guilt around excessive purchases by framing consumption around makeup and its functionality, making it acceptable. This respondent R16 highlighted that:

"I am guilty. I buy a lot of makeup. But I do use it. I don't buy anything except for makeup, honestly. Makeup is the only thing I buy out of impulse sometimes. I also control, sometimes I keep things in my cart and think whether to buy it or not."

By distinguishing makeup from other forms of shopping, the respondent presents consumption justification, minimizing the concern by emphasizing actual product use. This shows selective self-regulation strategy where Millennials continue to over-purchase but justify it in one way or another.

Social Pressures

The findings reveal that Millennials' fast fashion consumption is significantly shaped by external social compulsion, cultural alignment and market driven influences. Their reliance on social networks for recommendations and informal endorsements creates a degree of comfort and trust in buying from a new brand, particularly in fast fashion spaces. This means that purchasing decisions are not made independently but are highly influenced by social relations. The trust placed in personal networks often outweighs independent opinion, leading to a purchase. The respondent R14 added here:

"I usually go for experimenting brands, online brands or something if I am recommended by someone. So recommendations play a lot of role for me."

This shows that the respondent experiments brands only if she has been recommended by someone. Such recommendations act as both a source of information that can be trusted and a form of informal approval that accelerates consumption and trend buying. Peer networks act as an informal consumption channel where opportunities are circulated through every day social interaction. These social circles are not only a source of sharing preferences but also actively facilitate consumption through recommendations and collective styling. Placing trust in peer validation strengthens the appeal around these recommendations, reducing self-evaluation of one's purchases and accelerating the trend diffusion amongst social networks. The respondent R18 conforms to that:

"I think friends influence me more in terms of trends and styling ideas. For example, one of my friends was telling me about this online page on Instagram, and she was like, their clothes are really nice and reasonable. So if you want to buy from this brand on Eid, she shared that link with me. So definitely, I'm going to go through their website, I'm going to search, and if I find something from there, I'm going to buy clothes from them. If they find something good, they share with me. If I find something good, I share with them."

This shows that Millennial fast fashion consumers confide in informal peer-to-peer brand information sharing, which drives their purchase commitment. These trusted recommendations are socially anchored and because they act as a critical bridge between brands and consumers. Therefore, unsustainable fast fashion consumption amongst Millennials becomes a socially negotiated choice shaped by the given social external factors that constantly create subtle inclination to consume. These Millennials eventually end up navigating a way across this dilemma and meet social expectations, acceptance and belonging but all that happens at the cost of sustainability. Hence, consumption is mutually reinforced, where friends continuously reproduce and withstand fast fashion engagement despite awareness about environmental concerns. This strongly points to the socially embedded consumption pressures where purchasing decisions are shaped less by individual choices and more by socially constructed opinions. Another respondent emphasized that in cultural events like weddings, dresses are purchased for limited use purposes only due to fear of social judgement. R16, a 31-year-old Millennial adds:

"I think a lot of people, they buy new stuff on weddings, which has very less wearibility and utility, and do it out of social compulsion. Like, it's very frowned upon in our families that if you have worn it twice, you can't wear it thrice."

The respondent emphasizes that not repeating an outfit is not a personal preference rather a social condition for assimilation. Such social norms are deeply entrenched in everyday life with real reputational consequences, that override an individual's personal environmental awareness. This reflects how

surveillance is operationalized in social spaces where comfort is challenged and individuals expect scrutiny from others. This contributes to over-consumption, as clothing is detached from its functional longevity and its worth is tied to status and conformity. Another respondent builds on the notion of shopping out of cultural expectations and obligations built around events or occasions where 'dressing appropriately' becomes a necessity. This respondent R19, a 42-year-old Millennial, adds that:

"It has never happened that I don't have a new dress according to the occasion. Because I continue buying from sales and I keep buying them, so somehow I have a new dress... It's not necessary that I shop only when there is an event. I already have them."

The respondent's account shows that social obligation and market mechanisms collectively sustain habitual consumption. It means that Millennials are frequently purchasing fast fashion and they ensure that they are using sale seasons to the best of their advantage. The respondent does not have to buy right before an event because she already has bought in advance. These cultural norms create a sense of obligation to meet situational needs. The respondent R18, a 32-year-old Millennial, adds that:

"I try to be more mindful, I try to not take part in these events, I also question if I need multiple outfits or not, if it's a wedding then buying multiple outfits is a requirement, but I also reuse them after that event."

This suggests that Millennial consumers are mindful of excessive consumption fueled by socio-cultural norms. As a result, they consciously limit this behavior by repeating their outfits after functions as a compromise, to feel less guilty of their purchase within the constraints of social obligations. Hence, even environmentally conscious consumers have ways to legitimize their buying. Similarly, being presentable has become a social obligation rather than a personal choice. It shows the relationship between appearance and perceived competence, respectability and legitimacy, especially for working women. The respondent R17, a 37-year-old Millennial, shared that:

"I am a working lady and I have to get out of the house. So to move into society, you have to be presentable…. But because we are working ladies, we have to present our look in a decent way. And our profession is that we have to go in front of 100 plus students every day. Somehow, we have to meet some parents every day. So we have to present our look in a presentable way."

This response shows that the respondent is a teacher who makes purchases because she looks presentable and professional that way. Professional presentation behaves as a consumption driver that shapes fast fashion in such a way that it becomes an occupational necessity rather than a personal purchase. According to the respondent, professions requiring of constant interpersonal interaction, one must continuously invest

in their outward appearance to maintain credibility. This expectation normalizes frequent consumption and unsustainable buying.

Digitally Accelerated and Market Mechanisms

Respondents acknowledged that influencers regulate the preferences and purchasing decisions of their followers, even when they are aware of the commercial nature of such promotions. While some respondents shared increased skepticism over time, influencer recommendations continue to moderate product consumption choices. One of the respondent R14 added that:

"I would buy things which influencers would recommend. But over the time now I have understood. They are paid for the promotion. And now I only like follow certain. Like 2 to 3 influencers only. Which I know are recommending good products. But I still go and do my own research. And then buy it."

This response shows that selective critical engagement with influencers does not neutralize influencer impact. Digital platforms intensify consumer's exposure to trends and normalize over-consumption through multiple tactics including influencer recommendations. While there is a growing awareness that influencers are paid for product promotion, this does not really translate into disengaging the respondents from the system. Rather, the respondent switches to participation in consumption by filtering influencers and personal research. This now makes her an active consumer who purchases after critical consideration around the product, but does not reduce consumption. The respondent R19 also shares:

"Models look like models but influencers are all kinds of girls. They are fat and thin. When they wear it, they look attractive. So it feels it will look good on me too."

This shows that respondents perception of relatability to influencers is grounded in ordinariness. Influencers create a sense of acquisition around beauty standards, making products feel more personal and relevant. Unlike traditional models, influencers are perceived as a representative of ordinary people, with diverse body types, skin shades and appearance. When a style suits them, this encourages consumer's trust in the product suiting them as well. Simultaneously, despite social media behaves as a persuasive space, the ultimately decision around purchase rests with Millennials. The respondent R18 shares:

"If I see them reviewing some stuff, and if a product has a good review, for example, a platform like Instagram, they can make you feel more appealing or accessible. But I do not try to rely only on social media. I usually pause and think if I need this item, if it is good, if the reviews are good, whether if this article would look good on me. Just because they are looking good on them, because I believe that everybody is different. Everybody's color, tone, body structure is different. So it doesn't matter if

something is looking good on an influencer, if it will look good on me, or if it could complement my complexion, or my skin tone."

This response shows that for Millennial consumers, social media platforms like Instagram play a huge role in creating a sense of accessibility and desirability for fast fashion consumption, which is further exacerbated by influencer recommendations and reviews in shaping their appeal around these products. Despite the social media exposure and influencer endorsements, Millennials engage in self-regulation by distancing themselves from what is portrayed online, by opting for personal preferences only. They acknowledge the influence of idealized nature of influencer presentations, while maintaining a sense of autonomy when it comes to making a purchase decision. By resisting the blind imitation, the Millennials engage in self-assessment.

Moreover, the ease around online shopping lowers the friction around consumption process and encourages habitual browsing amongst Millennials. The respondents emphasized the ease of access, time constraints due to professional engagements and the advantage to buy without any physical exhaustion, leading to frequent and often unplanned buying. The convenience with casually exploring through products and adding items to cart transforms shopping into a continuous, less-draining activity, thus increasing unsustainable purchasing frequency. One of the respondents R16 shares that online shopping is not just preferable but almost a necessary due to work routines:

"I shop online more. Its more convenient and I don't have to put more effort and go to physical store. Since I work, so I don't have spare time and energy, it doesn't suit me. I buy online most of the time."

This response shows that convenience is the driving force of online shopping for many consumers. When platform frictions are reduced, there is an increase in purchase frequency amongst working Millennials. For another respondent, scrolling through products and adding them to cart, points to a consumption habit developed through the very act of browsing. The respondent R14 added that:

"I didn't use to shop frequently. But now I do it because of this online shopping. And sometimes, I generally like to go and put things in cart. Scroll through it and see what people look on it."

This response shows that the respondents purchasing frequency increased because platform accessibility creates convenience for purchases. This ease of access and constant availability creates temptations around purchasing. The digital marketplace, therefore, does not only facilitate consumption, but also fosters impulsivity and frequency of purchase. Discount driven consumption actively shapes the urgency and justification of a purchase, making the purchase unavoidable and reinforcing more consumption. They provide a moral buffer to consumers, allowing them to rationalize their purchases as 'economical', rather

than excessive. Sales and discounts create a sense of scarcity, pushing consumers into weighing the pros and cons of making the purchase, even when the purchase might not even be a necessary. Hence, these sales become a short-term stimulus for the consumers, in the hopes of not getting a better deal again. The respondents R19 and R18 added:

"I do all my shopping from the sale…When there is a sale, I have to buy something from it."

"I usually prefer brands that are, you know, affordable and doable that are not very expensive."

These responses show that for Millennials sale seasons are not only financial opportunities but also behavioral triggers that result in consumption. These triggers make buying from a sale feel like an obligation and a sound financial decision. Hence, Millennials assume that it is a financially rational decision to purchase outfits in bulk from a sale, effectively disregarding the consideration for sustainability. Additionally, purchasing decisions are framed by perceptions of quality, affordability and justified spending. Sales and discounts therefore become significant motivators that allow Millennials to rationalize their purchases and assume they made financially sensible decision. R18 suggests that:

"And most of the times when I go to brands, if there are sales on a brand and the item is good, then I purchase it. I never purchase when even if there is something that I like, but it is too expensive, I never buy them. Because if the price is not justifying the quality or the fabric, why would I waste money?"

The response shows that consumers would prefer to make a purchase from a sale. This reveals that their consumption is rooted in rational financial evaluation rather than environmental consideration. Similarly, another respondent R14 highlights a calculated form of purchase, where she tracks sales and makes purchases strategically. She responds:

"I do prioritize sales a lot. I know the brands. I know their sale times. And I usually, if I like something which is expensive and I really like it. I wait for the sale. And I have it in my tab open. And I would buy it whenever it goes on sale."

According per the respondent, tracking sale schedules allows one to make financially sound decisions and consumption planning in the longer run. The waiting is not out of genuine restraint for the sake of cutting short impulse purchases, rather to make economically rational choices when the sale is live and running. This might appear as rational consumption, however, it still is a desire for acquisition of fast fashion despite being delayed. The act of keeping items 'in a tab' or 'waiting for a sale' indicates the intention to buy unsustainably is already established. Instead of reducing the consumption, sales simply optimize it, making it more justified. Hence, consumers paradoxically end up spending more money in purchases during sale season than they would have in a situation without a sale.

Fast fashion consumption sometimes sustains due to digitally engineered behavioral nudges too. The repetitive and prolonged exposure to frustrating advertisements can sometimes erode the resistance the consumer shows, leading to a purchase. One of the respondents R14 shared her experience with cognitive irritation she felt due to repeated exposure to an advertisement:

"I would say Instagram has played a lot of roles. Because sometimes, there are even instances when I have bought an item just out of frustrating ads. Because I was so frustrated by some ads. The ads are so repetitive. You naturally become convinced. You are like, okay, let's just give it a go. So I have bought like that many times. But with the online channel of shopping, I have contributed to shopping a lot recently."

This response shows that algorithmic advertising ensures targeted repetition and visibility, creating a sense of inevitability around the product. The platform persistence and advertising fatigue gradually erodes consumer resistance to purchase. Hence, online shopping becomes difficult to resist because it encourages consumption through multiple marketing tactics. This explains that unsustainable consumption is not always actively chosen, rather can be passively induced through exposure designs and persuasive technologies. For Millennials, buying something on sale might feel like a responsible decision financially, even if it contributes to overconsumption.

Despite being surrounded by highly consumerist and digitally mediated shopping environments, Millennials are actively developing coping mechanisms to counter overconsumption. While consumer culture continuously proliferates heightened desire for fast fashion faster than consumers can actually control it, Millennials are consciously regulating and weakening their temporary emotional desires before they make a purchase.

Brand Trust and Loyalty

Brand trust emerges as a key driver towards reinforcing unsustainable consumption. This indicates that consumers are not indiscriminately buying fast fashion, rather they're repetitively being selective about the brands they trust. The trust within a brand builds consumer confidence about their purchases. The respondent R14 shared that:

"I think over time because I have felt some level of comfort and satisfaction buying from certain brands. So I just go to them. It's easier for me to just trust them and buy them. I am hesitant towards buying from new brands. Until it's very convincing marketing. Or if they have been recommended to you by somebody."

According to the respondent, prior positive experience eases purchasing for Millennials. This reflects that comfort and familiarity translates into habitual consumption, making consumers return to the brand

frequently. This leads to overconsumption and less self-reflection, making it less likely for consumers to introspect and reconsider sustainability implications of their purchases. The respondent R14 emphasizes quality of the product too:

"If their quality is top notch. Then I will go to that brand all the time. The quality of clothes matters to me a lot. More than style even sometimes."

This shows that brand loyalty can be maintained through promising delivery. Valuing quality could encourage longer use and reduced consumption, but in the context of fast fashion it mostly justifies brand loyalty rather than diminishing purchase frequency. Brand loyalty does not curb unsustainable behavior. It can normalize it and reinforce future purchases due to positive past experiences with the brand. High quality creates a perception around purchases being 'great investments', which can legitimize their continued buying. Hence, consumers feel that as long as their purchases are sourced from reliable brands, that consumption is rational, safe and justified, even if the overall volume of purchases remains high.

Perception around Green Fashion Brands

Financial limitations could be a key structural barrier to sustainable consumption, linking their low-cost preferences to the need for frequent purchasing, reinforcing dependence on fast fashion consumption. This suggests that sustainability (here: sustainable brands i.e. Green Fashion Brands) is often perceived as economically inaccessible or unaffordable, making cheaper or trend driven alternatives more preferable. This only redirects their consumption to low-cost, frequent purchases, as the respondent's R17 and R14 add that:

"My first priority is affordability. I don't believe in expensive clothing. Because we have to buy things very frequently. So affordability is main."

"I don't like buying just because it's a very known or a good brand or something like that. And if it's just the price for the naming and the branding. I avoid that now. So what I do keep in mind for me is that it has to be economical."

These responses show that the respondents frame consumption as a structural feature of their everyday lives. When purchasing frequently is treated like it's a norm and financially sound decisions are rational decisions, it systematically displaces sustainable behavior from purchasing behavior. For some millennials who are both aware and relatively able to afford sustainable options, they are skeptic towards it highlighting how concerns around 'greenwashing' and 'unethical supply chains' complicate consumer choices. The respondent R16 adds:

"Generation is not a green fashion brand. It is green washing; at the heart of it they're still exploiting the workers. If you want to be truly green, you need to have very ethical sourcing and supply chain management. And generation does not have that. No brand has that actually. This trend emerged in the cosmetic industry, people questioned and they started this cruelty free campaigns… No brand can be clean and green if they're not maintaining ethical standards. So generation is not a green brand."

This response shows that the distrust in brands can lead to the perception that no brand is truly ethical, reducing the incentive to pay for any brand that does not feel sustainable at all. For those with limited awareness or financial constraints, sustainable brands are a distant milestone and economically inaccessible. Amongst the informed respondents, their disengagement from certain brands, shows that awareness can sometimes translate into selective resistance. This is best evidenced in respondent R16 words:

"I don't buy from khaadi, I haven't bought from khaadi in a very long time. I think it was covid when news on social media surfaced that they exploit their employees a lot. They're not treated well. They're paid well but their working hours are cruel. Their working conditions are questionable. They can't sit and stuff. So I stopped consuming from khaadi altogether. In the past 6-7 years, I only bought once from khaadi and that made me feel extremely guilty."

The response shows that while individuals may boycott particular brands through selective resistance, the broader concern that '*no brand is fully ethical*' combined with financial and social pressures, consumers might be driven to cheaper fast fashion alternatives. But, Millennials making informed decisions, driven by awareness, accountability and guilt, choose to disengage from and selectively resist unsustainable brands. This awareness translates into informed consumption and conscious acceptance of one's impact on the environment, as deliberated by the respondent R16:

"Whenever I am buying something, it should have that longevity. It shouldn't be a one season thing. I try to be more conscious about it. But because I have come across more information about environmental issues and how individual choices connect with the whole system, so I have an understanding, so my purchases and environmental values don't come into conflict anymore."

This response reflects an emerging consumption angle which is antagonistic to the fast fashion system, when the respondent emphasizes how she is interested in products that have longevity. Another Millennial R14 shared that:

"If I get to know certain things about it, or think about it, I do try to refrain. I do look at the packaging as well, what is written on them, what are their production practices, I do look into them. And that does make me restricted towards their use or not use."

This response suggests that environmental awareness actively shapes behavior amongst Millennials, reinforcing self-evaluation and restrained consumption. Millennials demonstrate a shift from passive consumption to ethically informed decision-making, where awareness allows them to inquire regarding buying decisions. This awareness can behave as a barrier to unsustainable consumption, but it does not completely override other influences. Hence, unsustainable fast fashion consumption persists not because of environmental ignorance, rather due to social and structural embeddedness of consumption practices. This means the digital ecosystems and socio-cultural norms work together in such a way that they normalize, accelerate and legitimize frequent purchasing, even amongst environmentally conscious Millennials.

Theme 3: Multidimensional Awareness of Environmental Crisis

There are a number of visible and active environmental issues persistent across the globe, all in one way or another a result of human activities, the consequences of which surface in form of compounded threats to humans and planets life. The data uncovers that respondents demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of environmental concerns having alarming consequences, accelerated by human activities. The respondent R10 articulated extensive environmental concerns recognizing the existence, scale and implications of environmental degradation. R10 explained that Pakistan is one of the most vulnerable countries despite having a minimal contribution to environmental degradation:

"Pakistan has the least contribution to climate change yet it's the 4th most affected country."

The response shows that the awareness operates at both global and local level making respondents informed enough about the consequences of human actions and the resulting impact on the developing countries. These consequences materialize as pollution, floods and resource depletion making them highly pressing concerns. Notably, it has been emphasized multiple times that developing countries undoubtedly share a disproportionate burden, where they experience severe environmental crisis despite having comparatively lower contributions to environmental degradation. One of the respondent's R7 commented that:

"Countries like China and USA have a rivalry with each other, and countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh have to pay the cost for it."

Additionally, for another respondent, climate change is not merely perceived as an environmental issue rather as a threat multiplier affecting health, agriculture, livelihoods and overall quality of life. In her deliberations on the environmental awareness, R14 quoted that:

"Environmental crisis has become very multifaceted, specifically living in Pakistan…It's aggravating agriculture, health, living conditions, livelihoods and almost every other sector. That's why climate change is called a threat multiplier."

The respondents account shows environmental crisis as 'man-made' and a result of human activities which fuel the environmental degradation. Respondents emphasized that this degradation has tangible manifestations in form of torrential rains, droughts, rising temperatures and flash floods, exhibiting experiential and contextualized awareness about environment. R10 quoted:

"Humans have a major contribution towards deteriorating the environmental conditions especially climate change which is an urgent environmental issue … like literally a lot of organizations are built in the response to climate change because it's really alarming that in coming 30 or 40 years, the earth will be unlivable for a lot of people."

This response illustrates that humans actively contribute to expediting the deterioration of environmental crisis. For R3, environmental awareness is centered on immediate threats to health due to the prevalence of *"preservative-filled diets"* and *"the absence of real food"* where adequate attention is not being paid to it. For R5, the environmental awareness is situated in *"increasing industrialization, massive urbanization and deforestation"* threatening the present and future generations with emerging consequences of human activity. This environmental depletion is connected to health problems like "respiratory issues, skin infections and conjunctivitis" and becomes a matter of life due to *"compounded disasters in disaster prone regions."* Overall, this suggests an environmental awareness rooted in lived realities in the climate vulnerable regions.

Additionally, respondents highly acknowledge that human activities play a major role in contributing towards environmental degradation. There happens to be an open recognition of unsustainable practices and environmental butchery resulting from exploitation of resources, overconsumption, mass production and waste generation. The respondent R18 emphasizes that:

"I think that the air pollution is being caused by vehicles and factories, or from burning fossil fuels, what is happening is that the industrial emissions of these all are affecting not only human health, but I think our environment as well. There is water pollution as well, how contamination is affecting our lakes, rivers, or our oceans through industrial waste. Not just industrial waste, but through our sewage or all the plastic waste… I would say that we are destructing the habitat because we are building more houses or industries or stuff like that. So because of that, our carbon emissions are also increasing."

The respondent highlights the connection between the industrial and developmental activities that contribute to ecological degradation. The pollution is regarded as not a natural occurrence rather a byproduct of human actions such as industrialization, urban expansion, fossil fuel consumption, plastic and waste disposal and excessive construction. The nature of the human development at hand is deeply connected to the ecological crisis. This reflects an important aspect that environmental degradation is interconnected with human lifestyles and production mechanisms rather than isolated environmental impacts. The respondent R2 noted that *"unequal distribution of food and water resources, unhygienic food environment, regional disparities, unclean environment, unclean water, smoke and dust pollution, etc."* are all consequences, encompassing varied environmental issues, that result from human behavior and negligence. Additionally, respondent's (R2, R6 and R13) shared that, *"floods, water scarcity", "smog, heatwaves, rising temperatures, water contamination from textile waste*" and *"high power machines and industries built alongside water resources - releasing waste and carcinogens into water and air"* amplify the deterioration of environment. Humanity's destructive relationship with overconsumption, overproduction and its alarming impact on the environment, may contribute to feelings of powerlessness amongst the masses, particularly when individuals perceive environmental collapse as something which is difficult to reverse. R9 and R8 quoted that:

"It stresses me so much, like, we're literally creating our own destruction."

"People should fulfill their individual responsibilities, but they don't. I am especially irritated by this. Like, all over the world, there is air pollution, water pollution, and there are many things that we are facing in the world."

This shows that there is a heightened sense of environmental anxiety and self-awareness, suggesting that human behavior contributes to environmental degradation. It develops that ecological crisis is not external or unavoidable, but it is consistently being shaped by the unsustainable human lifestyles and choices. This indicates that awareness comes with a psychological pressure and generates feelings of helplessness and concern for the future. Hence, for respondents this environmental consciousness extends beyond simple awareness about broader recognition of the impending doom.

Awareness about Environmental Impact of Fast Fashion

The respondents held critical awareness regarding the impact of fast fashion on vulnerable populations, creating environmental degradation. They highly emphasized on the environmental and ethical consequences of Fast Fashion Industry, particularly about the industry utilizing excessive resources for production, waste generation and upholding exploitative supply chains. There exists a misalignment with sustainability on both consumers and producers part: producers prioritizing their maximization of profits

and consumers are driven by their desire to stay updated with trends, disregarding all environmental concerns. The respondent R7 noted an increasing use of synthetic blends in textiles, which is cost-effective for manufacturers but highly environment damaging:

"Dyes and chemicals being dumped are all exploiting the environment. Companies want profit and we want to dress well. And environment is nobody's priority… Around 60% cotton and 40% polyester is being used in textiles, which is not breathable and dangerous for your skin."

Moreover, respondents identified the system to be driven by over-production and over-consumption, where tons of clothing are manufactured, purchased and discarded using the most environmentally unsustainable and questionable methods and speed. Their awareness about fast fashion brands lies beyond the local realities and encompasses environmental injustices where brands have allegedly exported textile waste to other countries and improperly disposed-off, leading to precarious environmental and health outcomes for local communities. In addition to that, the excessive use of natural resources for production and accumulation of textile waste generated from pre- and post- consumption, lead to irreversible ecological damage, which Respondent R10 retorted in the following way:

"Fast fashion has negatively affected the environment because of overproduction, overconsumption, like a lot of resources are wasted for no reason at all and then discarding such products, like you cannot discard them in a green way, in a sustainable way. You have to burn them or maybe dump it in some place. Zara had a scandal or such once in the past. I think they dumped their disposals somewhere in Africa, which was causing a lot of health and environmental issues to the people of those communities."

This response shows that the nature of the environmental harm caused by the textile industry, including the use of non-degradable material and their harmful impact on the wild life and soil quality, reflects a strong awareness of respondents. There is no denial of environmental harm, rather the respondent is well aware of the damage caused by the fashion industry. It can be inferred from the respondent R4:

"I don't think all these textile factories, they pay much attention to the kind of products they're using, because all they care about is just their business and what they produce and how it benefits them…the materials that the textile industry uses, they are non-degradable. Whenever those big textile factories throw those things into waste, they don't degrade very easily, because of which, our wildlife is affected a lot, the quality of the soil is affected."

The response shows that respondents also shift the burden of accountability onto larger actors, and construct a moral distance from the consequences of the purchase, entirely disregarding the idea that the very

production is driven due to their demand. This separates the individual from the consequences of their own buying behavior. The respondent R7 further adds:

"Capitalism is focused on making a profit, and if these companies like usual are using influencers to promote their fast fashion, they should do it for their sustainable fashion too, then maybe, it can be addressed."

The respondent places the blame on corporate systems and marketing structures suggesting that change should be driven by companies rather than individuals. To add to the severity of the environmental cruelty, respondents mentioned the use of animal derived materials such as exotic leathers for Hermés Birkin Bags, encompass concerns about animal cruelty, biodiversity loss and unsustainable material sourcing. One of the respondent's R1 shared that:

"This is really uncomfortable to share. Like there's this very, very popular brand, Birkin. They use animal skins, like, all kinds of animals, ostrich leather and crocodile leather. Like, it's really bad and disturbing."

There existed a shared understanding amongst the respondents that overconsumption is highly driven by consumer demand and behavior that perpetuates these practices. Individuals always purchase more than they need, influenced by trends and social pressures. In doing so, they reinforce the cycle of production and environmental harm. The respondent R10 shared that:

"I think consumers should slow down on spending because it's a capitalist world. The industries, the brands are earning crazy profits off of this entire idea of overconsumption and consumerism. But we are the actual product. We are a vessel for their profits. We are accumulating on their profit with the stupid decision of overconsumption."

This reflects that there is a recognition of consumer exploitation by the capitalists and industries, encouraging consumers to purchase more than they need, and in the process normalizing excessive consumption. Hence, there is an acknowledgement around the consumer behavior that it is not only industry-driven rather through individuals' active participation in capitalist structures too.

Respondents even demonstrated that people have a responsibility towards their surrounding environment and ethical choices that should be driven out of the concern for the environment they live and breathe in. As co-inhabitants of this shared ecological system, people bear a duty to make conscious decisions and adopt sustainable ways of living and consumption in their everyday lives. Hence, these consumption choices should not be driven out of personal preferences, aesthetics and affordability, rather than awareness

for broader socio-economic and environmental costs, for which Pakistan barely has resources to address. Respondent R10 shared that:

"Consumption is causing a lot of environmental issues because companies are producing and people have the urge to buy what they don't actually even need."

Respondent R9 like others also shared a similar idea:

"I feel like we produce more than what we need and half the time we don't even need that stuff. If you increase the demand for one thing, companies will try to capitalize off of it… for a country like Pakistan, which does not even have a sound waste management system, overproduction and mass consumption of clothes is really harmful."

Additionally, the data revealed that respondents do not assume individual consumption to have a negligible impact, rather as something that has ethical weight, which requires individuals to reflect on how far their consumption choices degrade or exalt the environment. They understand that small actions accumulate to create a wider impact, reinforcing the idea that environment friendly behaviors should be foregrounded in our everyday routine activities like purchase, usage and ultimately disposal too. The respondent R7 retorted in the following words:

"Your micro level impact is going to the environment… creating an impact on us, our health, our mental health, and on our environment, we don't see it, but if we look at a micro scale, the impact is present."

This response shows that even if the impact on individual level is meagre, it is accumulating and accelerating a potentially irreversible variant of environmental degradation. Therefore, there is a need for pro-active measures and to understand that sustainable consumption is a necessary adaptation to impending environmental crisis. The awareness amongst some respondents is high but unevenly operationalized because they view some environmental issues as a point of priority than the rest. The directly experienced and visible threats like floods, droughts, and health impacts are viewed as requiring of more attention than the environmental concerns of fast fashion, despite an extensive awareness about its consequences if not handled efficiently. One of the respondent's R14 noted that:

"There are some priorities when you talk about environment and climate change. So, this could be at the very least of the environmental concerns. I am not saying it is not important, it is. And it is good to be at least aware. We are already into exasperated climate impacts. So it is better if we are doing better in some domains. We are conscious of that. So I think our focus, mind and energies are more invested towards the foreseeable or the impacts we are feeling personally. So we are more reactive towards those

things and less reactive towards precautions or something. But as a point of awareness, I think it is very good."

Another trope identified through the responses highlighted that consumers have established a hierarchical moral reasoning, where environmental concerns are acknowledged but deprioritized against immediate issues like hunger and poverty. The respondent R3 looks for an excuse, for continued consumption without guilt, in the following way:

"I know this is a very severe issue as well. But at the moment you say that if an emergency happens, you have to prioritize A, B, C. If somebody is dying out of hunger so there's so many issues that you have to like, I think, we're not able to give that much attention to something that's going on in the background more."

Hence, sustainability becomes a background problem for the consumers, while they are more reactive to concerns that are visible and prioritize them on urgent basis. This indicates that environmental concern for many is hierarchically structured depending upon which problem requires greater attention. This restructuring allows fast fashion impact to be perceived as less urgent and deserving of attention, thereby weakening its position in routine decision making. This suggests that people are more inclined towards reactive environmentalism, where attention is directed towards visible pressing crisis at hand rather than preventative long-term issues.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

5.1. Discussion

The purpose of this discussion is to convey whether research questions and objectives of the research were met or not. In accordance with that, the chapter will explain the major findings with respect to objectives, literature review, theoretical and conceptual framework. This research is divided into two study tiers, dedicated to exploring the factors responsible for influencing the consumers purchasing practice with changing trends, in the face of environmental deterioration. The environmental concerns in today's day and age are no longer distant rather multifaceted, foreseeable, and widely acknowledged. From climate change to resource depletion, the planet is under significant strain due to intensified human activity (United Nations, 2025). This accelerated environmental degradation is the result of excessive human consumption across every sphere of life. Modern consumer culture, characterized by convenience, affordability and profit, has normalized excessive purchasing behavior which is highly evident through the present-day fast fashion industry. As a result, unsustainable impulse driven purchases and frequent overconsumption practices become a routine and dramatically increase the demand and supply. Despite widespread awareness about the environmental impact of frequent consumption, there is a considerable disconnect. Many individuals claim awareness about environmental consequences, express concern over sustainability and intentions to purchase environment friendly products, yet their actual buying behavior always contradicts with their stated intentions. This intention-behavior gap exposes an embedded complex psychological and behavioral mesh underlying consumer choices.

By design, fast fashion offers instant gratification at a minimal cost, a key contributing factor to the awareness-action gap. Consumers are driven by varied emotional and social triggers – the Bandwagon Effect, the Fear of Missing Out and the Social Comparison – which override human concern for long-term environmental impact. Collectively, this immediate pleasure derived from acquiring a fashionable item outweighs numerous future considerations for environmental wellbeing, compounded by the issue of conscious or unconscious ignorance towards the negative impact of their choices. The selective ignorance enables unsustainable behaviors even in consumers who are otherwise conscious and responsible. Altogether, these dynamics help explain how behavioral biases and psycho-social motivations contribute to unsustainable fast fashion consumption.

Initially the discussion will focus on the environmental awareness across both generations. Secondly, it will foreground the impact of three psycho-social triggers i.e. the Bandwagon Effect, the Fear of Missing Out and the Social Comparison, on the unsustainable buying of fast fashion by Pakistani

Millennials and Generation Z. Lastly, the discussion expands on the unexplored psycho-social triggers that intensify fast fashion consumption across the two generations. The research results highlight a number of factors responsible for the impatience surrounding the consumption of fast changing trends. The aim of this research is to explain the impact of psycho-social triggers on fast fashion consumption by both Pakistani Gen Z and Millennials. To achieve the stated goal, there were 3 objectives established to meet the stated requirement of the research. These research objectives are discussed subsequently in accordance with the collected data:

5.1.1. Research Objective 1:

To analyze environmental awareness amongst Pakistani Gen Y (Millennials) and Gen Z.

The findings of this research reveal near-comprehensive environmental awareness amongst Pakistani Millennials and Generation Z. This awareness goes beyond simple understanding of climate crisis and encompasses understanding of the fast fashion environmental consequences as well. From chemical pollution, to excessive use of water and micro-plastic shedding, the respondents demonstrated a considerable environmental consciousness. Despite the acknowledgement, both generations continue to engage in frequent and unsustainable fast fashion consumption. The awareness-action gap is what makes these findings particularly interesting, where significant environmental awareness itself fails to translate into environment friendly behavior. The disconnect is especially alarming because in a country like Pakistan where the burden of climate crisis is not abstract rather felt and experienced, a minimal contribution to environmental degradation should feel personally relevant. This awareness is constantly overridden by emotional, social, digital forces that control the consumer purchasing decisions. The problem does not exist independently. It requires an understanding of over-consumption not as a single issue, rather as an interconnected systemic crisis which emerges due to structural and psychological barriers that prevent the awareness from translating into meaningful change. These issues and barriers are further elaborated in the following sections.

5.1.2. Research Objective 2:

To examine effects of the Bandwagon Effect, the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Social Comparison, on unsustainable impulsive fast fashion purchasing behaviors amongst Pakistani Millennials and Gen Z consumers.

This discussion focusses on the differential effects of the psycho-social triggers behind the unsustainable impulsive fast fashion consumption practices in Pakistan, specifically examining the relationship between the Bandwagon Effect, the Fear of Missing Out, the Social Comparison and the Unsustainable Impulse Buying Behavior, amongst both generations i.e. Gen Z and Millennials. The

following section contextualizes the theoretical framework, the resulting influence of the relationships between the psycho-social triggers and how these triggers interact to contribute towards unsustainable fast fashion consumption in Pakistani consumer society:

Generation Z

For Pakistani Gen Z, the findings reveal a significant behavioral outcome due to the influence of psycho-social triggers on the impulse buying of fast fashion and evolving trends in the Pakistani consumer landscape. The data indicates that the bandwagon effect does not directly drive trend participation and the fast fashion purchasing. It means that observing others engage with trends and switch to rapidly changing styles is insufficient to encourage or compel Gen Z to make an impulsive purchase decision. The bandwagon effect acts as a perceptual marker that allows Gen Z, as a digitally active participant, to observe, socially register and stay updated with the current trends. When Gen Z constantly observe their peers, social media influencers and digital community adopting fast changing styles, it registers as a normative experience.

The popular discourse largely positions Gen Z as a generation that is heavily submerged in trend driven environments and highly susceptible to peer pressure. This generation is sensitive to changing trends and short lived moments, making them easily switch to different styles without being emotionally attached to one. The widespread trend adoption amongst masses translates into a desire to look and feel trendy, resulting in positive attention towards the style. This attention can be observed in the form of consumer community adopting the trend and encouraging its adoption amongst the others. Seeing everyone purchase a particular style of trendy fashion, the praise and respectability accompanying it, creates an expectation of social credibility upon purchase amongst others too. In order to be seen as trendy and fashionably up-to-date, the young consumer's bandwagon the trend since majority is pursuing it. This aligns with the previous foundational research suggesting that trends are rapidly adopted for their social value, and favoring the group that is largely validated across social spheres over one's personal preferences (Leibenstein, 1950; Sabir et al., 2020). Fast fashion consumers rapidly go after the trends because when masses are constantly aligning with particular trends, these consumers feel an anxiety around being left behind, compelling them to bandwagon and socially conform to everyone else's choice sacrificing long-term environmental and economic sustainability (Chen et al., 2024). When a Gen Z consumer scrolls though their social media feed, they experience a world of harmless fashion being celebrated and experienced by others. The evidence of this experience scrolls right pass from one reel to another, documenting the social rewards of participating in a trend. The very fear of being socially excluded from such an experience and the group, is embedded within the Gen Z's very consumption behavior. When a specific fast fashion item circulates in the social,

digital landscape and embraced by peer networks and influencer community, it registers as a social expectation amongst other consumers.

When fast fashion trends become the talk of the town, the digitally active Gen Z consumers pursue what fashion is growing and what is not. This is because as soon as a trend goes live, it immediately triggers a strong emotional response of Fear of Missing Out. Gen Z's susceptibility to FOMO driven impulse buying is understood due to a number of reasons. It is the most digitally active generation, where individuals cannot survive a single day without social media, Wi-Fi connectivity and a feed put together through algorithms. Studies argue that these digital platforms are a source of triggering emotional responses in their users, through a variety of appealing channels (Zeta et al., 2025). The social interaction is primarily mediated by digital platforms that play an important role in peer-approved identity construction. It is framed through Instagram reels, Tik Tok trends and Snapchat streaks – surviving on urgency around the trend participation. Modern market places reinforce FOMO through algorithms and user generated content, triggering impulse buying amongst consumers. The very social visibility of Gen Z consumers maximizes their FOMO and ensures that adopting a trend provides emotional satisfaction to their identity-driven consumption, and impulse purchase provides a psychological relief. The frequent visibility of peer purchasing behavior on social media – shopping haul videos, get-ready-with-me reels and unboxing PR package with me – creates distressing anxiety regarding social exclusion and being perceived as outdated. This continued exposure creates a blend of anxiety, admiration, envy that ultimately translates into unplanned purchase decision.

Hence, FOMO operates as a significant psychological mediator, that influences the unsustainable impulse purchase of fast fashion. Young consumers constantly feel a desire for peer validation and acceptance, which makes them prioritize social belonging over ethical concerns (Bläse et al., 2023). The widespread adoption of fast fashion trends prompts FOMO which in turn results in impulse purchasing. This suggests that social environments are a source of both trend awareness and emotional experiences, that override self-control and behavioral outcomes. The Bandwagon Effect triggers a fear based response, where failure to participate in a trend feels like social exclusion and behaves as a powerful motivator for fast fashion purchasing. Thus, Bandwagon invites Gen Z to conform to trends so they can stop feeling that different from others, creating anxiety around missing out on social experiences leading to an impulsive decision (Kang & Ma, 2020).

Millennials

The behavioral dynamics of Millennials and the influence of psycho-social triggers present a contrast to Gen Z's unsustainable impulse behavior. The data indicates that while Millennials are highly engaged in social interactions, their practical manifestation of cognitive processes stalls right before it

translates into impulse behavior. The findings confirm that the pervasive adoption of trends amongst masses translates into an anxiety around social exclusion for Millennials too. Even though the bandwagon effect induces FOMO, this emotional anxiety fails to invite an unsustainable impulse purchase. It means that having a social awareness about contemporary styles and what is trending at the moment, does not ensure trend adoption or an impulse purchase. Millennials might feel an anxiety around not being part of trends, but their social awareness fails to translate into an impulse response. The fear of being different and not belonging, heavily induced by bandwagon effect, invokes a fear of missing out. This may happen because Millennials see trend engagement to be a social expectation which will make them feel socially included. Consequently, staying up to date regarding contemporary styles, symbolically bridges the generational gap for these Millennials, allowing them to retain feelings of youthfulness and a connection to the younger generation.

Pakistani Millennials came of age when social media and fashion revolutions were at a developmental stage, which could have made them internalize trend awareness as a normative expectation to being welcomed in a society. When they witness evolving fashion being adopted by masses, it triggers an anxiety of social exclusion. Instead of manifesting this anxiety in form of an apparel purchase; financial responsibilities like household rents, children education and retirement plans, take precedence for them. They demonstrate a less reactive response to trends and show resistance to peer pressure, allowing themselves to process FOMO without preferring an unplanned consumption. Despite experiencing FOMO, Millennials avoid manifesting it in form of unsustainable impulsive purchases. Even when a Millennial is facing an anxiety around social exclusion, their decisions could be moderated by other spending priorities or concerns for sustainability. Growing up, their increasing professional and familial engagements made them place more emphasis on finances and household management. Hence, trend adoption by masses does not leave an intense emotional impact for Millennials to produce an anxiety driven response. They may have also developed emotional regulation due to their own sense of personal style, and through the repeated experience with transient nature of trends, reducing the intensity around wanting what others want. But on the other hand, there could be a few Millennials who are at an earlier stage of this learning curve and have yet to fully understand that longer exposure to these mechanisms can lead to feeling pressure to indulge in impulse purchasing, which is ultimately a short-lived experience. While, these psycho-social triggers do not show a positive impact on Millennials buying practices, an in-depth study was conducted to explain what other triggers are responsible for making them indulge in impulse buying of fast fashion.

Alignment with the Theoretical Framework

The following theoretical framework explains the relationships between the psycho-social triggers and their impact on the unsustainable purchasing practices of the consumers.

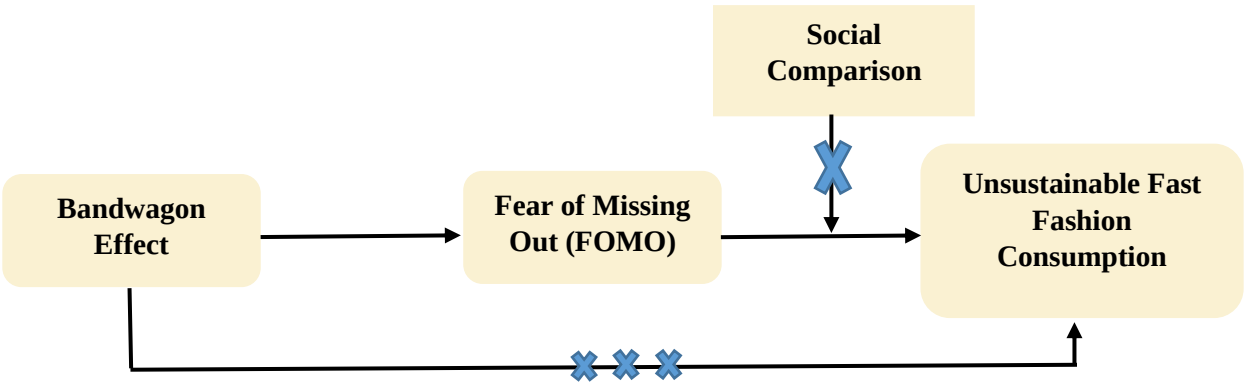


Figure 4: Theoretical Framework (Author's Construction)

The theoretical model successfully evidences that the Bandwagon Effect requires an emotional trigger to influence an unsustainable impulse purchase of fast fashion amongst Gen Z consumers. This emotional trigger creates a fear of being different from others and invites anxiety around being mocked, socially excluded or failing to experience what others can. When everyone from the peer group take a trend seriously, Gen Z feel a compulsion around not being left out. Hence, to avoid coming off as somebody who is outdated or lacks sense of current style, they feel pressured into buying fast fashion impulsively. In a few weeks' time, the trend shifts and they start feeling the same for another trend. With the increasing social visibility of the fast fashion product, greater is the products popularity amongst buyers. Instead of exploring sustainable and original style of fashion, Gen Z consumers imitate their peers in their choice of fashion assuming it to be a reasonable decision. This way they do not have to exhaust themselves with looking for the more sustainable options and assume majority cannot make an irrational decision. This social awareness activates a fear of missing out on these experiences, reinforcing the impulse purchase of fast fashion to fit within the trend environment laid out by the rest.

On the contrast, Millennials experience a Bandwagon Effect induced FOMO. It feels important to them so they feel that they are still an important and connected part of the society. Nevertheless, their anxiety does not encourage an impulse purchase of trends. They tend to have social information about what is trending and currently a practice, but their awareness does not translate into an unsustainable of the trends in order to feel socially validated and included. Their fear of social exclusion drives them to stay updated with the information around trends and what others prefer but it is not provocative enough to make them impulsively respond through an unsustainable purchase. This concept readily aligns with Przybylski et al., (2013) idea, characterizing FOMO to operate in such a manner that it does not provoke an unplanned purchase. The social anxiety and distress is felt, but processed consciously rather than being translated into purchasing behavior. This supports the idea that Millennials may be informationally aligned with trends without converting their interests into impulse actions. The findings exhibit that there remain cognitive

barriers like maturity, socio-economic realities and financial security that override this form of reckless buying amongst Millennials.

The findings also reveal that Social Comparison does not moderate the relationship between FOMO and the unsustainable impulse buying for both Gen Z and Millennial consumers of fast fashion. It is a shared understanding that individuals who compare themselves to others would be influenced more, as a result making more purchases. Consumers who socially compare frequently, experience a high FOMO which intensifies their impulse fast fashion purchases. Rather than behaving as mutually reinforcing mechanisms, both SC and FOMO operate as parallel psycho-social processes. Social Comparison is a cognitive process where individuals self-evaluate their own opinions, assets and social standing with respect to others (Festinger, 1954). Consumers evaluate their wardrobes against those of peers and influencers, and anxiety emerges when there is a gap between the two. FOMO on the other hand, is an emotional experience that encompasses anxiety, restlessness and urgency in order to show a behavioral response (Przybylski et al., 2013). Their non-significant interaction, while theoretically related, reflects a cognitive and an emotional pathway that does not compound each other's effects on the behavioral outcome of impulse buying for either of the generations. A consumer with high social comparison traits does not necessarily experience high FOMO driven impulse buying. Independently both social comparison and FOMO could be driving impulse buying of fast fashion. Gen Z and Millennials may actively compare that others have way more fast fashion assets, yet desire to purchase is strictly controlled by the social urgency framed around the trend and how fast a new style goes viral. When consumers frequently compare their apparel, appearance and assets choices with those of others, this creates dissatisfaction around their consumption preferences (Sabir et al., 2020). This anxiety due to feelings of inadequacy translates into unplanned impulsive purchases, operating complementarily alongside Bandwagon Effect and the Fear of Missing Out, but not influencing their impact. They feel a strong desire to acquire possessions that places them at above in a social hierarchy compared to others, ultimately determines their yearning of impulse buying (Pradila & Sari, 2024). The more they are aligned to trends and changing up-to-date styles, the more they are exposed to engage in buying opportunities. Hence, this alignment with unsustainable purchasing emerges because of a number of unexplored social, psychological, and emotional triggers for both generations which will be discussed in the following section.

5.1.3. Research Objective 3:

To identify the unexplored psychological and social triggers that compel young Gen Z and Millennial consumers toward impulsive fast fashion buying, and engage in strategic ignorance effectively disregarding their awareness of its environmental impact.

This discussion focusses on the unexplored psycho-social triggers that complicate adoption of sustainable behavior and prompt the unsustainable fast fashion consumption practices across Pakistani Gen Z and Millennials. These factors encompass psycho-social, emotional and digital dynamics that contribute a massive role in fast fashion purchase decisions. The findings of the qualitative study demonstrate some of the key overlapping factors, not captured by the quantitative study, that accelerate and reinforce the continued involvement of both generations in unreflective and repetitive buying of fast fashion.

1. The Psychological and Social Design of Unsustainable Fast Fashion Consumption

Unsustainable fast fashion consumption amongst both generations is not a result of rational economic decision rather shaped by psycho-emotional circumstances that confuse consumers and cloud their judgement when making a purchase. George Ainslie (2012) argued that for the sake of instant gratification, humans prefer immediate reward over a delayed reward. They tend to be highly inclined towards what gives them gratification as earlier as possible. Amongst Gen Z respondents, psycho-emotional states of stress, boredom, and overwhelming desire for instant gratification have emerged to be significant triggers pushing a purchase. This behavior is evidenced through the broader literature on 'retail therapy', that categorizes impulse shopping purchases as a behavioral strategy for handling negative emotions (Atalay & Meloy, 2011). This emotional anxiety and troubled mood is accompanied by an unplanned purchase and lack of behavioral control. The impulse purchase becomes a tool to manage emotional discomfort and overrides any deliberation for environmental consideration. The overabundance of products and the burden of making a choice in highly saturated retail environments, Gen Z consumers choose to opt for anything in order to resolve the cognitive discomfort. This behavior has been well documented in consumer psychology studies as well, explicating that excess in choices force consumers towards impulse and low-effort decisions in order to escape the effort involved in making that one choice (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). This mental overload that consumers feel around making a choice, enables impulse buying. When exposed to retail spaces with unlimited options, rational decision making becomes difficult for a lot of consumers, creating exhaustion around making a decision let alone thinking about sustainability concerns. The consumers choose to prioritize their immediate mental wellbeing and psychological relief, and override future rewards like informed decision making, financial and environmental consideration. Millennials also driven by emotional decisions, frame and rationalize their purchases in such a way that renders them acceptable. When purchasing is done for the sake of experiencing joy, the sustainability considerations become almost non-existent. This aligns with the George Ainslie's (2012) concept of Hyperbolic Discounting where consumers value smaller immediate emotional rewards over larger future rewards. Such emotional rationalization of impulse behavior stalls the self-evaluation of one's own actions. This form of unreflective behavior carries significant weight because the psycho-emotional and social rewards accompanying it effectively override delayed environmental awareness and sustainability.

The retail environments also socially engineer scarcity of fast fashion amongst Gen Z making it an externally engineered Hyperbolic Discounting, where retailers force consumers to acquire immediate reward that Ainslie describes. This fear of not being able to find products again creates an emotional urgency that overrides practical considerations and financial constraints. In order to not feel guilty in future about giving up on the item, the consumers make the purchase. This concept aligns well with studies illustrating forecasting of the guilt. Rather than recognizing the consequences of one's behavior, regret takes precedence over mindful decision making and acts a strong motivator of unsustainable impulse consumption (Gilbert & Wilson, 2005). Gen Z consumers estimate how much will they regret not buying and derive an emotional reward from that purchase. In order to acquire emotional recovery from the future regret they will experience upon not purchasing, consumers end up satisfying their desire for the product. This behavior is not really familiar amongst Millennials rather actively seen amongst Gen Z consumers. The process is reinforced by the retail and digital environments that manufacture urgency for a trending item, making mindful decisions a difficult task to achieve.

Additionally, for Gen Z consumers, the peer pressure to fit in with others compels one to keep up with the trends and show preference for the same styles. Pacing up with the wardrobe and fashion items of one's peer group becomes a social requirement in order to be identified as group's part. Social comparison determines the worth of the item and the passion for impulse buying. This acts as a social currency through which peer acceptance is maintained. The social comparison amongst peers behaves as a persistent trigger to generating anxiety and desire for consumption (Pradila & Sari, 2024). In order to fill the perceived social gap, that emerges from the different experiences and constant comparisons, the simplest resolution appears to be in purchasing. Gen Z consumers seek social approvals before purchasing, framing consumption as a form of social process rather than an independent decision. The repeated reliance on others opinions show that purchase decisions are highly influenced by other people's preferences and reactions. Consumers internalize an expectation around frequent profile update by uploading pictures, inviting appreciation and upholding a public image of fashionable icon as the norm. Once an outfit is posted online, repeating that outfit invites social judgement. It means that clothing items are evaluated for their social worth and how many unique appearances it can produce, something which is inherent to fast fashion and constantly evolving trends. This shows that a social life of a fast fashion item is very small than its physical life, making the influx of new clothing items a social necessity. Hence, consumption choices carry a digital and social weight which pressurizes Gen Z to ignore conscious decision making and indulge in large scale consumption to uphold that social image.

Social pressure does not disappear with age rather it transforms into different institutional contexts. For Millennials, it takes the shape of professional and familial expectations, particularly amongst working

women to present themselves as decent, professional and serious in their jobs. Moreover, in informal settings and family dynamics, repeating an outfit more than a few times is socially frowned upon and carries social stigma. This embeds unsustainable consumption in everyday social realities of professional life and family dynamics, rather than reckless fashion choices or impulse decisions. The repetitive purchasing of fast fashion for Millennials is a normalized social compliance so deeply normalized, where it is never really seen being translated from a conscious choice at all. The reliance on informal endorsements show a great degree of social validation where purchasing decisions are not made in a vacuum but are highly influenced by social relations. Hence, the expectation of a buying new outfit for festivities, avoiding repetition at formal events and upholding the professional criteria, makes these social influences even more powerful because they cannot be easily identified, realized and resisted in contrast to the explicit influences experiences by Gen Z. Hence, this kind of social pressure controls consumption behavior by operating through different channels to maintain pressure on both generations. The fear of social judgements and scrutiny as a result of non-compliance outcompetes environmental consideration. Consumers end up prioritizing the unsustainable fast fashion consumption due to pressure developed by psycho-emotional drivers, perceived scarcity and social pressures, reducing the impact of sustainability concerns on their purchasing decisions.

2. The Digital Landscape and Market Mechanisms

The digital environment has emerged as one of the most powerful drivers of unsustainable purchasing behavior not because of social comparisons or peer pressure, rather due to the algorithmic structure of content, that enables impulsive consumption amongst consumers. It behaves as an active medium for fashion discovery and shapes desire around what to purchase. For Gen Z, digital marketplace is behaviorally engineered, where targeted advertisements, reminders on items in the cart and automatic pre-filled checkout forms frequent digital temptation, narrowing down consumer's digital world towards consumption. This aligns with one of the studies conducted on consumer behavior where reducing barriers to repeated buying, actively increases the convenience around impulse buying, making the process very seamless (Kaur & Sharma, 2024). The pre-filled check-outs and the pre-filled billing information is a convenience design of today's digital structures that enable unreflective consumption. This blurs the line between just browsing and actually buying, normalizing frequent purchases. The persistent exposure to fashion content, results in algorithmic restructuring of one's online feed, leading to continued display of desired products and preferences. Thus algorithm traps the digital user into a consumption bubble, where it shows only fast fashion content if it has frequently been viewed before. This turns passive browsing and scrolling into an automated trap that constantly manufactures a consumer's desire to buy, rather than the consumer independently making a purchase decision.

The structural algorithmic design is further reinforced by social media influencer endorsements, but the nature of trust in these influencers is distinct for both generations. These influencers behave as intermediaries who frame trending fashion products as urgent and highly desirable. Gen Z look up to celebrities and influencers as ultimate style references. If a favorite celebrity picks a particular fashion style, they want to buy it immediately. Their glamorous wardrobe and lifestyle acts as a literal blueprint for how Gen Z should dress up and spend their resources. The trust placed in influencers is a source of 'social proof' mechanism; where consumers feel socially safe towards making a purchase.

Millennials on the other hand are much more practical. Their relationship with the digital environments is characterized by greater 'self-awareness' than Gen Z's, yet it does not really translate into reduced consumption. They barely care about the flawlessness, rather influencers are perceived as authentic and relatable figures. The influencers are trusted figures because they look like normal people. Millennials emphasize that influencers are random girls with diverse body types. When they style a particular trend, it encourages another person of the same body type to feel that they can style the same trend too. For them, trust is built on authenticity and utility of the fashion item. If it looks good on an influencer, it can look good on others too, prompting adoption of the style and purchase of the item. The dynamic becomes more complex when social media behaves as a psychological machine designed to breakdown consumer's self-control and make them spend (Kalpana & Krishnan, 2025). The sale-tracking behavior particularly found amongst Millennials, illustrates a very vigilant strategical tool to make financially sound decisions. The brands' sale seasons and timing purchases in accordance with discounts is framed as financial management. This allows consumers to rationalize their purchases which are not made out of genuine need. Market mechanisms tactfully wear down consumer's resistance, by normalizing purchases through persistent algorithmic advertising. Platform like Instagram and TikTok record every activity of a user, even scrolling past a picture or video is registered as a sign of interest, feeding it back into the system to generate a whole custom feed from what algorithm has picked. This creates a feedback loop where digital platforms continuously accelerate the consumer's exposure to fast fashion instances, making it difficult to reduce purchasing. Hence, digital influence is a powerful driver of unsustainable purchasing behavior that operates underneath the threshold of conscious choice, making consumers opt out of their concern for sustainability.

For Millennials, purchase decisions are not only an emotional reaction to an outfit that they really like, but also a highly strategic and well-thought out decision, influenced by market mechanisms. These processes not only help consumers map out the ways of landing the perfect opportunities for the purchase, but also inculcates materialistic capacities within consumers that hastens the impulse purchases (Falajunah & Dewi, 2025). Unlike Gen Z, who might get lured into buying impulsively due to excessive appearance of an advertisement, Millennials identify a few favorite brands, memorize seasonal sale schedules and track

their discount periods. This behavior allows them to 'rationalize' their overconsumption. Because when the items are being purchased on sales or discounts, Millennials do not assume it to be reckless or wasteful. Instead, they perceive the purchase to be a victory which is an outcome of rational and financially sound decision making. They treat spending on limited time offers and frequent clearance sales to be smart and economical strategies. Hence, they fall prey to the very structural and operational mechanisms of fast fashion marketing, i.e. frequent sales and limited stock offers, making them believe repetitive buying not as an impulse decision rather personalized economical strategy. They completely ignore the environmental impact of their purchases by keeping their entire focus on financial decision making. This exempts them from any sort of environmental accountability and the financial maturity, which in their perspective precisely originates from their very concern for sustainability. This behavior perfectly mirrors the concept of neutralization theory (Sykes & Matza, 1957), where individuals develop strategies to allow themselves to engage in behaviors to silence their conscience. This explains how good intentioned people can engage in behavior inconsistent with their values by reframing them as morally acceptable ones. They do this by reframing their behavior as morally acceptable before they even do it. A Millennial consumer might genuinely be driven out of care for the environment, but before any guilt of buying fast fashion recklessly hits them, their brain actively neutralizes the regret by framing it around making an economically sound decision. This is what perpetuates the unsustainable fast fashion cycle.

3. Strategic Environmental Ignorance: From Awareness to Inaction

Consumers of fast fashion are equipped with awareness of environmental concerns and sustainable fashion alternatives, but this awareness does not equate to sustainable consumption. While both Gen Z and Millennial participants demonstrate an awareness of green fashion and demonstrate a concern for environmental wellbeing, but this alignment is constantly overridden by barriers that prevent it from translating into actual purchasing behavior. This illustrates the Attitude-Behavior Gap where ethical intentions of consumers are buffered through external barriers (Carrington et al., 2010). The findings show that in some circumstances this gap does not emerge from consumer hypocrisy, rather it emerges from structural limitations unique to Pakistan's fashion industry ecosystem.

For Gen Z, the primary barrier preventing the sustainable purchasing is both due to aesthetic and experiential reasons. In the digital landscape, fashion and styling is an active vehicle for self-expression, identity formation and online visibility. According to the findings, Gen Z consumers encounter 2 main hurdles when they evaluate local green fashion alternatives. First, they perceive green fashion as visually unappealing, poorly designed or lacking in the hype and attention that conventional fast fashion receives. As per the consumers, for green fashion to be promising, it should have strict aesthetic standards over its pro-environment standards. Consumers are unwilling to compromise on personal style for environmental

considerations. The perception that green brands fail to meet their aesthetic criteria, suggests that aesthetics is the primary driver of Gen Z purchasing decisions. For a generation that actively places visual appeal above all other considerations, will not treat sustainable brands even as an available option for purchase. Second, multiple Gen Z consumers have also noted that they have never encountered a green fashion brand. This reflects the reality of the retail market of Pakistan, where sustainable fashion fails to capture the attention of the consumers, survives on low brand visibility, exercises non-existent marketing, and poor distribution networks. For Gen Z, if a brand does not exist in their digital ecosystem or physical malls, then it does not exist at all. Hence, Gen Z disregards the sustainable options and engage in strategic environmental ignorance because they do not meet the aesthetic, financial and accessibility standards.

For Millennials, the lack of affordability is a primary concern leading to rejection of green fashion. They recognize and articulate that creating ethical fashion requires supply chain accountability, organic material, fair labor wages and transparent manufacturing – which raises the final price of the product. For Millennials high inflation, utility bills, household management remains a non-negotiable criterion for any purchase. They cannot afford to purchase pro-environment clothing when fast fashion alternatives offer similar utility at a lower cost. There is paradoxically a reduction in the motivation to look for sustainable options when consumers intend to boycott brands that come off as sustainable but has unethical supply chains. This hyper-informed environmental consciousness creates a moral exhaustion that inculcates deliberate environmental ignorance. The persistent reliance on fast fashion in developing countries like Pakistan is not always a result of moral failing of the consumers, rather it could be due to an underdeveloped green market. Pakistani consumers are stuck in an ecosystem where sustainable alternatives are scare, expensive and aesthetically lacking. Financial limitations make sustainable options economically inaccessible for a lot of interested consumers as well. When sustainable alternatives are inaccessible, rationalizing the use of fast fashion requires less effort. This is because when consumers experience structural constraints, psychological and emotional barriers would naturally supersede their rational considerations.

Beyond the structural barriers, both generations engage in consumption behavior that provides them a moral wiggle room to actively employ guilt-free consumption and strategic environmental ignorance. Millennials manifest it in the form of informed moral distancing. They neutralize their unsustainable consumption guilt by assuming that no brand is truly ethical and that individual choices are ultimately inconsequential in a structurally compromised industry. This institutional pessimism serves as a psychological barrier that allows them to bypass sustainable options without experiencing accountability in relation to their consumption of fast fashion. For Gen Z, fast fashion consumption is so deeply embedded within their social survival and digital identity that environmental consideration is actively deprioritized.

The risk of social exclusion is so massive that it outweighs the threat surrounding environmental degradation, leaving out sustainability as irrelevant to their unreflective purchasing decisions.

Alignment with the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework supporting this study proposes that climate safety awareness and knowledge about the sustainability concerns produces Strategic Environmental Ignorance. This is a deliberate choice to ignore environmental harms in favor of fast fashion consumption for different reasons varying from one generation to another. This consumption of fast fashion operates at the intersection of multiple psychological, social and digital triggers and deliberate ignorance of the environmental concerns, that readily drive Fast Fashion consumption.

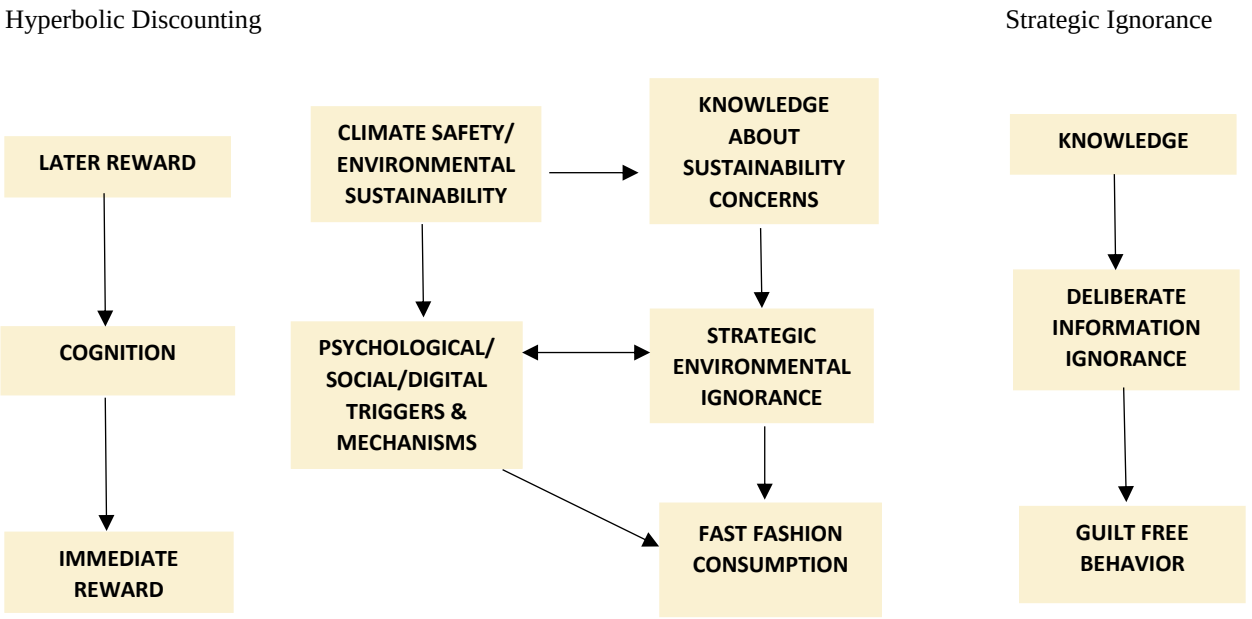


Figure 5: Conceptual Framework (Source: Author's Construction)

The qualitative findings of the study support this framework and explain how each component operates in practice and tends to contribute to generating a phenomenon. The relationship between psychological, social, digital triggers and strategic environmental ignorance is strongly supported by the data. The findings of the study reinforce that the Strategic Environmental Ignorance is not a deliberate decision to disregard environmental considerations when making a purchase, rather it is an outcome of an overwhelmingly saturated consumption environments where emotional triggers, social pressures, expectations, digital drivers and perception of pro-environment brands, collectively frame the cognitive and emotional behaviors towards consumption. These drivers compel consumers to forego the future rewards for the immediate instant gratification derived from an impulse purchase. Under the sheer weight of these

forces, consumers are driven towards the impulse buying of unsustainable fashion, which neither has a long social nor quality life.

Across both generation, environmental crisis is deeply felt and extends beyond familiarity with climate change and environmental degradation. However, this awareness conflicts with the psycho-emotional needs, social obligations, algorithm driven digital environments, and absence of credible pro-environment alternatives. For consumers, the environmental concerns emerging from the fast fashion industry are crowded out and deprioritized. Hence, the environmental acknowledgement remains behaviorally inert and these qualitative findings provide a voice to this gap.

Integration of the Models

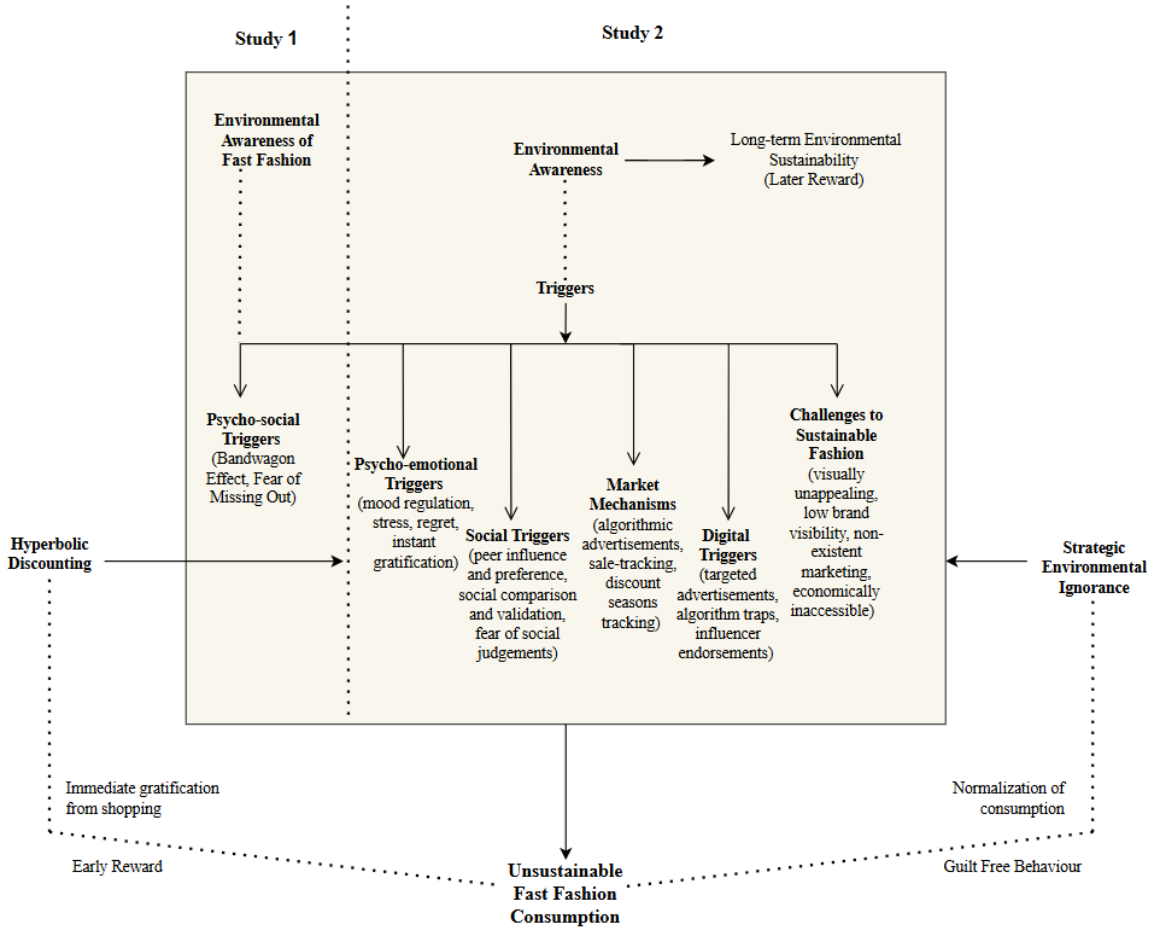


Figure 6: An Integrated Framework: Bridging Study 1 and Study 2

This integrated model illustrates the relationship between Study 1 and Study 2, showing the extent to which the quantitative study complements the qualitative study, giving rise to a mixed-methods research

approach rather than independent studies. The quantitative study evidences that psycho-social triggers i.e., bandwagon wagon effect and fear of missing out not only influence the buying of unsustainable fast fashion despite environmental awareness, but also encourage an in-depth exploration of unexplored triggers in form of a qualitative study. In addition, these studies build on the psycho-social triggers involved in amplifying the demand of fast fashion and reveal the mechanisms through which they operate differently across both Generation Z and Millennials. While the quantitative findings exemplified that there are certain triggers that contribute to unsustainable impulse buying of fast fashion, it opens the question for additional psycho-emotional, social and digital mechanisms that sustain the unsustainable consumption beyond three constructs, and the ways consumers end up rationalizing and justifying their environmental degrading behavior, despite environmental awareness. The study 2 further dives into examining the deeper and less evident triggers that make sustainable fashion practically an inaccessible alternative for Pakistani consumers. The final finding shows that these triggers pave the path for unsustainable consumption where the consumers engage in hyperbolic discounting and strategic environmental ignorance, consistently deprioritizing environmental responsibility and consideration behaviorally. This results in immediate gratification from impulse buying of fast fashion which outcompetes the regard for environmental concerns. Simultaneously, consumers actively frame their mindset in such a way that allows them to consume guilt-free, by normalizing their unsustainable purchases as a social and environmental necessity. This integrated model captures the fast fashion paradox that exists at the heart of this research, where Pakistani consumers remain embedded in consumption despite the awareness that might otherwise curb them from such behavior. It highlights that awareness alone is insufficient to produce sustainable behavior. Under the psychological, social, market and digital weight, consumers feel driven towards making purchases. These architectural influences have been designed in such a way that normalize excessive consumption and reinforce the prioritization of fast fashion buying and reward consumption.

5.2. Practical Implications

The Pakistani fast fashion industry is no longer operating on the rational economic decision making or aesthetic preferences, rather it is driven by psycho-social mechanisms that emerge from digital media, influencer culture and emotional vulnerabilities. This holds critical implications for both social policy, fashion industry design and digital platform stakeholders within the Pakistani ecosystem:

1. The research reveals that passive browsing behaves as a trap where consumer interests and desires are manufactured through different algorithm driven targeted reels and posts on social media platforms. Digital platform designers and regulatory bodies should recognize fast fashion as a structural issue embedded in digital environment rather than a simple consumer choice. Policy interventions should examine advertisements targeting consumer

vulnerabilities and implement features that encourage healthy use of these platforms to disrupt frequent shopping trends.

2. To bridge the awareness-action gap, interventions cannot solely rely on consumer awareness and guilt driven green marketing campaigns, rather it is important to incentivize the local textile industry to produce competitive sustainable clothing. To address this gap, the supply side conditions in Pakistan will require a radical transformation. Local manufacturers, designers and retailers must come together to reduce their production costs, match trend-responsive design standards and scale up the brands marketing visibility. Green fashion brands and sustainable fashion entrepreneurs should match the energy of viral trends and aesthetic demand of the consumers while lowering their affordability and accessibility costs. The gap will remain open unless sustainable fashion is made realistic, affordable and visually acceptable.
3. On a social level, interventions should be aimed at building consumer resilience and promoting sustainable consumption. Education and social policies should place more emphasis on identity construction that is rooted in emotional intelligence and rational decision making, so manipulative psycho-social influences are filtered out when they appear before a consumer.

5.3. Conclusion

This research is set out to explore why Pakistani consumers repeatedly engage in buying fast fashion despite a considerable awareness about the harm the fashion industry brings upon the environment. It seeks to understand the intricate psycho-social machinery driving the unsustainable fast fashion consumption across both Millennials and Generation Z. The research showed that the fast fashion industry in Pakistan does not rely on simple consumer preferences, rather it thrives through an adaptive digital environment and a deeply embedded social compliance. The results demonstrate that Bandwagon Effect, Fear of Missing Out and Social Comparison are not the only psycho-social trigger that drive unsustainable fast fashion consumption, rather there are numerous psycho-emotional, social and digital mechanisms that accelerate impulsive consumption. The study proves that for Gen Z, bandwagon alone does not drive an impulse purchase, rather for consumers to mass adopt a trend of fast fashion, they require an emotional catalyst (FoMO) that drives the unsustainable consumption. This is not true for Millennials. The study also highlights that social comparison and FoMO do not compound one another i.e. the self-evaluation and anxiety do not collectively influence the impulse buying relationship for either of the generation. A consumer's social comparison of their social standing relative to others does not alter the emotional panic they feel around missing a viral trend. In addition, Pakistani Generation Z tends to engage in unplanned purchases due to hyper-visible digital peer pressure, influencer endorsements, overwhelming

advertisements and aesthetic appeal of the fast fashion in order to escape the digital and social isolation. Whereas, Pakistani Millennials stay confined within the fast fashion cycle due to socio-professional expectations and their framing of consumption as reasonably and financially savvy behavior, effectively disregarding the environmental concerns emerging from their consumption.

Lastly, this research shows that the frequent consumption of fast fashion amongst Pakistani consumers is not a product of moral hypocrisy and indifference to the emerging environmental issues. Rather, it emerges as an inevitable consequence of the hyper-connected, algorithmically crafted digital environments and social expectations. Generation Z buys to survive the emotional anxiety of digital exclusion, while Millennials buy to survive the structural realities of the social presentation. Both generations show meaningful awareness of the fast fashion industry's contribution to the environmental degradation. They do not lack information, rather a way out of this problem. While distancing oneself from fast fashion culture comes with a cost of social risk, sustainable fashion in Pakistan is not even considered an option because it is running low, expensive and frequently distrusted. The digital environment is designed in such a way that it compels consumers to avoid making any readjustments and control purchasing difficult. Pakistani consumers are navigating a system that is designed to make them consume. Unless the domestic market undergoes structural revolution to bring it sustainable alternatives that are affordable, aesthetically appealing and accessible, young consumers will remain trapped. There is a need to shift the burden off of the consumers and call out the digital architecture and supply chains that feed and fuel their desire for consumption. Policy and scholarly attention to this industry and its operating mechanisms is where meaningful change will begin.

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Annexure 1

Table 16: Thematic Chart (Authors Construction)

Theme	Sub Theme	Codes	Description	Example
Factors Influencing the Unsustainable Buying of Fast Fashion Amongst Generation Z	Psycho-Emotional Drivers Aesthetics Criteria, Impulse Decision Making, Social Pressures, Digitally Mediated Influence, Perception of Green Fashion, Affordability and Accessibility	Extreme exam stress, bored easily, substituting desires, overwhelming choices, cognitive fatigue, pressure, comfort, personal liking, social media tempts, momentary, a lot of bangle craze, impulse buy, without thinking, opinion of a person, she liked something, I like it too, everyone around you is so much into fashion, peer pressure, upload pictures, have to fit in, others will praise, social media	Amongst Gen Z, the hasty unsustainable purchase decisions around Fast Fashion are actively influenced due to a number of factors that are involved in accelerating and normalizing repetitive consumption.	R4: *"I think it happens in extreme exam stress, that I order something, and I realize later that, oh my god, I didn't need this thing."* R9: *"Wherever I go, it's just clothes, clothes, clothes. So, the moment I enter a store, I get overwhelmed."* R3: "*I follow things that are actually pretty. So, they go in every trend. So, every time I wear them, I feel pretty."* R3: *"I follow things that are actually pretty."* R7: *"I'll purchase what Iqra Aziz is wearing."* R4: *"when I see a reel regarding anything which I find very tempting, so yes, I do go and buy that thing."*

		influencers, celebrities, open store pages, algorithms, ads coming up, sale alarms, see all these ads, like green brands, recyclable material, designed poorly, environmental sustainability is expensive, bad condition, financial bracket, affordability.		R4: *"I impulse buy when I'm online. I have my phone, I'm alone, and my add-to-cart is running."* R3: "*she agrees and buys it for me."* R9: *"I feel that if you're buying as much as you're seeing."* R1: *"I have a lot of pair of jeans and the reason behind it is those ads coming up every second."* R4: *"The clothes were designed so poorly."*
Factors Influencing the Unsustainable Buying of Fast Fashion Amongst Millennials	Psycho-Emotional Drivers, Social Pressures, Digital Influence and Market Mechanisms, Brand Trust and Loyalty, Perception around Green Fashion	Not good, appealing visually, designing, attract you a lot of times, make you feel appealing, complement my complexion, won't find them again, purpose of life, need in the future, make myself happy,	Buying decisions of Millennials are heavily influenced by a number of factors making Millennials indulge in unreflective purchases, that make the buying of Fast Fashion unavoidable. These	R14: *"I wouldn't buy if the thing is not good, not appealing visually."* R19: *"Sometimes, when the mood is low, I buy something to make myself happy."* R16: *"it's very frowned upon in our families that if you have worn it twice, you can't wear it thrice."*

	recommended by someone, am hesitant towards buying from new brands, comfort, satisfaction, recommending good products, do it out of social compulsion, present our look, continue buying from sales, continue buying, buying multiple items is a requirement, move in the society, shopping online is convenient, don't have to put more effort, like to put things in cart, shopping from the sale, not very expensive, affordable, sales on a brand, prioritize sales, goes	factors allow them to rationalize repetitive buying and reduce their incentive for sustainable behavior.	R17: *"But because we are working ladies, we have to present our look in a decent way."* R14: *"Like 2 to 3 influencers only. Which I know are recommending good products."* R19: *"Sometimes, models look like models but influencers are all kinds of girls. They are fat and thin. When they wear it, they look attractive. So it feels it will look good on us too."* R16: *"I shop online more. Its more convenient and I don't have to put more effort."* R18: *"If there are sales on a brand and the item is good, then I purchase it."* R14: *"I do prioritize sales a lot. I know the brands. I know their sale times."* R14: *"I have bought an item just*

		on sale, ads are repetitive.		R16: "*If you want to be truly green, you need to have very ethical sourcing and supply chain management."*
Multidimensional Awareness of Environmental Crisis	Environmental Degradation, Active human contribution, Awareness of Environmental Impact of fast fashion,	Climate change is a threat multiplier, deteriorating environmental conditions, man-made crisis, increasing industrialization, massive urbanization, deforestation, biodiversity loss, compounded disasters, industrial emissions, destructing habitat, ecological degradation, releasing waste and carcinogens, rising temperatures, lack of sound waste	The individuals recognize the threat around environmental crisis to be severe and disproportionately affecting developing countries. While, human activities are primary driver's environmental degradation because human actions directly accelerate the ecological destruction, there is growing awareness about fast fashion industries impact on humans and an	R10: *"Pakistan has the least contribution to climate change yet it's the 4th most affected country."* R7: *"Countries like China and USA have a rivalry with each other, and countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh have to pay the cost for it."* R9: *"It stresses me so much, like, we're literally creating our own destruction."* R1: "*A very popular brand, Birkin. They use animal skins, like, all kinds of animals, ostrich leather and crocodile leather."*

	management system, ecological issues.	accelerated irreversible wave of environmental degradation.

(Source: Author's Construction)

Annexure 2

Table 17: Thematic Analysis via the Braun & Clarke Method (2006)

Generating Codes	Identifying Themes	Refining & Defining Theme	Report: Illustrative Quote
Generation Z			
Exam stress, emotional displacement, post-purchase regret, mood-based buying, out of place emotions, indecisive	**Stress Regulation**	**Psycho-Emotional Drivers of Unsustainable Consumption**	*"I think it happens in extreme exam stress, that I order something, and I realize later that, oh my god, I didn't need this thing."*
Bored easily, desire for change, wardrobe renewal, wear new clothes every day, feel courage, feel strength	**Mood Regulation**		*"It's not a need. It's more like I get bored easily. So, I do change my fashion sense. I try to get new things as well."*
Change style, update wardrobe, want new clothes, emotional reinforcement	**Novelty-Seeking**		*"I want new clothes every day. And, I still want to change my wardrobe, my style."*
Overwhelming choices, clothes-vomit, cognitive fatigue, clouded judgement	**Cognitive Overload in Retail Environments**		*"Wherever I go, it's just clothes, clothes, clothes. So, the moment I enter a store, I get overwhelmed."*
Personal liking, visual appeal, comfort priority, style over trends, attractive colors, cute designs, appeal is non-negotiable, cleanliness, sophistication	**Preferential Aesthetics**		*"I mostly judge things by aesthetic. I don't care about the brand. I don't care about the price. I just care about aesthetics."*
Scarcity mindset, unique find, won't find it again, impulsive commitment, wasted money, will not come across similar item.	**Fear of Product Unavailability in the future**	**Perceived Scarcity & Urgency**	*"I impulsively buy hoodies. And if I can't find them anywhere. So when I find something so unique, I go I finally found it. I need it right this instant."*
Future regret, hesitation, emotional recovery through purchase, post-purchase justification, post purchase relief	**Anticipated Regret**		*"If I hadn't bought it, I would have regretted it. Once I bought it I realized, I shouldn't have. But when I see the bag, I feel good."*

Generating Codes	Identifying Themes	Refining & Defining Theme	Report: Illustrative Quote
Sale alarms, running out, 50% off, immediate decision, sale provocation	**Sale & Discount Urgency**		*"Their sales also provoke you that it's running out. And it's 50% and you buy it immediately."*
Pressure to fit in, peer pressure, others will praise, social validation, pressure to post pictures in new outfits, comments, likes, unconscious pressure, thirst for appreciation, praise, pressure to be pointed out, repetition, feel left out	**Peer Pressure & Conformity**	**Social Pressure Driven Consumption**	*"I feel like if I didn't have societal pressure, I would just wear whatever I want. Everyone around you is so much into fashion."*
Opinion of a person, she liked it, I like it too, peer approval, agreement, opinion, satisfaction with advise, Upload pictures, can't repeat, others will point out, social media image, confusion	**Social Approval**		*"Everyone is looking at you. You can't repeat it. Once pictures are taken and posted on social media, we get confused about how to repeat it?"*
Observational cues, shopping bags, indication, curiosity develops, window shopping, shopping with kin	**Social Cues**		*"Like even if I don't know it, so I do check the outlet. So people holding a bag, gives me an indication that maybe I should visit. Maybe there's something special there."*
Fashion differentiates, compete with others, compare yourself, social currency, wear trend at all costs, investing in looks	**Social Comparison**		*"Fashion is a need so you can enter the competition. You compare yourself with other people."*
Eid, events, university trips, wedding requirement, thematic dressing, influence from kin, event specific outfit, go with the theme, becomes a requirement, look like others	**Occasion-Based Consumption**		*"If it is a thematic event, you go with the theme, so that you can look like others. You know that it becomes a requirement."*

Generating Codes	Identifying Themes	Refining & Defining Theme	Report: Illustrative Quote
Celebrities, social media influencers, style reference, social proof, social media tempts, reel triggers, trending content, impulsive browsing, influence, yearning, inspiration, promoting overconsumption	**Influencer Endorsements**	**Digital Landscape & Market Mechanisms**	*"I opened Instagram, and there was this influencer wearing the same jacket. So when I saw her wearing it, I got an idea that she looks good in it so she would look good on me as well."* *"When I scroll a lot, I think that triggers. Like when I scroll a lot and then I see all these ads and I go visit the page, I really feel like I want to buy."*
Algorithms, ads popping up, scrolling website, frequent ads, open store pages, Instagram feed narrowing, influencing to buy	**Algorithmic Entrapment**		*"Everything is social media. Whenever I've deleted that app, I don't shop at all. After every two reels, there'll be an advertisement about clothing."*
Sale provocation, buying immediately, ease at checkout	**Ease Surrounding Online Shopping**		*"Their sales also provoke you that it's running out. And it's 50% and you buy it immediately…But you order as much as you need because they are on sale."*
Add-to-cart, open store pages daily, buy once or twice a week, scroll-to-buy	**Habitual Online Browsing**		*"I buy once or twice a week, but I open store pages online daily."*
Designed poorly, bad quality, not promoting properly, brands not putting effort, disliked outfits, aesthetic requirements not met, deterioration of quality, pathetic quality, fail to deliver	**Aesthetic Rejection of Green Fashion**	**Green Fashion: Barriers**	*"The quality was so bad. The clothes were designed so poorly that it seemed like the designer didn't want those designs to be sold."*

Generating Codes	Identifying Themes	Refining & Defining Theme	Report: Illustrative Quote
Haven't seen any in Pakistan, don't know green brands, hard to find, difficult to find one	**Low Brand Visibility**		*"I don't know what the stuff is made from. I don't have much idea about green brands. I haven't really seen any in Pakistan."*
Environmental sustainability is expensive, financial bracket, affordability, less options	**Financial Inaccessibility**		*"I came to know that the products made for environmental sustainability are more expensive. I consume fast fashion because they come in my financial bracket."*
Millennials			
Not good, appealing visually, designing, complement my complexion, quality attracts	**Aesthetic & Visual Appeal**	**Psycho-Emotional Drivers of Unsustainable Consumption**	*"I wouldn't buy if the thing is not good, not appealing visually. The quality attracts you the most, and then comes the designing."*
Make myself happy, purpose of life, mood is low, shopping as self-care	**Emotion Driven Buying**		*"I think I will need it in the future, so I buy it. And sometimes, when the mood is low, I buy something to make myself happy."*
Won't find them again, immediate decision, won't find later, heels attraction	**Anticipated Scarcity**		*"Impulse buying, I mostly do it for heels, which attract you a lot of times, you know you won't find them again, so when you see them, you immediately take a decision."*
Do it out of social compulsion, frowned upon, worn twice, can't wear thrice, buying multiple items is a requirement	**Social Compulsion & Family Norms**	**Social Pressures Driven Consumption**	*"A lot of people buy new stuff on weddings out of social compulsion. It's very frowned upon in our families if you have worn it twice."*
Presentable look, look decent, working ladies, move in society, presentable way	**Professional Presentation**		*"Because we are working ladies, we have to present our look in a decent way. We go in front of 100 plus students every day."*

Generating Codes	Identifying Themes	Refining & Defining Theme	Report: Illustrative Quote
Recommended by someone, friend's influence, sharing links, social trust	**Informal Social Endorsements**		*"Friends influence me more in terms of trends. One of my friends was telling me about this page on Instagram… if they find something good, they share with me."*
Influencers are all kinds of girls, relatable, looks good on them, authentic figures, influencer, reviewing stuff recommendations	**Influencer Trust & Authenticity**	**Digital Influence & Market Mechanisms**	*"Models look like models but influencers are all kinds of girls. When they wear it, they look attractive. So it feels it will look good on me too."*
Continue buying from sales, prioritize sales, know their sale times, shopping from sale, wait for sales, buy whenever the product is available on sale, have to buy from sale	**Sale-Tracking Behavior**		*"I do prioritize sales a lot. I know the brands. I know their sale times. I wait for the sale. And I have it in my tab open."*
Ads are repetitive, frustrated by ads, naturally convinced, give it a go	**Repetitive Advertisements**		*"There are instances when I have bought an item just out of frustrating ads. The ads are so repetitive. You naturally become convinced."*
Shopping online is convenient, don't have to put more effort, put things in cart, scroll, no physical store, less spare time and energy	**Online Shopping Convenience**		*"I shop online more. It's more convenient and I don't have to put more effort and go to a physical store."*
Comfort and satisfaction, hesitant towards new brands, trust them, go to them, easier to trust, hesitant in buying from new brands	**Habitual Brand Reliance**	**Brand Trust & Loyalty**	*"I have felt some level of comfort and satisfaction buying from certain brands. So I just go to them. It's easier for me to just trust them."*
Quality matters, not just for the name, economical, not expensive branding	**Quality Over Branding**		*"If their quality is top notch, then I will go to that brand all the time. The quality of clothes matters to me a lot. More than style even sometimes."*

Generating Codes	Identifying Themes	Refining & Defining Theme	Report: Illustrative Quote
Affordability, not very expensive, affordable and doable, price justifying quality, buy things frequently, don't believe in expensive clothing, has to be economical	**Affordability as a Primary Criterion**		*"My first priority is affordability. Because we have to buy things very frequently. So affordability is main."*
Greenwashing, not maintaining ethical standards, exploit workers, no brand is truly green	**Greenwashing Awareness**	**Perception Around Green Fashion**	*"Generation is greenwashing. No brand can be clean and green if they're not maintaining ethical standards."*
Stopped buying from Khaadi, guilty, working conditions questionable, social media surfaced	**Consumer Activism**		*"I haven't bought from Khaadi in a very long time. I stopped consuming from Khaadi altogether. In the past 6-7 years, I only bought once and that made me feel extremely guilty."*
Longevity, conscious about it, packaging, production practices, environmental values, more conscious,	**Informed Sustainable Choices**		*"Whenever I am buying something, it should have longevity. It shouldn't be a one season thing. I try to be more conscious about it."*
Both Generations			
Climate change is a threat multiplier, man-made crisis, industrialization, deforestation, biodiversity loss	**Environmental Degradation Awareness**	**Multidimensional Awareness of Environmental Crisis**	*"Climate change is a threat multiplier, it deteriorates environmental conditions across agriculture, health, livelihoods and living conditions."*
Increasing industrialization, massive urbanization, releasing waste and carcinogens, compounded disasters	**Active Human Contribution**		*"Man-made crisis, increasing industrialization, massive urbanization, ecological degradation is an active human contribution."*
Industrial emissions, habitat destruction, ecological degradation,	**Fast Fashion's Environmental Footprint**		*"Releasing waste and carcinogens, destructing habitat, ecological degradation, the environmental*

Generating Codes	Identifying Themes	Refining & Defining Theme	Report: Illustrative Quote
waste and carcinogens, rising temperatures			*footprint of fast fashion is recognized widely."*

Annexure 3

Consumer Survey

Target Audience: Pakistani Millennials and Gen Z

Section 1: Participant Information

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in a study exploring how psycho-social triggers influence consumers fashion choices compelling them to engage in unsustainable impulse buying of fast fashion. The survey is anonymous and will take 4-5 minutes. There are no right or wrong answers. Please respond honestly.

Section 2: Filter Question

If you fulfill the criteria for the following questions, you are eligible to proceed with the rest of the form. If not, please exit the form without proceeding any further.

1. Which of the following age generations do you identify with? Millennial/Gen Z/ None

2. Are you aware of the environmental impact of massive production and wide consumption of fast fashion? (Yes/No)

3. If Yes, which of the following environmental impacts of "Fast Fashion" are you aware of?

a) High water consumption in textile production
b) Chemical spill overs polluting local waterways
c) Excessive landfill waste from discarded clothing
d) High carbon emissions from global shipping and rapid production
e) Microplastic shedding from synthetic fabrics (like polyester)

Section 3: Demographics

1. Age: [ ]

2. Gender: [ ]

3. Spending on fashion per month: [ ]

4. List down 3 fast fashion brands you often buy from!

Survey Questions

Variable	No.	Question	Author
Bandwagon Effect	Q1	I feel a strong urge of buying items, that are currently in fashion and widely worn by my peers.	Eastman & Iyer (2023).
	Q2	My primary motivation for purchasing fast fashion is to stay updated with the latest trends and seasonal must-haves.	
	Q3	I prefer brands that are viral and bought from by many people.	
	Q4	I find items more appealing when they are being promoted by influencers or celebrities. This helps me identify which fashion items are worth purchasing.	
Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)	Q1	I would fear that those people who have purchased a certain up-to-date fashion item would have more rewarding experiences than me.	Przybylski et al. (2013)
	Q2	I would be worried knowing that those who have purchased a limited edition kurta would be having fun without me.	
	Q3	I feel a genuine sense of anxiety if I am not updated on the latest viral trends.	
	Q4	It is really important to me how my social circle perceives my style as on-trend.	
	Q5	I would likely spend some time trying to keep up with what trends are being followed by my network fellow members.	
	Q6	When I see a trending piece at an affordable price, I view it as a 'limited-time opportunity' that I must take advantage of before it sells out or goes out of style.	
Social Comparison	Q1	When I am in a social setting, I instinctively 'style-check' my friends and family against viral fashion standards and gauge who's the most fashion-forward in the room.	Gibbons and Buunk (1999)
	Q2	I am hyper-aware of my outfits and the fashion trends I see on my feed; if I'm not wearing what's 'currently in', I feel socially invisible.	

	Q3	If I want to find out how ‘fashionable’ I am, I compare what I own with what my age fellows have recently bought.	
	Q4	I often cross-reference my fashion choices with the current aesthetic of my peer group to ensure I am fitting in rather than being seen as 'out of date' and 'so last year'.	
	Q5	I actively discuss upcoming brand drops and sales with others to ensure I never miss out on the opportunity of grabbing my favourite items before they sell out.	
	Q6	I often try to find out what others think about new styles so I get familiarized with their preferences when I am unsure if I should buy a particular item.	
	Q7	I always like to know what fashion items others in my social group are buying when a new trend emerges. I need to know what they are buying so I can align my own purchases.	
	Q8	If I want to learn more about a new fashion item, I try to find out what others think about it first. I try to get a collective opinion of my circle to ensure my choice will be socially validated.	
Impulse Buying Behavior	Q1	I often buy things spontaneously.	Rook and Fisher (1995)
	Q2	I often buy things without thinking.	
	Q3	"Just get it” describes the way I buy things.	
	Q4	"I see it; I buy it” describes me.	
	Q5	"Buy now, think about it later” describes me.	
	Q6	Sometimes I feel like buying a viral kurta or a hoodie on the spur-of-the-moment.	
	Q7	I buy things according to how I feel at the moment.	
	Q8	Sometimes I am a bit reckless about what I buy even when I wasn’t planning to buy it.	
	Q9	I carefully plan most of my purchases.	

Annexure 4

Interview Guide:

Environment

1. Are you aware of recent environmental crisis in today's world? How would you describe your level of awareness or concern about environmental issues?
    - Can you share your thoughts about the most pressing of the environmental issues today?
2. How do you think can individuals contribute to environmental sustainability?
    - What efforts do you make to contribute to environmental sustainability?

Fashion

1. Introduce fast fashion (fashionable products, excessively produced, rapidly consumed, trendy, up-to-date, constantly changing styles, street wear, alternatives to expensive clothing)
2. Do you consume fashion?
3. Do you feel any likeness towards new styles emerging in the market rapidly? (Do you think you're a stylish person?)
4. Can you tell me your favorite places to shop for clothes?

Introduction

1. Can you tell me a little about your buying philosophy or your approach to buying clothes in general? For example, do you usually prioritize quality over price, or are you a dedicated researcher who looks for the best deal possible?
    - If you opened your closet right now, what percentage of it is "essential" versus "extra"? How did those "extra" items get there?

Experiences with Impulsive Buying

1. Do you know what it means to buy impulsively?
    - How often do you think you buy things impulsively?
    - Could you share a specific instance of buying fashionable item impulsively (name the item as well) and just walk me across how you saw the clothing item and decided to buy it?
    - Describe the feeling in the moment you decided to buy it. Is it a "high," a sense of relief, or something else?
    - What are the other reasons for you to buy impulsively?
      What products do you often buy impulsively (from fashion)?

Social and Cultural Influences

1. Do social media, influencers, or friends/family affect your impulse purchases?
    - What kind of influencers (fashion) do you follow on social media?
2. How do social norms (built around shaadi's and occasions for instance buying a lot) around consumption affect your choices?

Understanding Environmental Awareness

1. What comes to mind when you hear the term "Fashion"?
2. Have you heard about green fashion brands?
    - Can you name a few?
    - In your opinion, what practices have these brands adopted for them to be named a green brand?

    - Do you ever actively seek out "green" brands or the brands that make sustainable products?
3. Do you think there is a connection between fashion trends and environmental issues?
    - Can you name a few impacts of fashion industry on the environment?
    - What have you heard and how does it make your feel?
4. Do you ever think about where clothes or fashionable products come from or how they're made?
    - Do you feel a connection to the waste generated by the industry?
    - When you buy something impulsively, do you ever think about where it came from or where it will end up (the waste)?
    - How does this awareness usually influence your shopping decisions?
5. Can you share how you dispose-off your clothes?
    - When you dispose of clothes, walk me through the criteria, how do you decide if something is "trash/dispose-off" or "shared"?

Tension Between Values and Behavior

1. When you make an impulsive purchase, does it conflict with your environmental values? How so? (e.g., "I'll wear it forever," or "It's just this once.")
    - Do you feel any guilt or discomfort?
    - Why or why not?
    - Do you feel the guilt or people put you in it?
2. How do you think about who to prioritize when switching styles and following fast fashion?

Influencing Factors

1. What factors make it harder for you to shop sustainably (e.g., convenience, price, trends, advertising)?
2. Does the shopping environment (in-store or online) affect your impulse decisions?
    - What is the difference?
    - Do you think you buy more impulsively when shopping online/offline?

Is there anything else about your impulsive buying or environmental awareness that you think is important for me to understand?