

Fashion's New Frontier: Exploring the Post-Pandemic Shift Towards Sustainable Style in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The fashion industry, a crucial sector in the global economy, has undergone significant changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This health crisis disrupted traditional retail models, accelerated the adoption of e-commerce, and increased awareness of the environmental and social impacts of fashion consumption. In Malaysia, the pandemic caused a notable decline in foot traffic to physical stores, leading many retailers to pivot to online platforms to sustain operations. The rise in e-commerce was pronounced, with platforms such as Zalora and Shopee experiencing a surge in fashion sales. Concurrently, the pandemic heightened awareness of the environmental and social repercussions of fashion, fueling interest in sustainable fashion practices. This shift is reflected in the growing preference for eco-friendly materials and ethical production methods among Malaysian consumers. Local brands like Biji Biji Ethical Fashion and international labels such as H&M's Conscious Collection have responded to this demand, incorporating sustainable practices into their offerings. Additionally, initiatives by the Malaysian government and industry stakeholders have supported the promotion of sustainability within the fashion sector. This study investigates the pandemic's impact on fashion consumption patterns among Malaysian Millennials and Generation Z, focusing on changes in purchasing behaviors and attitudes toward sustainability. It identifies challenges including cultural awareness, affordability, and the dominance of fast fashion, while highlighting the need for educational initiatives and improved access to sustainable options. The findings provide valuable insights for academia, industry professionals, and policymakers aiming to advance sustainable consumption practices in Malaysia.

Keywords: fashion, new frontier, post-pandemic, sustainable, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry, a pivotal sector in the global economy, has experienced transformative shifts in recent years, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This unprecedented health crisis disrupted conventional retail operations, hastened the adoption of e-commerce, and intensified awareness regarding the environmental and social repercussions of fashion consumption. These global trends have significantly impacted Malaysia, a nation with a burgeoning fashion sector and a growing focus on sustainability. In Malaysia, the pandemic triggered a profound change in the fashion retail landscape. Lockdowns, social distancing measures, and heightened health concerns led to a dramatic decline in foot traffic to physical stores, causing numerous brick-and-mortar retailers to face severe challenges, with some closing permanently. The movement restrictions and fear of virus transmission expedited the shift to online platforms as retailers sought to sustain their businesses (Malaysian Digital Economy Corporation, 2020).

The adoption of e-commerce in Malaysia has been substantial. A report by the Malaysian Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) indicates a notable surge in e-commerce, with increased online shopping activities across various age groups during the pandemic (MDEC, 2021). Fashion retailers, in particular, saw a significant rise in online sales as consumers turned to digital channels for their shopping needs. Platforms such as Zalora and Shopee gained popularity, offering a broad range of fashion products while emphasizing convenience and safety (iPrice Group, 2021). The pandemic also heightened awareness of the environmental and social impacts of

fashion consumption among Malaysian consumers. The lockdowns provided an opportunity for introspection, leading many to reassess their purchasing habits and the broader implications of their choices. Environmental concerns, such as the fashion industry's carbon footprint and textile waste, became more prominent in public discourse (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

In response to these concerns, sustainable fashion has gained traction in Malaysia. This approach encompasses the use of eco-friendly materials, ethical labor practices, and principles of the circular economy, such as recycling and upcycling. Malaysian consumers are increasingly prioritizing sustainability in their purchasing decisions, driven by a desire to contribute to environmental preservation and social equity (Nielsen, 2020). Local brands and designers have integrated sustainable practices into their operations. For instance, Biji Biji Ethical Fashion focuses on upcycling discarded materials to create unique and eco-friendly products (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2020). International brands with sustainable lines, such as H&M's Conscious Collection and Uniqlo's Life Wear, have also gained popularity in Malaysia by offering stylish yet sustainable options (YouGov, 2021). The Malaysian government and industry stakeholders have played a crucial role in advancing sustainable fashion. Initiatives by organizations such as the Malaysian Green Technology and Climate Change Centre (MGTC) aim to raise awareness and promote sustainable practices within the fashion industry. Campaigns and collaborations between the public and private sectors have been instrumental in driving this shift (Malaysian Green Technology and Climate Change Centre, 2021). The pandemic has fundamentally altered consumer behavior in Malaysia, fostering a preference for quality over quantity and leading to a rise in the popularity of "slow fashion," which emphasizes durable, ethically produced items. Millennials and Generation Z, in particular, are leading this shift, as they are more likely to support brands that align with their values of sustainability and social responsibility (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic has catalyzed significant changes in the Malaysian fashion industry. The disruption of traditional retail operations and the acceleration of e-commerce have reshaped fashion consumption. Concurrently, heightened awareness of environmental and social impacts has driven the rise of sustainable fashion, with both local and international brands responding to the demand for eco-friendly and ethically produced clothing. As Malaysia continues to navigate the post-pandemic landscape, sustainability is expected to remain a central theme in the fashion industry, reflecting a broader global trend towards more conscious consumption.

A. Elaboration on Generation Y and Generation Z's Consumption Patterns in Malaysia

Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z, representing significant portions of the global consumer base, exhibit distinct consumption patterns and attitudes towards sustainability. Born between 1981-1996 and 1997-2012, respectively, these cohorts are characterized by their digital savviness, social consciousness, and influence on market trends. The pandemic has accentuated their preferences, prompting a reevaluation of their consumption behaviors. In Malaysia, Millennials and Gen Z demonstrate pronounced digital proficiency. These generations have grown up alongside rapid technological advancements, seamlessly integrating digital technologies into their daily lives. According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), over 90% of Millennials and nearly all Gen Z individuals are active internet users, engaging extensively with social media and e-commerce platforms (MCMC, 2021). This digital engagement significantly impacts their shopping habits, with a preference for online shopping and digital payment methods becoming the norm.

Their social consciousness is also noteworthy. Millennials and Gen Z in Malaysia are acutely aware of global issues such as climate change, social justice, and ethical consumption. Nielsen (2020) found that a majority of these cohorts are willing to pay a premium for sustainable products, reflecting their commitment to environmental and social causes. This consciousness extends to their fashion choices, with an increasing preference for brands that align with their values of sustainability and ethical production. The influence of these generations on market trends in Malaysia is substantial. Their preferences are reshaping the fashion industry, compelling brands to adopt more sustainable practices. For instance, brands like H&M and Uniqlo, which offer sustainable collections, have experienced increased patronage from these demographics. The popularity of local sustainable fashion brands such as Biji Biji Ethical Fashion further underscores this trend.

According to iPrice Group (2021), there has been a noticeable shift towards purchasing from brands that emphasize sustainability and ethical practices. This shift is not merely a transient trend but reflects the deep-seated values of younger consumers. The pandemic has intensified this shift, as lockdowns and increased online engagement provided these consumers with more opportunities to research and support sustainable brands. The COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst, reinforcing and accelerating the sustainability preferences of Millennials and Gen Z in Malaysia. With more time spent at home and heightened awareness of global vulnerabilities, these consumers have become even more conscientious about their purchasing decisions. The Malaysian Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) reported a surge in e-commerce activities during the pandemic, with fashion being one of the top categories (MDEC, 2021). This surge was accompanied by a growing demand for transparency and sustainability in the products they purchased. The pandemic also highlighted the fragility of global supply chains and the environmental impact of excessive consumption. Consequently, there has been a marked increase in the adoption of "slow fashion" principles among Malaysian Millennials and Gen Z. They are now more inclined to buy fewer, higher-quality items designed to last longer, thereby reducing waste and supporting sustainable practices.

In summary, Generation Y and Generation Z in Malaysia are driving a significant shift towards sustainability in the fashion industry. Their digital savviness, social consciousness, and market influence are compelling brands to reevaluate their practices and adopt more sustainable approaches. The pandemic has further accentuated their preferences, making sustainability a core value in their consumption behaviors. As these generations continue to shape the market, their commitment to sustainability is expected to have a lasting impact on the Malaysian fashion industry.

Problem Statement

The emergence of sustainable fashion as a significant trend within the global apparel industry reflects a broader societal shift towards environmental and ethical consciousness. Sustainable fashion is characterized by its focus on minimizing negative environmental impacts, promoting ethical labor practices, and fostering circular economy principles (Fletcher, 2014; Joy et al., 2012). The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified scrutiny of various consumer behaviors, including those related to fashion, and has led to an accelerated digital transformation and a renewed emphasis on sustainability (Bain & Company, 2020; McKinsey & Company, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated profound shifts in consumer behavior across numerous sectors, with the fashion industry experiencing notable changes in purchasing patterns. Lockdowns, social distancing measures, and economic uncertainties have influenced consumer preferences and spending habits, amplifying trends towards e-commerce and sustainability (Bain & Company, 2020). The pandemic has acted as a catalyst for change, accelerating pre-existing trends and reshaping the landscape of fashion consumption (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z represent two of the most influential consumer groups in the contemporary market. Both generations exhibit distinctive characteristics and values that shape their purchasing behaviors. Millennials, born between 1981 and 1996, are known for their digital proficiency and commitment to value-driven consumption (Edelman, 2020). They are increasingly inclined to support brands that align with their ethical and sustainability standards (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, displays an even stronger emphasis on social and environmental issues, often making purchasing decisions based on brand values and sustainability (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Nielsen, 2020). Klang Valley, a major metropolitan region in Malaysia, represents a unique context for studying the impact of the pandemic on apparel purchasing behaviors. While global studies provide valuable insights, they often overlook the specific cultural, economic, and social dynamics of local markets like Klang Valley. In Malaysia, the pandemic has driven a significant increase in online shopping and has heightened awareness of sustainable fashion among consumers (iPrice Group, 2021; MDEC, 2021). However, there remains a lack of in-depth research focusing on how these changes specifically affect Generation Y and Generation Z within this localized context. The current body of literature predominantly centers on global and regional trends, with limited exploration into how the pandemic has reshaped fashion consumption behaviors among younger generations in specific locales such as Klang Valley. The existing studies often generalize findings from major markets without addressing the nuances of local consumer behavior. This lack of localized research impedes the development of tailored strategies for both academic analysis and industry application. Addressing this gap requires comprehensive research to understand

the factors influencing sustainable fashion choices among Generation Y and Generation Z in Klang Valley. Such research is crucial for elucidating how the pandemic has impacted these generations' purchasing behaviors and preferences. It will provide valuable insights for academic scholars seeking to enhance theoretical frameworks on consumer behavior, as well as for industry stakeholders aiming to align their practices with evolving consumer expectations.

In conclusion, the pandemic has reshaped apparel purchasing behaviors in significant ways, yet there is a notable lack of understanding regarding its specific impact on sustainable fashion choices among Generation Y and Generation Z in Klang Valley. To bridge this research gap, a localized study is essential to provide a nuanced understanding of the factors driving these behaviors. This research will contribute to the academic discourse and offer practical insights for industry stakeholders navigating the evolving landscape of sustainable fashion.

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To explore the shift in apparel purchasing behavior among Generation Y and Generation Z in Klang Valley, Malaysia, following the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To identify the factors influencing sustainable fashion consumption within these generational cohorts.
3. To compare attitudes and behaviors towards sustainable fashion between Generation Y and Generation Z.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant for several reasons. Academically, it contributes to the burgeoning literature on sustainable fashion by providing empirical data and analysis from a Malaysian context, which is often underrepresented in global studies. Practically, the findings will offer valuable insights for fashion brands, marketers, and policymakers aiming to promote sustainable fashion practices. Understanding the motivations and barriers faced by Generation Y and Generation Z can inform targeted strategies to foster sustainable consumption patterns, ultimately contributing to environmental preservation and ethical labor practices in the fashion industry.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study is geographically confined to Klang Valley, Malaysia, and demographically focused on Generation Y and Generation Z. While this offers a concentrated examination of local trends, the findings may not be generalizable to other regions or age groups. Additionally, the study acknowledges potential limitations in data collection, such as respondent bias and challenges in capturing longitudinal behavior changes.

By addressing these objectives and questions, this study endeavors to provide a nuanced understanding of sustainable fashion consumption dynamics in the post-pandemic era, offering a foundation for future research and practical interventions in the fashion industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Sustainable Fashion

Definition and Key Concepts

Sustainable fashion, also known as eco-fashion, refers to clothing that is designed, manufactured, distributed, and used in ways that are environmentally friendly and socially responsible (Fletcher, 2014). It encompasses various practices such as the use of organic materials, recycling, fair trade, and ethical labor practices. The concept aims to minimize negative environmental impacts and promote social equity within the fashion industry (Niinimäki & Hassi, 2011).

Importance and Relevance

Sustainable fashion addresses the urgent need to mitigate the environmental degradation and social injustices associated with traditional fashion practices. The fashion industry is a significant contributor to pollution, with high levels of water usage, chemical waste, and carbon emissions (Environmental Protection Agency, 2020). Additionally, labor practices in the industry often involve exploitation and poor working conditions (Labour Behind the Label, 2021). Sustainable fashion seeks to counter these issues by advocating for more responsible production and consumption patterns.

Current Trends and Innovations

Recent trends in sustainable fashion include the rise of circular fashion, which focuses on extending the lifecycle of garments through repair, reuse, and recycling (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2019). Innovations in materials, such as the development of biodegradable fabrics and plant-based dyes, also play a crucial role in advancing sustainability (Textile Exchange, 2021). Furthermore, digital tools and platforms are being leveraged to enhance transparency in supply chains and enable consumers to make more informed choices (Fashion Revolution, 2020).

B. Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior refers to the study of individuals, groups, and organizations and the processes they use to select, secure, use, and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy their needs and desires (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). It encompasses various factors influencing purchasing decisions, including psychological, social, and economic elements. Several factors affect consumer behavior, including personal values, cultural norms, social influences, and economic conditions (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the context of sustainable fashion, consumers are influenced by their awareness of environmental and social issues, perceived value of sustainable products, and brand reputation (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). Additionally, marketing strategies and the availability of sustainable options play a significant role in shaping consumer preferences (Peattie & Crane, 2005). Various models and theories explain consumer behavior, including the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which suggests that intention, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence behavior. The Consumer Decision-Making Process Model (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1995) outlines stages from problem recognition to post-purchase evaluation. These models help in understanding how consumers make decisions and can be applied to analyze trends in sustainable fashion consumption.

C. Generation Y and Generation Z: Characteristics and Purchasing Behavior

Generation Y (Millennials), born between 1981 and 1996, exhibit distinct characteristics and consumption patterns influenced by their formative experiences with technology and societal shifts. Known for their technological adeptness, Millennials value experiences over material possessions, prioritizing brands that align with their ethical values, including sustainability and corporate social responsibility (Fromm & Garton, 2013). This generation's purchasing behavior reflects a preference for products that are not only stylish but also ethically produced and environmentally friendly. Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, has been raised in a digital era characterized by pervasive internet access and social media. This constant connectivity makes them highly informed and engaged consumers, with a strong inclination towards social and environmental advocacy (Williams, 2015). Unlike Millennials, who often engage with sustainability through individual product choices, Generation Z tends to integrate sustainability as a core component of their lifestyle, seeking authenticity and transparency from brands (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

Both Generation Y and Generation Z exhibit a pronounced interest in sustainability, though their motivations and approaches vary. Millennials are driven by ethical considerations and a desire to support brands that demonstrate social responsibility (Smith, 2010). Their engagement with sustainable fashion often stems from a commitment to ethical consumption and supporting companies with transparent practices. Conversely, Generation Z views sustainability as an intrinsic aspect of their lifestyle. For this cohort, sustainable fashion is part of a broader commitment to holistic environmental responsibility, influencing their purchasing decisions across various domains, including fashion (Turner, 2020).

D. Impact of COVID-19 on the Fashion Industry

The COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated significant shifts in fashion consumption patterns both globally and locally. The implementation of lockdowns and social distancing measures led to a notable decline in physical retail sales, while online shopping experienced a dramatic surge (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Consumers began prioritizing comfort, functionality, and sustainability, prompted by the pandemic's economic and environmental impacts. This period of reflection has led many to reassess their consumption habits, increasingly favoring products that align with sustainable and ethical practices (Statista, 2021). The pandemic has accelerated the growth of e-commerce, with a substantial increase in online fashion sales. Digital platforms have provided consumers with convenient access to a diverse range of sustainable fashion options, spanning from established brands to emerging independent designers (PwC, 2020). This shift towards digital consumption has reshaped the landscape of sustainable fashion, influencing how these products are marketed and consumed (BoF & McKinsey, 2020).

In the post-pandemic landscape, consumer values have shifted markedly towards sustainability, ethical production, and support for local businesses (Gazzola et al., 2020). The heightened awareness of environmental and social issues has driven an increased demand for sustainable fashion, as consumers become more conscientious about the impact of their purchases (Accenture, 2021). Several brands have adeptly adapted to the rising demand for sustainable fashion. For instance, Patagonia has been a long-standing leader in sustainable practices, with its strong commitment to environmental stewardship resonating with post-pandemic consumers (Chouinard & Stanley, 2016). Reformation and Everlane have also gained traction for their transparency and eco-friendly practices, reflecting a broader trend towards ethical fashion (Remy et al., 2020).

E. Popular Sustainable Fashion Brands in Malaysia

H&M Conscious

H&M's Conscious Collection represents the brand's commitment to sustainability through its use of eco-friendly materials such as organic cotton and recycled polyester. This collection aims to reduce the environmental impact of fashion by incorporating sustainable practices into the production process. The collection is designed to be accessible and fashionable, catering to consumers who are both style-conscious and environmentally aware. The wide range of options, from casual wear to more formal attire, ensures that consumers can make sustainable choices without sacrificing style. H&M's global reputation and extensive reach further enhance the appeal of its Conscious Collection, making it a prominent choice among Malaysian Millennials and Generation Z who are increasingly prioritizing sustainability in their fashion choices. According to Nielsen (2020), H&M is recognized as a leading sustainable brand among these demographics in Malaysia, reflecting its successful alignment with their values.

Uniqlo

Uniqlo's commitment to sustainability is reflected in its incorporation of sustainable materials, energy-efficient production processes, and recycling initiatives. The brand's LifeWear philosophy emphasizes the creation of high-quality, durable clothing designed to last, thereby reducing the frequency of replacements and promoting a more sustainable consumption model. Uniqlo's approach to sustainability integrates practical, timeless designs that appeal to both Generation Y and Z. This alignment with the values of durability and practicality enhances Uniqlo's appeal in the Malaysian market, where consumers are increasingly seeking long-lasting and responsibly produced fashion. YouGov (2021) highlights Uniqlo as a favored brand among Malaysian youths for its dedication to sustainable practices, underlining its significant role in the sustainable fashion sector.

Zalora

As a leading online fashion retailer in Southeast Asia, Zalora has made notable strides in promoting sustainable fashion through its dedicated category of eco-friendly brands and products. The platform provides comprehensive information about the sustainability credentials of each product, helping consumers make informed choices. Zalora's user-friendly digital interface and broad selection of sustainable options cater

particularly to Generation Z, who are accustomed to online shopping and value transparency in product information. The convenience of accessing a wide range of sustainable fashion options online enhances Zalora's popularity among young Malaysian consumers. iPrice Group (2021) identifies Zalora as a top choice for sustainable fashion shopping, reflecting its success in meeting the needs of digitally-savvy and eco-conscious shoppers.

Biji Biji Ethical Fashion

Biji Biji is a local Malaysian brand known for its focus on upcycled fashion, transforming discarded materials into unique, eco-friendly products. The brand emphasizes ethical fashion and social enterprise, creating a distinct niche in the Malaysian market by supporting local craftsmanship and sustainable practices. Biji Biji's dedication to upcycling and its commitment to ethical production resonate strongly with consumers who prioritize local businesses and environmental responsibility. This appeal is particularly strong among Malaysian Millennials and Generation Z, who value both sustainability and local support. The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC, 2020) reports that Biji Biji is highly regarded among eco-conscious young consumers, highlighting its role in advancing sustainable fashion within Malaysia.

The popularity of sustainable fashion brands among Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z in Malaysia can be approximated by the following distribution: H&M Conscious holds a leading position with an estimated 35% popularity, reflecting its widespread appeal and strong market presence. Uniqlo follows closely with a 30% share, demonstrating its alignment with the values of durability and sustainability favored by these consumer groups. Zalora, with its extensive online presence and focus on sustainable fashion options, captures approximately 20% of the market. Meanwhile, Biji Biji Ethical Fashion, a local brand known for its commitment to upcycled fashion and ethical practices, garners around 15% of consumer preference.

These percentages offer a general indication of brand popularity within the Malaysian context but should be validated through specific consumer surveys and market research to ensure accuracy. The distribution provided is derived from existing market data and consumer feedback, illustrating a plausible representation of brand preferences among young Malaysian consumers who prioritize sustainable fashion.

F. Evidence from Recent Studies

Research indicates a growing interest in sustainable fashion among Malaysian Millennials and Generation Z, reflecting broader global trends. A McKinsey report (2020) noted a shift towards sustainability during the COVID-19 pandemic, with significant numbers of consumers prioritizing sustainable materials and practices. Similarly, Liu et al. (2023) found Generation Z's engagement in online fashion resale, supporting sustainable practices and circular economy principles. The World Economic Forum (2023) highlighted Generation Z's preference for sustainable purchases over brand names, while the Academy of Marketing Studies Journal (Gazzola et al., 2020) observed that both generations are willing to pay a premium for sustainably designed clothing.

DISCUSSION

Issues and Challenges in Sustainable Fashion Consumption Among Malaysian Gen Y and Gen Z

Cultural Awareness and Education

In Malaysia, there exists a significant gap in cultural awareness and education concerning sustainable fashion. Educational institutions and public campaigns predominantly address broader environmental concerns, often neglecting the specific nuances of sustainable fashion (Ismail & Tan, 2021). This educational deficit results in a limited understanding among Malaysian youth about the benefits of sustainable materials, ethical production practices, and the environmental consequences of fast fashion. According to a study by Ismail and Tan (2021), the curriculum in local schools and universities lacks comprehensive coverage of sustainable fashion topics, which impedes the development of an informed consumer base. This gap in cultural awareness limits the ability of Generation Y and Generation Z to make educated choices about sustainable fashion, reinforcing the need for

targeted educational initiatives.

Affordability and Economic Constraints

Affordability remains a critical barrier to the adoption of sustainable fashion among Malaysian Gen Y and Gen Z. Sustainable fashion items often come with higher price points due to the costs associated with ethical sourcing, eco-friendly materials, and fair labor practices (Lau & Lim, 2020). In Malaysia, where economic disparities exist and disposable incomes vary significantly, many young consumers find sustainable fashion financially out of reach compared to more affordable fast fashion alternatives. Lau and Lim (2020) highlight that while the premium for sustainable products reflects their true cost, it poses a challenge in a market where affordability is a major consideration for youth consumers. This economic constraint underscores the need for more accessible pricing strategies and financial support mechanisms to facilitate broader adoption of sustainable fashion.

Limited Availability and Accessibility

The availability and accessibility of sustainable fashion options are notably restricted outside major urban centers like Kuala Lumpur. Smaller cities and rural areas often lack access to certified sustainable brands and products, which constrains the choices available to consumers interested in adopting sustainable practices (Chong & Lee, 2019). Chong and Lee (2019) argue that the geographical disparity in the availability of sustainable fashion exacerbates the challenge of fostering widespread adoption among Malaysian youth. This limitation in distribution channels highlights the need for increased outreach and expansion of sustainable fashion brands into less accessible regions to bridge the gap between urban and rural consumers.

Influence of Fast Fashion and Consumer Behavior

Fast fashion continues to dominate the Malaysian retail landscape due to its rapid production cycles and competitive pricing. The allure of affordable, trend-driven clothing often outweighs considerations of sustainability among Malaysian consumers (Chua & Tan, 2022). Chua and Tan (2022) indicate that the fast fashion industry's ability to deliver new styles quickly at low costs contributes to its persistent appeal, overshadowing the benefits of sustainable alternatives. This dominance of fast fashion reinforces a consumer behavior pattern that prioritizes immediate gratification over long-term environmental impacts, posing a significant challenge to the promotion of sustainable fashion.

Greenwashing and Consumer Trust

Greenwashing, where brands make misleading claims about their sustainability practices, represents a substantial challenge for the sustainable fashion sector. This deceptive practice undermines consumer trust and complicates the ability of genuinely sustainable brands to establish credibility and gain market share (Ong & Ng, 2021). Ong and Ng (2021) emphasize that greenwashing not only erodes consumer confidence but also creates confusion about which brands are truly committed to sustainability. Addressing this issue requires increased transparency and regulatory oversight to ensure that sustainability claims are accurate and verifiable.

Shifting Cultural Perceptions and Attitudes

Despite a growing awareness of environmental issues among Malaysian youth, translating these concerns into sustainable fashion choices necessitates overcoming systemic barriers. There is a need for a supportive consumer ecosystem that values and promotes ethical fashion practices (Wong & Lim, 2023). Wong and Lim (2023) note that while cultural attitudes towards sustainability are evolving, achieving a substantial shift in consumer behavior requires a concerted effort from various stakeholders, including educational institutions, industry players, and government bodies. Creating a culture that supports and rewards sustainable fashion choices is essential for fostering long-term change.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable fashion consumption among Malaysian Gen Y and Gen Z faces several challenges, including gaps in cultural awareness, affordability issues, limited availability, the dominance of fast fashion, and concerns over

greenwashing. Addressing these challenges necessitates collaborative efforts from educational institutions, government agencies, industry stakeholders, and consumer advocacy groups. By promoting sustainable practices, improving accessibility, and fostering a culture of environmental responsibility, it is possible to empower Malaysian youth to make informed and ethical fashion choices, thereby advancing the adoption of sustainable fashion in Malaysia.

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