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The Consequences of Social Responsibility: A Study of Fast Fashion Brands

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the positive impact of social responsibility carried out by fast fashion brands on consumers' attitudes, trust, perceived consumer effectiveness, and brand awareness. Using the purposive sampling method, there were 175 respondents participated in the survey. The data was analyzed using a structural equation model. The results revealed that a brand's social responsibility activities influence attitude, trust, perceived consumer effectiveness, and brand awareness. However, the authors did not find any significant effect of perceived consumer effectiveness and brand awareness on purchase intention. This research can help fast fashion marketers design a comprehensive message to convey to the public that they carry out CSR programs. This study contributes to the literature on green marketing by examining the effect of CSR conducted by fast fashion brands on various responses of consumers. The findings can help companies design and communicate appropriate CSR initiatives to enhance consumers' positive perceptions.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, attitude, trust, perceived consumer effectiveness, brand awareness.

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INTRODUCTION

Fast fashion is a term used to describe the clothing business that produces clothes that have the latest models and designs, produced on a large scale at minimal cost, and the results of this production will later be brought to retail stores quickly when demand is high (Dewi and Nugroho, 2022). Quoted from Investopedia, fast fashion is defined as the design of clothing that is produced quickly to stores to take advantage of existing trends, with the existence of fast fashion providing changes in the lifestyle of consumers, who along with the times always know (Hayes, 2023).

As the second most polluting in the world (Business of Fashion, 2015), the fast fashion industry is considered to have a devastating impact on the planet such as waste from textile dyes used in clothing that can pollute the waters around the place of production as well as the use of polyester materials derived from fossil crude oil when washed will produce microfibers that increase the amount of plastic waste in water. Moreover, mass-produced fast fashion products can also produce waste that cannot be recycled because this waste contains substances such as lead, arsenic, and mercury that are

harmful to humans and aquatic life. Also, carbon emissions produced by factories that produce fast fashion result in hotter earth conditions and unpredictable weather, and the number of mass-produced fast fashion products can result in overworking time for employees, thus violating existing human rights regulations.

Fast fashion prioritizes trendy and up-to-date clothing models, affordable prices, and shorter life cycles and encourages consumers to immediately visit stores and buy the latest products (Jung and Jin, 2014; Qian, 2014; Wei and Jung, 2021). This type of business operates with a low-cost strategy that results in lower prices than slow fashion businesses. Due to lower prices and fast-changing clothing models, consumers tend to buy new clothes more frequently and discard the old ones. The environmental costs of producing fast fashion are very high, starting from the raw materials for making clothes such as the use of excess water, clothing dyes, and pollution produced during the production process (Sweeney, 2015). As the trend of clothing changes rapidly, the production machines in factories are constantly working so the adverse impact on the environment is inevitable. On the other hand, to keep costs low, fast fashion brands are produced in developing countries which sometimes do not have good working conditions and low wages (Shen, 2014; Uddin, 2017). These practices can damage a brand's reputation and image.

Driven by pressure from society as well as customers, fast fashion brands are practicing social responsibility efforts to be more ethical. For instance, Uniqlo, a giant fast fashion brand has a movement called RE. UNIQLO (Recycle, Reuse and Reduce), that collects clothing to be recycled and turns it into new products. UNIQLO also works with NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) to distribute used clothing to refugees, disaster victims, and people in need. Then UNIQLO has a CSR called Responsibly Sourced Down and Feather where UNIQLO only uses sources of poultry feather clothing production that come from responsible farms and can minimize the impact on wild birds. Then UNIQLO has a movement called Clothing Made from PET Bottles, and the Blue Cycle Jeans movement (Less Water, Exceptionally Made) which can reduce the need for large amounts of water to do the finishing process on jeans. (Uniqlo Sustainability, 2022).

Previous research found that consumers' positive perception of fast fashion' CSR activities will increase their intention to buy the brand as well as brand equity and trust (Sun, Kim, and Kim, 2014; Chang and Jai, 2015; Miotto and Youn, 2020). This aligns with the rise of consumers' awareness of sustainability (Ritch, 2015) and their hopes that companies are becoming more ethical (Schaltegger and Hörisch, 2017). However, consumers can become skeptical and have negative perceptions of fast fashion brands' CSR activities that influence them not to buy the products and are perceived as 'greenwashing effort (Lee and Lee, 2018; Elg and Hultman, 2016; Kim and Oh, 2020). This inconsistency provides an opportunity to investigate how the CSR practices of fast fashion will encourage consumers to purchase the brand.

²⁷ The purpose of this study is to study consumers' perception regarding fast fashion brand's social responsibilities which are trust, attitude, perceived consumer effectiveness, and brand awareness that leads consumers to buy the brand. The current study contributes to CSR research carried out by fast fashion brands that are considered to be unsustainable and unethical. Apart from that, this research also provides fruitful insights for fast fashion brands to design appropriate CSR programs to enhance consumers' positive perceptions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social responsibility has a strategic goal to maintain a harmonious relationship between the company and the social environment and contribute to the socio-economic life of the surrounding community (Riano and Yakovleva, 2019). According to Sarkar and Searcy (2016), CSR's characteristics include several dimensions such as economic, social, ethical, stakeholders' interests as well as sustainability. Moreover, CSR conducted by fast fashion industries also includes consumption, cultural issues, supply chain management, and companies' performance (Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir, 2020).

In the context of sustainable consumption behavior, it is imperative to discuss the role of attitude that reflects an individual's beliefs based on certain values that favor the environment rather than focusing on self-interest (Jung, Kim, and Oh, 2016). Since attitude has been found as an important determinant of pro-environmental behavior (Kang, Liu, and Kim, 2013), is it important to examine its role in predicting consumers' sustainable behavior. Previous studies found that attitude is influenced by a company's sustainability efforts (Neumman, Martinez, and Martinez, 2021; Kang and Hustvedt, 2014).

H1: Perception of Social responsibility positively influences consumers' attitudes.

Pioneer research in relationship marketing defined trust as one's confidence about the other party's reliability and integrity and along with commitment, both factors must exist in a successful relationship (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). When consumers believe that a brand's positive actions are motivated by its intention to enhance their welfare, it means that a brand trust has been established (Delgado-Ballester, 2003) and is reliable. In the marketing literature, trust is considered to be an important factor in developing and maintaining retention. Previous research found that social responsibility activities that are based on altruistic motives influence consumers' trust in the brands (Neumman, Martinez, and Martinez, 2021; Kang and Hustvedt, 2014).

H2: Perception of Social responsibility positively influences consumers' trust.

Perceived consumer effectiveness is defined as an individual's judgment as the ability to make a difference in the solution of a specific problem. Past studies show that perceived consumer effectiveness influences consumers' intention to practice pro-environmental behavior in several fields (Kim and Choi, 2005; Vermeir, Verbeke, 2008; Kang, Liu, and Kim, 2013; Antonetti and Maklan, 2014). The more consumers perceive that their decision will have a positive impact on the environment, they will be more likely to buy sustainable clothes (Kang, Liu, and Kim, 2013). The CSR effort of fast fashion brands is proven to influence consumers' perceived consumer effectiveness.

H3: Perception of Social responsibility positively influences consumers' perceived consumer effectiveness.

To create awareness, a brand must communicate its social responsibility activities to consumers. According to Foroudi et.al (2018), consumers rely on their awareness of the brand when evaluating it since the brand is already present in their minds. When a brand communicates its CSR activities to the consumers, they will become more aware of the brand and build associations in their minds related to the brand. Therefore, if CSR activities are continuously reported to consumers, brand awareness will increase and consumers can associate the brand with pro-environmental behavior (Yoo, Donthu, and Lee, 2000). Previous research shows that socially responsible service companies can enhance consumers' awareness (Hsu, 2012; Fatma, Rahman, and Khan, 2015; Hafez, 2017). It has been confirmed that effective CSR communication can have a positive effect on brand awareness (Hsu, 2012; Muniz et.al, 2019).

H4: Perception of Social responsibility positively influences brand awareness.

From the perspective of marketing, understanding attitude as an important construct is a must since it reflects consumers' evaluation positively or negatively towards a certain object that encourages them to buy the product. CSR awareness helps consumers to develop knowledge and a positive attitude towards the brand; this will influence them to buy the brand (Vera-Martínez., Alvarado-Herrera, and Curras-Perez,2022). Moreover, when consumers are aware of CSR, they will generate positive opinions and recognition about the brand which increases the purchase intention tendency (Ramesh, et, al, 2018; Lee et.al, 2020).

H5: Consumer's Attitude positively influences purchase intention.

It was hypothesized earlier, that CSR influences consumers' attitudes and trust (Neumman, Martinez, and Martinez, 2021; Kang and Hustvedt, 2014). Meanwhile, other researchers have also found similar results in the hospitality context, in which consumers' perception regarding CSR activities conducted by a hotel can build consumers' trust and loyalty (Martinez and del-Bosque, 2013; de Leaniz., Crespo and Gomez-Lopez, 2019).

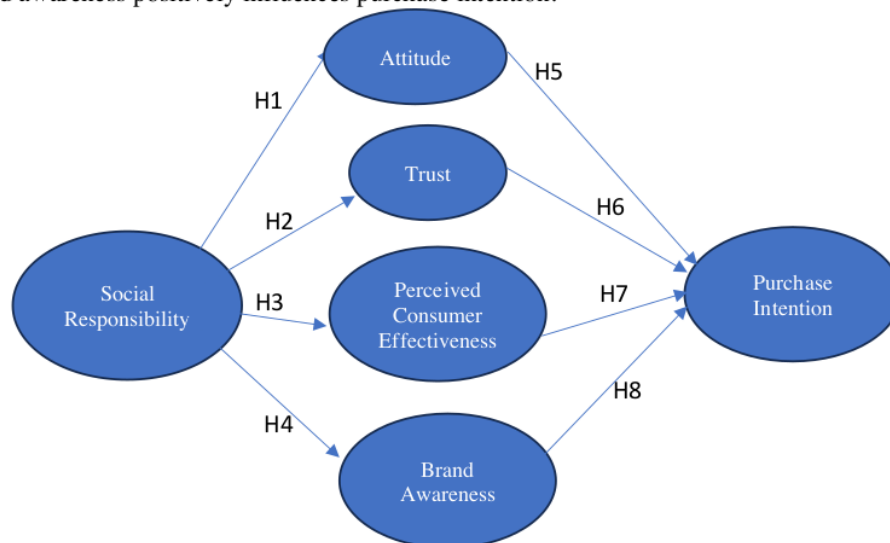
H6: Consumers' trust positively influences purchase intention.

Perceived consumer effectiveness can be categorized as individuals' beliefs that relate to their confidence in making a difference while doing goods, such as environmental-related activities (Antonetti and Maklan,2014). Research by Kang, Liu, and Kim (2013) and Neumman, Martinez, and Martinez (2021) confirmed that when consumers think their purchase matters, they will be more likely to buy sustainable clothing brands.

H7: Perceived consumer effectiveness positively influences purchase intention.

Past research found that when consumers are aware of the existence of e-label brands, it will be more likely that they will buy the brand (Hasudungan and Saragih,2023). The positive influence of consumers' awareness of CSR performances on purchase intention has also been confirmed by previous researchers (Olsanova et.al, 2021; Olsanova, Cook, and Glatc, 2018). Regarding social responsibility issues, fast fashion brands must develop high brand awareness by utilizing communication tools because this business is found to bring damage to the environment.

H8: Brand awareness positively influences purchase intention.



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Figure 1. Conceptual Model.

METHODS

The research design was descriptive, and it was a cross-sectional study. The data were collected using a self-administered online survey and it was distributed via social media. The unit of analysis was individual. This study used a purposive sampling method to collect desired information and was directed to those who have owned Uniqlo clothing for at least one year. 175 Uniqlo owners participated in this study which was obtained by multiplying the number of indicators by 5-10 (Hair et.al, 2019).

The variables and measurements in this study were adapted from previous research. Five constructs were measured using instruments from Neuman, Martinez, and Martinez (2021), which are social responsibility, attitude, trust perceived consumer effectiveness, and purchase intention. Three indicators to assess brand awareness variables were adopted from Yoo et.al (2000). The respondents' answers were analyzed by Structural Equation Model using SPSS 24.

As suggested by Hair et.al (2019), the Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Reliability tests were used to test the validity and reliability of the measurements and variables. The requirement for an indicator to be valid depends on the factor loading which is 0.4 in this study. All the measurements in this research were valid. The Cronbach Alpha value for each variable to test the internal consistency reliability was above 0.6; it means all variables were reliable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The majority of respondents (62.3%) have already owned the Uniqlo clothing brand for more than three years. 56% of respondents were female, and 44% of respondents were male. Out of the 175 participants, 54.3% were between 20-25 years old; 39.4% were in the range of 25 to 30 years old and 6.3% were above 30 years old. Most of the participants work in the private sector (38.3%), while 19.4% of entrepreneurs participated in the study. Then, 34% of respondents have graduated from high school and there were 28.6% of participants have undergraduate degrees, while 6.9% of respondents have finished their diploma degree.

Factor loadings of all the measurements were higher than 0.4 which indicated acceptable construct validity (Hair et.al, 2019). Subsequently, Cronbach's Alpha for all the constructs was above 0.7 which demonstrated good internal consistency reliability.

Table 1.
Results of Validity and Reliability Tests.

Constructs and Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach Alfa Coefficient
Social Responsibility		
UNIQLO is committed to using a portion of its profits to help non-profit organizations	0.629	

Constructs and Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach Alfa Coefficient
1 UNIQLO contributes to helping the communities in which it does business	0.628	
Local institutions benefit from Uniqlo's contributions	0.743	0.812
Uniqlo integrates charitable Contributions to their business activities	0.679	
UNIQLO makes many corporate contributions to society	0.639	
Trust		
UNIQLO is serious about its CSR activities	0.644	
UNIQLO's claim that some of its products are produced in an environmentally friendly manner is believable	0.722	
In my experience, UNIQLO products are of high quality.	0.648	0.786
1 UNIQLO has a name you can trust	0.712	
UNIQLO delivers what it promises	0.719	
Attitude		
I think UNIQLO is a very good brand	0.598	
I think UNIQLO is a very useful brand	0.743	
My opinion of UNIQLO is very favorable	0.697	0.712
3 Perceived Consumer Effectiveness		
Through my personal choices, I can contribute to the solution of environmental issues	0.682	
My actions are significant enough to affect environmental problems	0.694	

Constructs and Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach Alfa Coefficient
My actions are significant enough to affect environmental problems	0.683	0.758
7 Ecological degradation is partly a consequence of my own consumption choices	0.606	
Brand Awareness		
I think UNIQLO always provides the best products for its customers.	0.736	0.782
I can quickly recognize the UNIQLO brand logo	0.750	
I know that the UNIQLO brand belongs to the fast fashion category.	0.727	
Purchase Intention		
I will likely buy Uniqlo clothes	0.733	0.713
I will purchase products from UNIQLO 's Collection 7 the next time I need clothing	0.753	
I will try other products from UNIQLO's Collection	0.7561	

Source: Data Processing Results

The goodness of fit test shows the adequacy of the proposed model (ECVI: 3.345; RMSEA:0.081; TLI:0.849; CFI:0.867; IFI:0.869; CMIN/DF: 2.135; AIC:582.004). According to Hair et.al (2019), indices must meet a certain range to be called fit.

The descriptive statistics show some information as follows: the respondents feel that the fast fashion brand is committed to making contributions to local institutions, not-for-profit organizations, and society (mean score: 4.24). In addition, the respondents favor the fast fashion brand and think it is a very good and useful brand (mean score: 4.38). Next, the respondents think the fast fashion brand keeps its promise, can be trusted and its claims regarding the products are believable (mean score: 4.33). The mean score of 4.38 for the perceived consumer effectiveness construct shows that the respondents are sure that their actions and personal choices can contribute to the solution of environmental problems. Moreover, the respondents are aware of and recognize the logo of the fast fashion brand (mean score: 4.34). Lastly, the respondents are more likely to purchase clothes from a fast fashion brand that has implemented CSR activities (mean score: 4.31).

The results of the hypotheses testing are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Hypotheses Testing Results.

Hypotheses	Estimate	P-Value	Results
H1: Perception of Social responsibility positively influences consumers' attitudes.	0.885	0.000	Supported
H2: Perception of Social responsibility positively influences consumers' trust.	1.022	0.000	Supported
H3: Perception of Social responsibility positively influences consumers' perceived consumer effectiveness.	0.882	0.000	Supported
H4: Perception of Social responsibility positively influences brand awareness.	1.001	0.000	Supported
H5: Consumer's Attitude positively influences purchase intention.	0.578	0.115	Not Supported
H6: Consumers' trust positively influences purchase intention.	1.006	0.008	Supported
H7: Perceived consumer effectiveness positively influences purchase intention.	-0.353	0.059	Not Supported
H8: Brand awareness positively influences purchase intention.	-0.232	0.287	Not Supported

Source: Data Processing Result

Results in Table 2 show that the effect of the perception of social responsibility on consumers' attitudes is significant (p -value: 0.000), hence H1 was supported. This indicates that when consumers think of the good things carried out by fast fashion brands such as contributing to society and local institutions as well as donating a portion of their profits to non-profit organizations, they perceive that the brand is good and useful. This result supports previous research that conducting social responsibility efforts will increase consumers' positive feelings and perception towards the brand (Jung, Kim, and Oh, 2016; Kang, Liu, and Kim, 2013; Neumman, Martinez, and Martinez, 2021; Kang and Hustvedt, 2014).

The analysis also shows a significant influence of consumers' perception of fast fashion's social responsibility on their trust towards the brand and perceived consumer effectiveness (p -value: 0.000), therefore H2 and H3 were supported. The results of the analysis confirm that conducting various social activities will benefit the fast fashion brand because consumers will increasingly believe in the quality of the brand and its CSR. This also supports previous research that trust in the fast fashion brand was influenced by the brand's social responsibility activities (Neumman, Martinez, and Martinez, 2021; Kang and Hustvedt, 2014). Similarly, consumers are more confident about their ability to contribute to solving environmental problems when they are aware that fast fashion brands have helped society as it was also found by past studies (Kim and Choi, 2005; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2008; Kang, Liu and Kim, 2013, Antonetti and Maklan, 2014; Neumman, Martinez and Martinez, 2021). H4 addressed that social responsibility will influence the consumers' awareness of the brand, and it was supported (p -value: 0.000). The more consumers know that the brand does various social activities, the easier it is for them to recognize the brand logo and know that the brand always provides

the best products. This finding is in line with past research that emphasizes the importance of communicating CSR to create brand awareness (Hsu, 2012; Fatma, Rahman, and Khan, 2015; Hafez, 2017; Hsu, 2012; Muniz et al., 2019).

However, the influence of consumers' attitudes on purchase intention was not significant (p -value: 0.115) so H5 was not supported and this confirms research by Neuman, Martinez, and Martinez (2021). Although consumers positively evaluate fast fashion brands as excellent and useful products, they do not buy them right away. The authors suspect that there is another variable namely environmental corporate social responsibility, that moderates the effect of consumers' attitudes on their behavioral intention to purchase the brand (Duong, 2023; Vu et.al, 2021).

It was found that H6 was supported (p -value: 0.115) confirming previous findings (Neuman, Martinez, and Martinez, 2021; Kang and Hustvedt, 2014; Martinez and del-Bosque, 2013; de Leaniz., Crespo, and Gomez-Lopez, 2019). Consumers who trust the CSR activities carried out by the brand and believe that the company's products are produced in an environmentally friendly manner will be willing to buy the brand.

The results revealed that H7 was not supported (p -value: 0.059) and it is no different than the finding from Neuman, Martinez, and Martinez (2021). Despite believing that their actions can contribute to environmental issues, consumers do not buy fast fashion brands that actively conducting corporate social responsibility. As confirmed by Kamal, Che, and Le (2022), consumer innovativeness is the moderating variable that can explain the significant effect of perceived consumer effectiveness on purchase intention. This research reported that H8 could not be supported H8 because there was no positive influence of brand awareness on purchase intention (p -value: 0.287) which contradicts past findings (Olsanova et.al, 2021; Olsanova, Cook, and Glatc, 2018). According to Azzari and Pellisari (2020), perceived quality was found to be a mediating variable to explain the impact of brand awareness on purchase intention.

CONCLUSION, MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study provides empirical evidence that consumers' perception of fast fashion's social responsibility positively influences attitude and trust toward the brand. Consumers' perceived consumer effectiveness as well as brand awareness. Furthermore, both attitude and trust have a positive influence on purchase intention, while perceived consumer effectiveness and brand awareness do not.

These findings underline the strategic role of social responsibility programs carried out by fast fashion brands to influence consumers' perceptions. Firms can collaborate with organizations engaged in environmental and nature conservation to create a movement to campaign for sustainability. Fast fashion brands should stress environmental sustainability that can reduce the adverse impact of the production process on the environment, such as using recycled material and environmentally friendly sources that come from certified vendors. This study helps fast fashion marketers develop CSR programs that provide jobs for underdeveloped communities and improve society's welfare, especially women and children. Furthermore, fast fashion marketers must use marketing communication tools to convey their CSR activities to increase brand awareness and consumers' understanding of the benefits of the programs. The company's official website and social media are

key communication tools that provide detailed information about CSR activities. Firms can also display information about their CSR in the store.

This study only used Uniqlo as a sample brand that did not represent the whole aspect of fast fashion brands' CSR. Future research may add other fast fashion brands that have already implemented CSR initiatives to enhance the generalization of the research. The current study did not consider the attitude-behavior gap in pro-environmental behavior research. Further research may extend the research framework that incorporates moderating and mediating variables that will strengthen the model such as environmental corporate social responsibility (Duong, 2023; Vu et.al, 2021) and consumer innovativeness (Kamalanon, Che, and Le, 2022) as moderators as well as perceived quality as a mediating variable (Azzari and Pellisari, 2020).

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