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Rethinking the fast fashion trend cycle: Consumer perspectives

ABSTRACT

This article examines the fashion trend system in the context of sustainability. It investigates consumer viewpoints which brings new perspectives on the manifestations of trends and their impact on sustainability. Previous research on the trend cycle has tended to focus on how the cycle begins and ends, with an emphasis on short-lived trends, and has not focused on consumer perceptions. In contrast, this article presents new research that evidences how fast fashion can have longevity beyond trends, by focusing on the experience of wear. This draws out a deeper understanding of the impacts of trends on consumer behaviour in the context of fast fashion, where the trend cycle moves quickly. In particular, the research has revealed that it is important to consider the lives of the individual consumer and their behaviour in relation to challenging existing assumptions that trends are inherently short lived. Primary research data, realized through a series of wardrobe studies, show how a selection of young fashion consumers are behaving with regard to fast fashion. Unexpected results show how many participants owned fast fashion clothing that lasted longer than anticipated, with surprising durability. In addition, fast fashion can just like other garments, be subject to emotional attachment. Fostering deep attachments to clothing offers opportunities to extend the use

KEYWORDS

sustainable
consumption
longevity
wardrobe studies
emotional attachment
material culture
style identities

1. It should be noted that this work represents a section of a much larger project, which is available in Marroncelli (2024).

time of garments. The historic workings of the trend system have initiated a fastness to fashion that this research has sought to challenge.¹

1 INTRODUCTION

Sustainability issues associated with the fashion industry have been widely documented. Marriot and Clayton (2006) describe fashion as an ‘impediment’ to sustainability. Environmentally polluting supply chain operations include over 92 million tonnes of waste produced per year and 79 trillion litres of water consumed by the industry (Niinimäki et al. 2020). Fast fashion, associated with rapid over-production, low prices and quick turnarounds of clothing and trends, contributes to significant negative environmental impacts (Stringer et al. 2020). Fast fashion is maintained through consumer identity building, and the consumers need for excitement and difference within their wardrobes. Changes in consumers’ lifestyles that required the fashion industry to adapt rapidly to trends, and offer more products to choose from, have encouraged the growth of fast fashion (Su and Chang 2018). Consumers have a desire to create their identity through fashion, and the desire to be fashionable often outweighs drivers to be ethical or sustainable (Mcneill and Moore 2015).

Research in the field of sustainability and fast fashion suggests that whilst the industry’s success has been built upon speed and novelty, a paradox is presented, as the fast fashion business model has been slow to adapt to sustainability (Black 2019). The paradox highlights the tension between wanting to consume, with efforts to limit consumption (Mcneill and Moore 2015). Fundamental changes are needed to improve the sustainability of the fashion industry. Alongside the introduction of sustainable practices throughout the supply chain, a shift in consumer behaviour is imperative. This will necessitate decreasing clothing purchases and increasing garment lifetimes (Niinimäki et al. 2020). One way to prolong the durability of fast fashion may be to enhance the symbolic value of clothing. It can be argued that the trend cycle alongside fast fashion has decreased the value of clothing. This is due to the cycle encouraging the production of low-cost clothing and fast response systems which encourage disposability (Joy et al. 2012). In a fast fashion system, mistakes and try-outs are cheap and easy for the consumer, with little to no consequences (Niinimäki 2018). The research reported in this article is original as it sets out to investigate whether fast fashion can be imbued with symbolic value that will increase the span of a trend. Using wardrobe studies (Grimstad Klepp and Bjerck 2014) as a research method, this article examines underexplored connections between fast fashion, consumer behaviour and the trend system.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section introduces the concepts of identity, sustainability and emotional attachment, all of which will be explored through the lens of the fast fashion trend cycle.

The trend cycle

Trends can apply to both fashion and many different industries in wider society. The word ‘trend’ was first used to describe stylistic and cultural changes in

the 1960s, with the term 'trendsetter' appearing in 1962 (Goncu-Berk 2017). Previous research on the trend cycle has tended to focus on how the cycle begins and ends. Fashions typically fall into either short-term or long-term cycles. However, this can be considered problematic, and trends may not have clearly defined start and end points (Divita 2019).

Short-term cycles can be described as 'fads'. A fad will rise meteorically in popularity, only to suffer an abrupt decline as the trend becomes adopted (Easey 2009), e.g., the poncho in the early 2000s. 'As a fad becomes fashionable, it also becomes unfashionable' (Easey 2009: 151). Simmel notes that 'as fashion spreads, it gradually goes to doom' (Rocamora and Smelik 2016: 76). The fad trend can be seen as problematic in terms of fast fashion and sustainability. A trend with limited intended longevity will also encourage the production of low-cost clothing and fast response systems that encourage disposability (Joy et al. 2012).

In contrast, a long-term cycle can be described as a 'classic', which 'denotes a lasting significance, endurance, and long-life span' (Goncu-Berk 2015: n.pag.). A classic is never out of style for its market segment, and garments share the quality of 'timelessness' (Easey 2009: 150), e.g., the little black dress. Although, if produced in a fast fashion system, low-quality clothing can have limited durability, thus reducing its lifespan. Fashion items, as depicted on Eundeok's (2011) graph (Figure 1), lie between the fad and classic items. A fashion style remains popular for a prolonged period of long time, before gradually declining, e.g., skinny jeans.

A notable absence from the literature is that current trend cycle thinking does not consider the lives of the individual consumer in relation to the trend cycle. This article will bring forward new knowledge to this debate. Social media has added a layer of complexity to the trend cycle by creating a consumer that can be impacted at any stage of the buying process, and this influences how consumers align their buying behaviours in response to trends (Nash 2019). Influencers and flash sales, promoted by social media, create a sense of urgency, encouraging the consumer to 'buy now or miss out'. Rogers (2003) devised the diffusion of innovation curve in 1962, which shows the types of consumers who adopt trends at certain times (Figure 2).

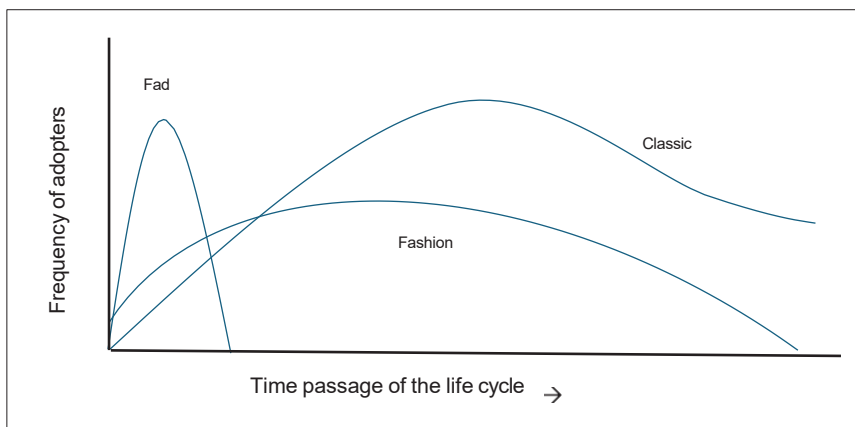


Figure 1: Fad, fashion and classic styles have different rates of acceptance. Adapted from Eundeok (2011).

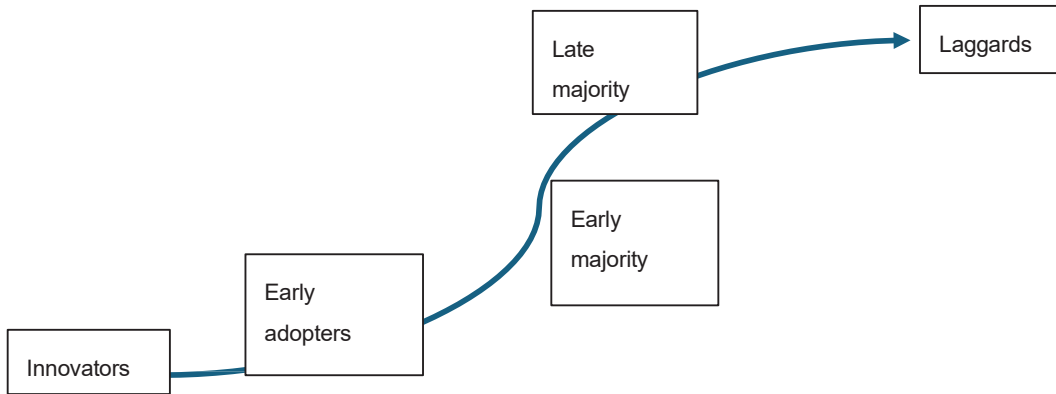


Figure 2: Diffusion innovation curve. Adapted from Raymond (2010: 19).

This model was inspired by the process of adoption of agricultural and farm practices, but since the 1960s, has been applied to many different industries, including the fashion industry.

However, Workman and Lee (2017) criticize Rodger's model, as the diffusion of innovation curve was originally designed to be applied to the adoption of new ideas, not products. Furthermore, fashion styles are constantly changing, and the model may not be suitable for revealing the nuances of the adoption and diffusion of fashion styles (Workman and Lee 2017). It is apparent that there is a gap in the current literature in terms of better understanding the trend cycle, considering the complexities of the fashion system in the context of sustainability, technology and consumer behaviour in the twenty-first century.

Pursuit of style identities

Fashion consumption, facilitated by the trend system, has become central to identity construction (Veenstra and Kuipers 2013), whilst the need to make global consumption more sustainable remains a pressing issue (Bloodhart and Swim 2020). Clothing mediates the relationship between an individual and the outside world, and the process of combining items to be worn involves constructing the individual in the eyes of others (Woodward 2005). Dressing is not just based upon individual style preferences but fundamental cultural competences, meaning that the way we dress has symbolic implications.

Clothing communicates our social identity, and this is framed by cultural values. A postmodern era has challenged the once fixed boundaries that defined cultural values, including gender, sexuality and social status (Davis 1994). Postmodernism recognizes identity as fluid and fragmented, a state that can be achieved through fast fashion, through the purchasing of low-cost garments (Furlong 2016). Consequently, the opportunity for announcing individual identity is only now possible through products provided by a shifting and uncertain mass culture (Darden and Worden 1991).

Over-consumption is in part a result of consumers wishing to frequently differentiate their style, driven by the need to establish and freely change an individual identity in a postmodern world. Amongst younger generations that have been blamed on the pursuit of ideal identities, particularly in periods of

heightened awareness of identity development (McNeill et al. 2020). On social media platforms, like Instagram, it can be perceived as distasteful amongst younger generations to wear the same outfit twice, a trend that has negative sustainable implications (Grant 2018). Consumer need to follow fashion trends falls on a delicate balance between not only wanting to fit in but also needing to stand out. Simmel (1957) argues that this tension is a core dynamic of being human and central to changes in fashion trends. This is especially relevant for young consumers and navigating identity can provide a sense of stability during early adulthood (Miles et al. 1998).

Dobers and Strannegård (2005) found that sustainability must be seen as intertwined with social processes such as fashion and identity construction. It can be argued that existing knowledge surrounding the links between sustainability, trend consumption and identity have been underexplored, which this study seeks to address.

Sustainability and fast fashion

The fashion industry has been recognized as one of the world's biggest polluters (Moorhouse and Moorhouse 2017). Fashion cycles are becoming increasingly fast paced, particularly through the advent of fast fashion and online shopping (Marroncelli and Braithwaite 2020). To withstand this demand and increase profit margins, some sectors of the fashion industry have adopted unsustainable production techniques (McNeill and Moore 2015). 'Fast fashion' refers to low-cost clothing that takes direct inspiration from luxury fashion trends (Joy et al. 2012). This encourages an environment where, 'design, sourcing and manufacture decisions are made with an emphasis on speed rather than sustainability' (Bruce and Daly 2006 cited in McNeill and Moore 2015: 213). Low-price points associated with fast fashion encourage frequent and impulsive consumption (Cairns et al. 2021).

Consumers and companies have started to demand more accountability from clothing (Manley et al. 2023). Although 'sustainable fashion' does remain an oxymoron (Berger-Grabner 2018), a 2022 study that looked at sustainable fashion on Instagram, found that most posts on sustainable fashion also aimed to promote products (Vladimirova 2022). Improving the sustainability of the fast fashion system may involve shifting consumer mindsets around purchasing habits and over-consumption. Notably, the paradox exists that sustainable consumption is still consumption.

Fashion is often characterized by hedonism, instant gratification, short product life cycles and 'quick' trends (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik 2015; Marroncelli and Braithwaite 2020). This is in contrast to sustainability, which is associated with ethics, durability and the repeated use of products (Manley et al. 2023). Rapid turnarounds and constant new releases linked to the trend cycle encourage persistent shopping and 'trend chasing' amongst consumers. Clothes quickly lose their appeal, are replaced or thrown away, and cheap fashion is often perceived to be disposable (Cline 2013).

Niinimäki and Armstrong (2013) hypothesize that fostering deep attachments to clothing offers opportunities to extend the use time of garments and postpone disposal. Designing objects that encourage emotional attachment can present alternatives to our 'throwaway society', by developing powerful frameworks that foster relationships between people and things (Chapman 2005). Emotional attachment can be defined as, 'encapsulating an affect-laden, possession-specific bond between a person and an object or object' (Kellett

and Holden 2013: 120). Research regarding emotional attachment to clothing has tended to focus on the older consumer (Townsend et al. 2016). Certain types of emotional attachment are formed over many years, and therefore the older generation will naturally be at a perceived advantage, as they have had more time to form these attachments. This study will pay particular attention to how the younger consumer forms attachment to their clothing and if emotional attachment overrides fashion trends when investigating clothing consumption.

Pleasurable use experiences and meaningful memories with products can encourage attachment (Niinimäki and Armstrong 2013). This offers potential for designers to explore fashion as a more sustainable practice. It is possible that the stories and origins of clothing can be designed to encourage care (Clark 2008).

3 METHODOLOGY

This methodology applied qualitative research (Etherington 2004) with an object-based approach (Woodward 2019) that was realized through a series of wardrobe studies (Grimstad Klepp and Bjerck 2014). The study is grounded in object-based research, as the clothes situated in participants' wardrobes can be viewed as material objects. 'Objects evoke memories: they connect the past and the present' (Bide 2017: 451). Steele (1998) notes the important role that objects can play in the creation of knowledge of clothing. Objects have symbolic functions and social meanings (Candlin and Guins 2009). This study focused on the symbolic value of fast fashion garments in participants' wardrobes.

The research was undertaken primarily in and around the regional city of Nottingham between 2020 and 2021. Twenty-two wardrobe studies were conducted both online and in person. Klepp and Bjerck define wardrobe studies as, 'a methodological approach that analyses the way in which clothes relate to each other on the whole or in parts of the wardrobe' (2014: 373). Investigating wardrobes involves incorporating methods which seek to uncover knowledge about the contents and dynamics of a wardrobe, studying how garments are selected and used (Fletcher and Grimstad Klepp 2017). Woodward (2007) describes the wardrobe as a collection of items accumulated from previous occasions. Students (aged 18–25) and young adults (aged 28–35) are identified as primary consumers of fast fashion (Gilliland 2019) and therefore were the target sample group for this research. Males and females were interviewed equally. In the findings and discussion section, participants have been given pseudonyms, so that their identities remain anonymous.

This research has faced several limitations, due to the scale of the project. This research was conducted in one geographical region in one country (Nottingham, United Kingdom), which also possibly limits the representativeness of the sample. In addition to this, the sample size of this research must be taken into consideration. The sample used in small scale research, i.e., a singular group of people, can be used to facilitate an in-depth study (Hammersly and Atkinson 2007). In total, 22 participants were interviewed for the wardrobe studies. Although the viewpoints presented throughout the article are not generalizable to the whole of the student (aged 18–25) and young adult (aged 28–35) population, or the whole male and female population, they are indicative of a feeling amongst that generation. Utilizing a small sample size does however also provide an opportunity; 'Focusing upon a narrow sample

defined by the life-stage of the participants provides an opportunity to better understand the holistic experience of decision making' (Ritch 2014: 1177).

Wardrobe studies have the ability to stimulate rich descriptions and stories and can contribute to increasing the materiality of clothing studies (Grimstad Klepp and Bjerck 2014). Applying this research method, this study interviewed participants in front of their wardrobes. Analysing the clothes already situated in an individual's wardrobe is a key method in understanding more sustainable consumption practices (Woodward 2014). Building upon previous research which has utilized wardrobe studies as a method (Woodward 2007; Niinimäki and Armstrong 2013), this study has explored attachment to clothing alongside the trend cycle in detail. The particular focus on longevity in relation to garments, which could be considered to be 'fast fashion', provided a unique perspective and contribution to knowledge.

Questions focused on clothing behaviours, including frequency of new purchases, favourite brands, items of clothing in the wardrobe that are the oldest, attachment to clothing and nostalgic memories. These questions were designed to encourage an enquiry around the trend cycle by facilitating discussions surrounding the longevity of clothing and 'fastness' of fashion.

Following transcription from the wardrobe studies, a thematic analysis was undertaken (Braun and Clarke 2006). Key themes coded from the qualitative research have been identified and examined within the findings and discussion.²

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis has been structured into main themes identified during transcription of primary research data. These themes responded to issues raised in the literature review and are as follows: accidental classics and unusual longevity and the importance of the individual consumer.

Accidental classics and unusual longevity

Participants were asked if they owned any items of clothing that could be described as accidental classics. This question was deemed to be important in the context of trends as it sought to interrogate the longevity of fast fashion within the trend cycle. The 'accidental classic' can retain longevity, despite the fact that it is intended to be 'fast' fashion. 'Mass produced goods can age well, and they can gain character through use' (Chapman 2005: 118).

Many participants did own clothing that lasted longer than expected, with surprising durability. Primark was mentioned most frequently when discussing these items of clothing. This was an unexpected finding as Primark are a low-price, value retailer. Table 1 shows garment types and descriptions of accidental classics purchased from Primark.

Table 1 shows how a selection of young fashion consumers are behaving with regard to fast fashion. Value has been placed on these Primark garments, and they have been kept and worn for longer than perhaps initially intended. This does not mean that fast fashion is sustainable, but it does bring a different viewpoint to the fast fashion debate. This could be seen as a surprising outcome, given that Primark is renowned for being a value retailer on the British high street, with some of the lowest price points (Butler 2019). In terms of the workings of the trend cycle, it also challenges the perception that Primark garments always fit into the 'fad' category, due to their perceived low quality and quick responses to trends.

2. For a further details regarding the methodological process, please consult Chapter 3 of the following document: 'The emotional durability of fast fashion: Male and female perspectives' (Marroncelli 2024).

It may be the case that Primark in particular is a rite of passage for young consumers in terms of their trend consumption, shopping and style formation. Rites of passage are significant as they can represent a symbolic divide between youth and young adulthood (Stannard 2013). This is a period profound change and importance in an individual's life and is distinct in terms

Table 1: Accidental classics purchased from Primark.

Participant	Garment type	Age/attributes/cost	Image (If available)
Noah, a male student	T-shirt	Yeah, this if we're talking about durability, this was Primark. I was expecting it to disintegrate as soon as I got home, about three years ago. This was seven pounds from Primark and is lasted quite a while. Which I wasn't expecting it to.	
Shauna, a female student	Top	This top I had, it must have been since before I was a teenager, I'm gonna say 12. It is something that I regularly wear in the summer. It's a nice stripe, it's got a nice bow detail on the shoulder. It's not really casual, but it's not too fancy, and it's a lightweight material, so I love wearing it. I wasn't meant to keep it this long, but I have.	
Matthew, a male young adult	Orange raincoat	This is one of those jackets I bought for a festival... I remember being in town just picking up a few bits I was in Primark and I saw this hanging on the end of a rail on the sales like a fiver. I only bought it for that weekend, and I've just not been able to part with it since because it's just it's become more of an accidental staple if you like of my wardrobe. I always wear this near Halloween because it's orange.	
Matthew, a male young adult	Plain white shirts	I do have quite a few shirts from Primark, just white plain shirts, some of them I've had for years and they really are you know, still washing really well, still a really nice bright white.	N/A

Table 1: Continued.

Garment Participant	type	Age/attributes/cost	Image (If available)
Viv, a female young adult		Green coat I've got a green coat which I keep putting it on because it's still weirdly within fashion now and people do compliment it. So that's an accidental one. <i>How old is that?</i> Maybe two years. And I thought it would just be a short seasonal thing. It's a khaki green, knee length quilted coat from Primark. I thought I'd only like it for a short amount of time but still get complimented on that.	N/A
Owen, a male student.	Socks and pants	I get my socks and pants from Primark. And regarding them lasting long, I mean I don't think really think that much different from Nike socks, they just don't have the little tick on them. To be honest though, Nike socks, when I've had had them, they've been quite poor quality. So, I prefer Primark ones.	N/A

of identity exploration (Arnett 2000). 'Understanding the important rites of passage in people's lives can lead to an improved understanding of consumer behaviour' (Piacentini and Mailer 2004: 253). The low-price points of Primark garments make them accessible to young people whilst they are at a life stage that may involve identity and stylistic exploration, with limited income. It is clear from Table 1 that there is no defining feature that connects the Primark garments together. Participants do however collectively mention not expecting the garments to last as long as they have. The repeated use of clothing is dependent on many factors (Fletcher 2016). When describing elements that can create satisfaction from the long-term use of products, Niinimäki and Armstrong (2013) note how quality, functional aspects and aesthetic attributes are all important aspects.

The theme of accidental classics and unusual longevity challenges the general misconception that that fast fashion always disintegrates after a few wears and washes, thus prompting consumer behaviour which devalues clothing. Fletcher's work highlights that durability is not the only, or indeed most important, factor in determining if clothing continues to be used. It is instead the 'social system which shapes the ideology of use' (2016: 183) which often overrides durability. Human action and intention can extend the active use of fashion clothing, as demonstrated in Table 1.

It must be acknowledged that what makes an item a classic piece of clothing is based on subjective opinion. The garments visible in Table 1 can be classified as accidental classics according to their owners. However, the same garments may be valued differently by other consumers. It is difficult to discern to what capacity qualities of an accidental classic are inherent in the design of the garment, and to what degree it lies in the personal relationship between the wearer and the clothing. A combination of being the right garment at the right time and price, in addition to a positive personal relationship with the

consumer, can contribute to items of fast fashion becoming accidental classics. As Fletcher (2016) notes, extending the life of a product through increased durability is only effective if the user also prolongs their use of the product and limits future consumption. It is therefore important to consider the lives of the individual consumer and their behaviour in relation to trends and longevity.

The importance of the individual consumer

Clothing as a form of material culture emerges from everyday life, relationships and wider consumption patterns (Woodward 2014). Material culture can be defined as 'the study through artefacts of the beliefs, values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of a particular community or society at a given time' (Prown 1982: 1). According to Miller and Kuchler (2005), when we go out in the world, we want to look good, and this depends on our ability to wear new garments. In this way, clothing as material culture can be used to accentuate and express our understanding of the public gaze and reflect our identity. Social media alongside the desire for the 'new' contributes to the perceived 'fastness' of the trend cycle. Wardrobe studies demonstrated how emotional attachment to clothing can be uncovered through feeling and memory. The trend is about the look not the feel, but the individual cares about *feel* and *memory*. Feel applies here to both the materiality of the garments (how they feel next to the skin) and feelings associated with memories linked to particular items of clothing.

'Understanding how we "feel" is particularly important within the field of fashion and sustainability given the complex interplay of psychological processes that can prevent individuals from acting sustainably' (Tassell et al. 2022: 75). When asked if they were attached to any items in their wardrobes, participants regularly mentioned keeping garments that elicited memories of friends and family and ranged from blazers to T-shirts to dresses. Matthew, a young adult, details how he is attached to a shirt bought for a family holiday:

I remember I got this shirt from 'trade x'. I don't know if you even remember 'trade x'? It was a discount clothes place where you could also buy electronics and things like that. I remember getting it for my first family holiday abroad when I was 11. We went to Majorca, I was obsessed with Egypt at the time, still kind of am in a way, but this was everything to me because it had Tutankhamun on it was blue, you know, and I absolutely love it. I still wear it to this day and it still fits me. I was quite a broad kid when I was younger so I'm lucky that it still fits. I always take it on holiday or if it's a really nice day in summer I will wear it, I do feel great in this this to be honest. [...] I got this when I was 11 and I'm 31 now so 20 years I've have this.

This example demonstrates how fast fashion can, like other garments, be subject to emotional attachment. Matthew's shirt (Figure 3) was purchased from a discount retailer, is 20 years old, and he describes how he still 'feels great in it'. He goes onto say, 'I would say I was attached to it. Yeah, I wouldn't feel great about getting rid of it'.

In their 2023 study, Neto and Ferreira describe how the principles of happy and lasting interpersonal relationships between humans can also be found in wearer–clothing relationships. Their study shows how friendship principles can contribute to the creation of meaning with items of clothing.



Figure 3: Matthew's holiday shirt.

supporting the friendship system is foundational for emotional attachment to develop. Similar to how friendships that have lasted for years share an abundance of happy memories and shared experience between two parties, the relationship between Matthew and his holiday shirt hold comparable principles. Matthew's shirt was bought for his 'first family holiday', and he now always takes it on holiday or wears on a sunny day. It is likely that Matthew has many happy memories associated with this shirt and intends to keep wearing it in the future, when further happy memories will be created. Drawing upon Neto and Ferreira's (2023) work, similarities can be made between friendship principles where happy memories and bonds generated with friends encourage the motivation to maintain these relationships.

A further example of emotional attachment to fast fashion uses a personal reflection from my own wardrobe. The dress in Figure 4 was bought in 2011, and thirteen years later, it is an item which I still wear today.



Figure 4: *New look dress.*

The dress was purchased from New Look, it is made from 100 per cent polyester with 100 per cent nylon lace detailing and made in China. This dress can be described as a fast fashion garment with unusual longevity. The enhanced durability and extended use of this garment, along with the classic design, have led to an attachment being formed with the dress. Similar to Matthews's holiday shirt, I have many happy memories associated with this dress. I wore it to *London Fashion Week* in 2011 (Figure 5) and also wore this dress in 2012 when my parents dropped me off at university for the first time. As previously discussed with the accidental classics in Table 1, this is reflective of a rite of passage in an individual's life, which is symbolic in terms of identity exploration. These data suggest that the relationship between the garment and the owner is an important factor which can determine if the consumer forms an attachment to the item. Valle Noronha et al. (2018) note how relationships between individuals and their clothes can evolve over time. Factors which can influence the increase and decrease in the quality of these relationships include comfort, frequency of use,



Figure 5: Wearing the New look dress at London Fashion Week, 2011.

and versatility (Valle Noronha et al. 2018). It can be argued that my dress positively responds to each of these factors. It is comfortable as wear does not depend on weight fluctuations, due to the loose-fitting nature of the garment. The dress has been frequently worn during a fourteen-year period. Visually, the dress can be described as part of the 'bohemian chic', trend which has remained consistently in fashion over the last decade. This is a trend which can be described as a 'classic' as depicted on Eundeok's (2011) graph (Figure 1). The dress is also versatile as it can be worn with tights, bare legs, trainers or boots.

These data have revealed that fast fashion, like other garments be subject to emotional attachment. Items of clothing that participants were attached to in this study are not dependent on quality. There is no evidence that participants were less attached to fast fashion clothing owned vs. other garments. The research data suggest that it may be the experience of wear that gives value to fast fashion garments. This places an emphasis on the relationship between the garment and the owner and not the individual trend. Some items of fast fashion hold value, which is contrary to traditional stereotypes that fast fashion is easily disposable. In this way, the longevity of these garments is prolonged in the trend cycle, as they have not fallen out of fashion, according to their individual owners. The value discussed here is linked to participants' value systems, and what they consider to be important. Both examples in this section mention links to memories associated with family. According to Schwartz (2012), this can underlie the values of security, tradition and benevolence. Deep attachments have been formed with these garments as

the users have described positive emotions, memories and special meanings. Attachment constructed over a longer period comprises of a 'reflective' level, as memories can trigger powerful, long-lasting emotions (Norman 2007). The garments which participants are attached to in the findings and discussion section are not trend-led. Participants also did not mention following trends when describing accidental classics or if they were attached to any items in their wardrobes. This demonstrates how emotional attachment to fast fashion items may postpone disposal and increase the span of trends in the context of extended clothing use.

5 CONCLUSION

This article questioned the speed of fast fashion within the context of the trend cycle in terms of how young consumers are behaving and using their clothing. The study has created a new way for understanding the trend system, which considers the lives of the individual consumer and highlights attachment to garments. Research regarding emotional attachment to clothing has tended to focus on the older consumer, whereas this study has explored attachment amongst students and young adults. Findings have revealed that garments which represent rites of passage hold great attachment and importance to the young consumer.

The research has interrogated the nature of the fast fashion trend cycle, which is often viewed as being, quick, cheap and disposable (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik 2015; Marroncelli and Braithwaite 2020). Primary research findings have revealed that young consumers (often) do not purchase fast fashion garments for trend-led motivations and keep these garments for extended periods of time. The theme of accidental classics and unusual longevity challenges the general misconception that that fast fashion always disintegrates after a few wears and washes, thus prompting consumer behaviour which devalues clothing. Wardrobe studies uncovered that certain items of fast fashion can hold symbolic value to the consumer.

The value is linked to memories and emotional attachment and can increase the garments longevity. The research data suggest that it may be the experience of wear that gives value to fast fashion garments. The attachment formed is not motivated by sustainability concerns, as participants did not mention this to be an important factor when describing the garments which they had owned for the longest. This shows that an individual's sense of identity in the context of clothing and sustainability within their wardrobe is complex.

In many instances, emotional attachment can increase the span of fashion trends for the younger consumer in terms of their extended clothing use. This work informs the growing body of literature on sustainability and clothing and may hold implications for fashion brands. Designing objects that encourage emotional attachment can present alternatives to our 'throwaway society', by developing powerful frameworks, which foster relationships between people and things (Chapman 2005). This study has enabled an analysis of the importance of following, or perhaps not following, trends and fashion.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

This research received favourable ethical approval from the College of Art, Architecture, Design and Humanities Research Ethics Committee at Nottingham Trent University. All participants cited in this study have given full ethical consent.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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