Nobody likes it, everybody buys it?!  
Friederike Düffelmeyer  
The Attitude-Behavior Gap in Fast Fashion
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II. Abstract

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Abstract:

Negative voices about fast fashion have become much louder in the last couple of years. Stories about sourcing, production and disposal of products became headliners in respectable newspapers and material for shocking documentaries. However, the fast fashion retailers are still expanding their territories and even new chains emerge. Observing the ongoing dialogue between the dissenting votes against fast fashion, its producers and consumers lead to the assumption that there might be a gap between young consumers’ attitude towards fast fashion and their corresponding behavior. Such a gap has been examined in many research areas before concerning for example the consumption of more ethical products, the attitude towards corporate social responsibility or health related matters.

To investigate the assumed gap in fast fashion consumption further a deductive approach has been used and focus groups have been conducted which offered great insight into the opinions and beliefs of the fast fashion main target group. Multiple hypotheses have been drawn from these findings and an online questionnaire was implemented to back up those results.

In order to assemble the questionnaire and analyze the results several theories regarding the forming of attitude and behavior haven been used and explained in further detail, including the Hierarchy of Effects, The Consistency Theory, The Techniques of Neutralization, The Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behavior.

Conclusively it can be said that young consumers do have to a certain degree a negative attitude towards fast fashion but still name it as their first shopping choice. Even though not all hypotheses which have been drawn could be fully confirmed, a gap is definitely visible between consumers’ attitude and their behavior and the reasons for it are of high interest. However precise reasons or which factors exactly interfere when the purchase decision is made discarding the concerns cannot be pointed out and only trends could be depicted. The factors forming attitude and behavior are numerous and underlay various concepts which have to receive further attention in order to solve all issues of the attitude-behavior gap in fast fashion.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior, Fast Fashion, Attitude, Behavior, Gap, Theory of Planned Behavior
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1. Introduction

This section is used to explain the background of the conducted study and to clarify and define the problem and the research question. At the end of this chapter, the purpose of the study and its delimitations are described, including methodological aspects.

1.1 Background

After years of praise about the fast fashion industry and how it enables everybody to be fashionable and in style with little financial effort, it seems that the wind has turned. “Maybe it’s time for a change in gear in fast fashion lane”, titled *The Sydney Morning Herald* and writer and sociologist Ruth Quibell (2012) states that “we have been taught, to seek cheapest prices and to keep buying […] industry say it is our thirst for newness that drives the whole catastrophe.” The catastrophe which is meant here are the results of the never ending and incredibly fast cycles of fashion, the social and environmental effects “such as putting massive amount of textile waste into landfill” and the fact that “Britons on average throw away 30 kilograms of clothes each year” (Quibell, 2012) and this does not involve child labor or working conditions yet.

It is not unusual anymore that fast fashion is brought to the same level as fast food: cheap, greasy and to a large extend unhealthy - even though not everybody has realized that so far (Elser, 2011). Terms such as “disposable fashion” or “McFashion” carry through the world of fashion, environmental blogs as well as websites. In the UK, this has even been a topic to discuss with the prime ministers environmental adviser since the Green Party tried to “condemn increasing sales of cheap, disposable clothing” (The Independent, 2007).

As it can be seen politicians, environmentalists, sociologists and bloggers have finally formed their (negative) opinion about fast fashion – but what about the consumers? The ones, which either have to buy a garment in the one minute, or they will see it vanish in the next? The ones who are held hostage in what Lucy Siegle, *The Guardians* environmental fashion writer, calls “turbocharged consumerism” resulting in bursting wardrobes? (Quibell, 2012)

Costumers nowadays face an uncountable number of choices, not only in the stores but in front of their own closets (Dykes, 2011). They find themselves in the difficult situation deciding to either maintain their position in the social hierarchy of fashion which forces them to keep up with the system and constantly change their look and fill up their wardrobe or just to be outdated (Quibell, 2012). Even though people seem to like to buy more for less instead of investing more into items which will last longer, they are not imperatively happier with this attitude (Braukämper, 2012).
The New York Times published an article about consumers on a “shopping diet” and how they tried to change their buying habits by participating in challenges such as “Six items or less” (meaning they had to wear the same six items for an entire month) or the “Great American Apparel Diet” (not buying something new for one year) (Wilson, 2012). Could this portrait the start into a new fashion era where consumers buy more responsibly? Or is blogger Renae Hurlbutt right when she says that “consumers [...] have become more conscious of the environmental impact of what we eat and what we drive, the discussion about what we wear has yet to really take hold” (Hurlbutt, 2011)?

A paradox seems to evolve this industry. Despite the fact that fast fashion and its impact seem to be condemned by many opinion leaders as well as consumers these days, the fast fashion sector continues to grow with no end in sight. Consumers seem to be aware of the consequences of their overconsumption of fast fashion clothing, nevertheless they keep on buying. The question comes up if there is a gap existing between consumers’ attitudes towards the products and the (excessive) buying behavior. In addition, the main reasons for this assumed gap are of interest.

1.2 Problem Discussion

Fast fashion seems to face a growing number of opponents and, maybe even more important, a more educated consumer. This education originates from the fact that information is easy to access and to spread in times of the internet. In Germany this consumer is for example, according to Euromonitor International, going to “move on from “throw-away” clothing and invest in better quality items” (Euromonitor International, 2011) since they are seeking more value in their purchases. Nevertheless fast fashion retailers are still a fast-growing species in the landscape of fashion which contradicts those findings.

The research that has been done in the field of the fast fashion phenomenon and the corresponding consumer is very limited so far. Little is known about the intentions to buy more for less on a regular basis instead of investing disposable income on better quality and more responsible items. Research has been undertaken in order to understand the supply side of fast fashion but deeper insight into consumers’ perception is lacking. (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010) Almost every publication about consumer behavior discusses about the building process of attitude and how it affects behavior however little has been said about a possible gap- especially in the field of fashion. The attitude-behavior gap has been a vast topic in the area of food consumption (Padel & Foster, 2005) regarding the purchase of organic food and in the health sector where people learn about risks and how to avoid these but refuse to change their behavior (Hornik, 1991). Moraes et al. (2012) examine the attitude-behavior gap in relation to consumption communities but again not in the particular case if fashion or fast fashion. Chatzidakis et al. (2004) explored “techniques of
neutralization” that consumers use in order to justify unethical decisions. Here some indications about the fashion industry can be found but it is again a more holistic approach concerning overall consumption. Bhardwaj and Fairhurst (2010) furthermore state that the consumer perspective has been left out in current literature about the overall concept of fast fashion and not many studies have seen the phenomenon as a consumer-driven approach. Research is therefore demanded on different factors which could be responsible for the diverse purchase intention of the consumer “such as exclusivity, price-consciousness, hoarding merchandise for future use, consumers’ perceived risk due to trade-off between quality and price, consumer expectation and satisfaction after the consumption process, and consumers’ efficiency in terms of cost-benefit analysis” (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010, p. 171).

According to Morgan and Birtwistle (2009, p. 190) young consumers care about being in fashion the most and they are “the most avid consumers of fast fashion and heavily influenced by the fashion press and media”. They forecasted a trend in 2009 that the age group of 15-29 year olds will keep on expanding in the “foreseeable future thanks to its [fast fashions] attraction to the young and fashion-hungry” (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009, p. 191).

The conducted study on young consumers can therefore be described as relatively new in a field which has furthermore not been in the focus of many researchers before and thus demonstrates a high relevance. The existence of an attitude-behavior gap in fast fashion consumption among young consumers is examined and possible reasons for such a gap (if existent) are investigated.

1.3 Research Question

The specific research questions this thesis is trying to address are the following:

1) Do young consumers have a negative attitude towards fast fashion?
2) Is there a gap existing in between attitude and behavior in fast fashion consumption among young consumers?
3) If yes, what are the possible reasons for this gap?

1.4 Purpose and Aim

The purpose of this study is to shed light on a just evolving but highly interesting topic in the competitive world of fashion. The results of this thesis can be of great interest to not only the fast fashion retailers but to the opponents of this business model as well. Having the knowledge of an assumed attitude-behavior gap can be a milestone in changing consumer
behavior by for example the right marketing measures. Producers of higher quality fashion and ethical labels can draw conclusions from this study as well and use it in their favor. Environmental organizations might be able to take up the findings and have a basis on where the young consumers are standing at the moment and act accordingly.

The overall aim is to find an explanation for the already explained paradox. Growing dissenting votes against the fast fashion business model and the resulting consequences in direct relation to the success of the sector of fast fashion require a clarification. Finding such a declaration with the help of the attitude-behavior gap model is the main aim at this point.

1.5 Delimitations

Such a thesis is not only limited in scope but also to the options on how to conduct primary research. The short time frame and the availability of resources can be reasons for incompleteness and a further investigation of the chosen topic might be necessary. However those limitations can be seen as purely methodological aspects as well since certain measures have been chosen over others which are clarified in section 3.

Moreover it has to be said that the academic field concerning attitudes, personality and behavior is enormous and by far not all theories and concepts can be depicted in such a thesis. The chosen principles are the ones which seemed most appropriate for the selected research questions, however completeness cannot be guaranteed.
2. Theoretical framework

The section helps to clarify the underlying concepts and frameworks of this study. It gives insight into the industry of interest and the theory which forms the basis of the ladder empirical investigation. The first part consists of the description of the fast fashion phenomenon and makes the reader familiar with the biggest or best known fast fashion brands in the EU since this is the geographical area of interest. The second part will clarify the relationship between attitude and behavior and provide several theories concerning the concept of attitude and include the multi-attribute attitude models by Ajzen and Fishbein. The section will close with the techniques of neutralization and selected examples of the attitude-behavior gap in other areas of research.

2.1 Fast Fashion

2.1.1 The Concept of Fast Fashion

By now, fast fashion has become an established concept and consumers all over the world know what stands behind these two words. According to Caro and Martínez (2009, p. 65) fast fashion can be described as followed:

“They [the fast fashion retailers] introduce clothing collections based on the latest fashion trends but designed and manufactured quickly and cheaply, to allow the mainstream consumer to take advantage of current clothing styles at lower prices.”

Bhardwaj and Fairhurst (2010) state that in the beginning of the 1990’s this whole movement started when retailers were becoming more responsive and updated their product range in order to meet fashion trends. This was due to an increase in fashion imports in the late 1980’s which decreased the demand for more simple and utilitarian apparel and made consumers more conscious about their look (Bailey, 2001). This can be seen as the start of fast fashion since the outsourcing of sourcing and manufacturing processes to low-cost countries started in order to obtain a cost advantage in the highly competitive apparel industry. The evolution towards “throw-away fashion” was initiated. (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010)

Moving further to the 21st century fast fashion retailers like H&M or ZARA have managed to shift their “focus of competitive advantage from price towards fast response to changing fashion trends and consumer demand” (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006, p. 260). As one reason for this Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2006) mention the mass communication which keeps consumers very well informed about latest styles and trends due to its all-time
availability. Next to this consumer influence has changed since now fashion trends can be found on the streets, in certain lifestyle destinations, clubs or within cultural groups. The times when fashion trends were predicted about one year in advance came to an end. (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006) Moreover real-time-data is used in order to respond to fashion demand consumers desires nowadays (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

The question evolving is how does the business model look like which manages to respond to consumer demand in real-time and to produce at such low-cost? For ZARA for example the secret is vertical integration. The whole Inditex group (Industria de Diseño Textil) is vertically integrated and therefore has total control of the production process at any time – from the design idea to the shop floor (Hall, 2008). The “fashion sensitive products” of ZARA are therefore completely produced on the Iberian Peninsula, other more basic items are moved to lower wage countries overseas (Ghemawat & Nueno, 2006).

H&M, ZARA’s biggest competitor, has a slightly different business system, in which not integration is key but outsourcing. According to Lörchner (2011) about two thirds of H&M’s production is manufactured in Asia and since H&M does not own any manufacturing plants on its own, it has about 700 different suppliers spread over Asia and Europe (Agence France-Presse, 2010).

The principles of “just-in-time” production, quick response techniques and agile supply chain are according to Christopher et al. (2004) the answer to a highly competitive market in which short life cycles, high volatility, low predictability and high impulse purchasing are typical characteristics.

After all these items are manufactured and shipped to the stores around the world, the question remains how the fast fashion retailers manage to force their customers to come by on a regular basis and buy all of these items produced. Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2006) argue that those retailers constantly change their product offers with styles that even attract the attention of the media and therefore customers visit their stores with a high frequency. “Here one minute, gone the next-styles” is how Ruth Quibell (2012) entitles the strategy of retailers which gives an impression of scarcity to the consumer. Either you buy it right away or your chances are lost. It is a mix between the desire to have variety and instant gratification which forces consumers to choose fast fashion retailers (Friede, 2009). Next to that, the number of seasons has dramatically changed over the years. Where traditional retailers offer about four different seasons per year, fast fashion retailers such as ZARA or H&M respond to the consumer demand for newness and offer more than 20 planned seasons (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). Furthermore the stores are restocked on a daily basis and a flagship store might even receive new stock three times a day and customers therefore know when to shop for their size which has been sold out the day before (Raper Lareaudie, 2004).
Bhardwaj and Fairhurst (2010, p. 170) additionally declare that the “perception of throwaway fashion varies among different generations”. This is due to the fact that younger generations favor a higher amount of rather low quality but cheap and trendy clothing and older generations rather invest more into higher quality items. These older generations, for example the baby boomers, view fast fashion as a waste because low quality items are bought and thrown away quickly and it has nothing to do with satisfying a real “wardrobe need”.

### 2.1.2 Global Players of Fast Fashion

In order to clarify the term “fast fashion retailer” which is used throughout this work and to give an impression about the power which these retailers have in different markets, some facts and figures about the most successful ones are brought together in the following section. It has to be said that there exist more so-called fast fashion chains than the ones that have been chosen. However this thesis is restricted in scope and the chosen chains appeared to be the leading and most popular ones in Europe at the moment.

#### ZARA

The first ZARA store was opened in 1975 and in 1985 the Inditex Group was founded to which ZARA belongs to today (Inditex Group, 2012). ZARA is next to seven other apparel chains the most successful brand for Inditex since it contributes 64.6 percent to total sales. Including ZARA Kids stores, there exist 1723 ZARA stores spread over 82 countries employing 109,512 people. In 2010 the Group’s net sales rose by 12 percent. (Inditex Group Annual Report, 2012) As already mentioned earlier, the Inditex Group is highly vertically integrated and the whole holding consists of more than 100 companies operating in textile design, manufacturing and distribution (Inditex Group, 2012).

#### H&M

H&M was founded in 1947 Västerås, Sweden by Erling Persson. Until today about 2500 stores opened in 44 different markets. The H&M Group does not only consist of H&M but a number of other brands such as COS, H&M Home, Monki, Weekday and Cheap Monday. Germany is H&M’s biggest market, followed by the US, France and the UK. (H&M, 2012)

The growth target of H&M amount to 10-15 percent per year and H&M claims their business concept to be, to offer quality and fashion at the best price (H&M, 2012). H&M employs about 94,000 people and had a turnover of 128,810 Million SEK including VAT in 2011. According to the company it tries to design a sustainable chain of work throughout all its departments to protect people and the environment at the same time. (H&M, 2012)

#### MANGO
The first Mango store opened in Barcelona in 1984 and as of today Mango has 2415 stores in 140 countries worldwide. The headquarter of Mango and its Design Center are still located in Barcelona and employ about 1800 people of which more than 500 work at the El-Hangar Design Center. About 10.000 direct employees work for Mango. The company designs about 2500 different styles per season and produces 100 million articles every year. Mango has its own in-house logistics system which is capable of classifying and distributing 40,000 garments an hour. In 2012 the company had a turnover of 1.585 billion € of which 81 percent were generated outside of Spain. (Mango, 2012)

**Topshop**

Topshop belongs to the Arcadia Group and the first store was opened in 1964 as a fashion chain within the Peter Robinson Ltd. chain. By 1970 it became a stand-alone shop and today more than 300 Topshop stores can be found in the UK. 140 more stores are located outside of the UK territories. Topshop is the only high street fashion brand which pops up on the schedule for the London Fashion Week. (Arcadia Group, 2012)

The most famous costumer of Topshop is the Duchess of Cambridge, former Kate Middleton, which ensures the sold out of items she has worn are bought in only minutes (Paxman, 2011). The whole Arcadia Group has 44.030 employees and 2507 stores in 36 countries. Even though times were tough for the Arcadia Group due to economic recession Topshop is trading positively.(Arcadia Group, 2011)

**Gina Tricot**

Gina Tricot is one of the youngest but fastest growing fast fashion retailers and started out in 1997. Until now Gina Tricot can show 175 stores in five countries and has its headquarter in Borås, Sweden. Next to the sales in the stores a lot of turnover is generated through its online shopping channel. Gina Tricot stores are equipped with new items on a daily basis and the display of those is changed continuously in order to ensure a new fashion adventure no matter how often the customer stops by. Items are distributed from the factory right to the store without any middle man involved which is one secret of Gina Tricot’s fastness. (Gina Tricot, 2012)

**Primark**

Primark is an Irish fast fashion retailer which started out in 1969 in Dublin. In Ireland all Primark stores are called Penney’s. Primark is owned by ABF (Associated British Foods) and today 235 Primark stores exist in total spread over seven countries. (Primark, 2011) Primark’s hallmarks are enormous sales areas in central locations and very low prices due to economies a scale and low margins. Furthermore does the company renounce big marketing campaigns and this strategy saves capital to sell the merchandise even cheaper. Jewelry and shoes are the core assortment of Primark and mostly manufactured in Bangladesh. (Sträter, 2011)
2.2 Attitude-Behavior Relation

In order to comprehend the relevant foci of the empirical study the concepts of attitude and other theories were looked at, including “The Reasoned Action Approach” and “The Theory of Planned Behavior” which are referred to whenever the attitude-behavior gap is mentioned in recent literature.

2.2.1 Attitude

According to Rath et al. (2008, p. 104) “an attitude is our settled opinion – either positive or negative – about people, places, ideas, or objects. By ‘settled opinion’, we mean that attitudes are formed after some thought, they are learned, and they occur within given circumstances.”

Shehs and Mittal (2004, p. 200) use a classic definition by psychologist Gordon Allport saying “Attitudes are learned predispositions to respond to an object or class of objects in a consistently favorable or unfavorable way.” Here it can be derived that, in consumer behavior, anything attitudes can be formed about are named “attitude objects” (Rath, et al., 2008). Following these definitions about attitudes, it can be assumed that attitude can help to predict a certain kind of behavior. However this is an oversimplified view of the construct that does not depict its multi-dimensional nature. Thus the following theories will summarize the different approaches to this complex construct that exist in literature.

2.2.1.1 The Three Component Model

Solomon and Rabolt (2008) refer to the ABC model of attitudes, consisting of affect, behavior and cognition whereas Shehs and Mittal (Sheth & Mittal, 2004) talk about the “Three-Component Model of Attitude”. Both models are based on the same underlying assumptions. Rath et al. (2008, p. 105) call those components “elements” which “contribute to the way we form attitudes” even though there are more influences to forming attitudes such as “individual personalities, past experiences, family and friends, media and marketing efforts.”

The cognitive element or beliefs refer to the degree of knowledge and thoughts the consumer has about certain objects. It further includes expectations what the object is or does. According to Shehs and Mittal (2004) there exist three diverse types of beliefs: descriptive beliefs, which describe the object in form of a certain quality or outcome; evaluative beliefs, which deal with the persons own perceptions and preferences about
liking or disliking something; and normative beliefs which “invoke moral and ethical judgments in relation to someone’s acts” (Sheth & Mittal, 2004, p. 203).

The affective element or feelings refer to the emotions of the consumer towards a certain attitude object. These feelings can change depending on a special mood the consumer might be in on a particular day since internal feelings could influence the emotions towards a product (Rath, et al., 2008).

The behavioral element or conations describes the action or intention a person wants to take towards a certain attitude object, even though it has to be said that “an intention does not always result in an actual behavior” (Solomon & Rabolt, 2008, p. 281).

### 2.2.1.2 The Hierarchy of Effects

How these three elements interplay and in which order they actually appear when attitudes are formed differs and depends on the consumers’ level of involvement and motivation with the attitude object. The concept which explains this is called the “Hierarchy of Effects” or “Attitude Hierarchy”.

The graphic above shows the “Hierarchy of Affects” according to Solomon. Shehs and Mittal (2004) state that the “Standard Learning Hierarchy” is the one which is most commonly discussed, and Solomon and Rabolt (2008) argue that it is the way in which most attitudes are being constructed - “Think first, feel next and act last” (Sheth & Mittal, 2004, p. 204). This hierarchy is often compared to the decision-making process consumers go through when making an important or high-involvement purchase decision. The product and its
features are studied in detail which can lead to a positive feeling about the product which in turn can lead to a purchase decision which is based on cognitive information processing. (Rath, et al., 2008)

The “Low-involvement Hierarchy” on the other hand is based on behavioral learning processes. It includes such products or services for which the consumer does not have a preference and he does not make the effort to collect information about it since it would be a waste of time due to the relatively low investment he will make. Therefore (purchasing) behavior follows right after beliefs and the real evaluation takes place afterwards depending on the fact if the experience has been of a positive or a negative kind. Thus it can be said that the attitude emerges in the end of the process. (Rath, et al., 2008)

Solomon and Rabolt (2008) further state that fashion usually is a high-involvement product and only for example underwear might be an item which is bought with a lower level of involvement. The questions which arises here is how does this conform to the attitude and behavior in fast fashion? It seems like fast fashion items became low-involvement products which are mostly being evaluated after purchase.

The last hierarchy in Solomon’s hierarchy of effects is the “Experiential Hierarchy” which is said to be based on hedonic consumption or consumption for pleasure. Shehs and Mittal (2004, p. 204) call it the “Emotional Hierarchy of Attitude” which is characterized by the fact that it is based on emotions only and the consumer therefore “feels first, then acts, and thinks last”. Intangible product attributes such as packaging or brand names influence the attitude of the consumers and hedonic motivations such as “how the products make them feel or the fun its use will provide” (Solomon & Rabolt, 2008, p. 283) come into play. Additionally Solomon and Rabolt (2008) state that fashion can fall under the experiential hierarchy as well since many fashion products reveal certain emotions and the decision regarding fashion are not always as rational as other high-involvement decision.

### 2.2.1.3 The Consistency Principle

Even though hierarchies can be formed in order to describe certain processes about the building of attitudes, the three components always imply one another, meaning if one component is modified, then the others will change as well eventually. According to Shehs and Mittal (2004, p. 206) a consumer “tries to make the three components consistent and to maintain consistency among them”. This consistency is related to the factor of “attitude valance”, namely positive thoughts are associated with positive effects and rather unfavorable feelings with negative ones; and “attitude strength” which means that the components are consistent in their intensity. (Sheth & Mittal, 2004)

Solomon and Rabolt (2008) talk about the theory of cognitive dissonance, meaning that people are willing to change an element in order to resolve the dissonance which appeared
somewhere between their thoughts (beliefs), feelings (affects) and behavior. Consumers are usually motivated to decrease the negative implications raised by dissonance but sometimes they do not which offers the theory of a gap between attitude and behavior. One example is that most smokers are aware of the consequences their smoking can have regarding their health but they do not quit smoking either, therefore the dissonance continues and other techniques are used such as “adding or changing elements” (Solomon & Rabolt, 2008, p. 285). Another theory explaining certain attitudes is the self-perception theory. It applies when consumers are not really aware of their attitudes towards certain objects and they therefore observe their own behavior to infer their attitudes. According to Solomon and Rabolt (2008, p. 286) “the theory states that we maintain consistency by inferring that we must have a positive attitude toward an object if we have bought and consumed it”.

2.2.1.4 The Functional Theory of Attitude

Rath et al. (2008) state attitudes serve consumers in different ways, more clearly that attitude has different functions. Four functions have been established by psychologist Daniel Katz called “The Functional Theory of Attitude”, including the utilitarian function, the value-expressive function, the ego-defensive function and the knowledge function (Sheth & Mittal, 2004). The following explanations of the different functions of attitude are taken from Rath et al. (2008) and are therefore not the authors own body of thought.

The utilitarian function: this attitude function focuses on the benefits or features a product offers to the consumer and therefore helps to reach certain goals such as buying running shoes which really support the athlete’s joints while running.

The value-expressive function: helps the consumer to express his personality and self-image with the help of certain goods or brands. This is probably the most interesting function for marketers in order to convince the consumer of a certain product or service.

The ego-defensive function: protects the consumer from anxieties he or she might have. Wearing a particular business outfit to work might help to be more accepted.

The knowledge function: deals with all the different stimuli a consumer is exposed to on an everyday basis through all kinds of media. This attitude function helps to order the information gained regarding products the consumer might be looking for. In the need of a new swim-suit the consumer will reflect on certain ads or articles about the latest trends and pay more attention to those. (Rath, et al., 2008)
2.2.2 The Theory of Reasoned Action

“Attitude is the most distinctive and indispensable concept” (Allport, 1968, p. 65). Since this statement has been true in the 1950’s and is still true today, Fishbein introduced a model in 1967 which was supposed to explain the formation of attitude and the relation between attitude and behavior. Over the years, this theory has undergone constant refinement and development.

The graphic above shows the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and its determining factors. Belleau et al. (2007, p. 246) state that the TRA “is based on the premise that individuals are rational and make systematic use of information available to them.” As it can be seen in figure 2 it all ends with a certain behavior which is preceded by a certain intention. According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) most actions of consumers are taken under a certain level of control so that the intention to for example buy something or not to buy something is the direct determinant of action. A correspondence between those two is however not always guaranteed. Going backwards in the graphic it is now of interest what determines the intention which will usually lead to a behavior.

Two factors come into play at this point of which one deals with personal thoughts and one with social influences. The first factor which influences the intention is the “attitude toward the behavior”. Here the individual evaluates the behavior in an either positive or negative way and judges it by its own understanding of what is good and what is bad. The second factor is called the “subjective norm” and represents the social pressure which is put on the individual for doing something or not. (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) Those norms are “perceived prescriptions” which is why they are named “subjective norms” (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980, p. 6).

However to fully understand the intentions, “it is necessary to explain why people hold certain attitudes and subjective norms.” (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980, p. 7)
Starting with the description of how the “attitude toward the behavior” is formed, referring to the expectancy-value-model seems like a reasonable approach. The model has been established by Ajzen and Fishbein as well and can be seen as the predecessor of the TRA which has been developed during the years. (Ajzen, 2012) As already explained in section 2.2.1.1 consumers attitude towards on object depends on their beliefs about the object in question. Beliefs are here defined as “the subjective probability that the object has a certain attribute” (Ajzen, 2012, p. 12). Those beliefs and their corresponding strengths towards an object forms a person overall attitude. “Once a set of beliefs is formed and is accessible in memory, it provides the cognitive foundation from which attitudes are assumed to follow automatically in a reasonable and consistent fashion.” (Ajzen, 2012, p. 12)

The subjective norms on the other hand are influenced by normative beliefs. These beliefs are formed by normative referents which are important to the consumer. Such a referent can have many forms: a family, friends, co-workers, peer groups etc. (Ajzen, 2012) Conferring to Ajzen (2012, p. 16) “the prevailing subjective norm is determined by the total set of readily accessible normative beliefs concerning the expectations of important referents”.

When talking about attitudes and its relation to behavior Fishbein and Ajzen developed an important principle which suggests distinguishing between general attitudes and attitudes toward performing a certain action. “The principle of compatibility” states that “attitudes and behavior correlate with each other to the extent that they refer to the same action, target, context, and time elements” (Ajzen, 2012, p. 15). General attitudes can consist of religious or political views or opinions about groups or events which are only directed to the target and no action is specified at this point which can result in a weak relationship between the two. Measuring behavior on the other hand involves a particular action, target or context as well and can therefore predict more than only broad patterns as it is the case with general attitudes. (Ajzen, 2012)

Belleau et al. (2007) added some additional external variables to their study concerning their study of the purchase intentions of young consumers. They argue that other influences can have an impact on the behavioral intention as well and therefore included next to “attitude toward the behavior” and subjective norm” external variables such as “fashion involvement”, “personality traits” and “media usage”.

All in all it can be said that the “Theory of Reasoned Action” is a widely used multi-attribute model in order to predict certain behaviors. The inclusion of personal and social influences tries to depict reasons why attitude and behavior are not consistent sometimes and can explain gaps which in turn can be of high importance for marketers or others who attempt to understand consumer behavior.
2.2.3 The Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) can be seen as a further development of the TRA. Fishbein and Ajzen always assumed a certain degree of control a consumer has over his actions since most decisions regarding a particular behavior depend on the consumer, his attitude and subjective norm. In 1985 the TRA model has been revised in order to take the “degree of control over the behavior into account” (Ajzen, 2012, p. 17) and the TPB was established. The factor “perceived behavioral control” was added “as an additional predictor of intentions and behavior” (Ajzen, 2012, p. 17).

The new factor “perceived behavioral control”, just as attitudes and subjective norms, works also with beliefs which are accessible to the consumer. However in this case “beliefs about resources and obstacles that can facilitate or interfere with performance of a given behavior” (Ajzen, 2012, p. 18) are the center of attention.

![Figure 3: The Theory of Planned Behavior](source: Icek Ajzen, Martin Fishbein Legacy: The Reasoned Action Approach in THE ANNALS OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY, p. 19)

Figure 3 shows the TPB and the new factor of “perceived behavioral control” and the “actual control” which influences it. Summarizing the model the following assumptions can be made: “the more favorable the attitude and subjective norm, and the greater the perceived control, the stronger is the person’s intention to perform the behavior in question” (Ajzen, 2012, p. 18).

2.2.4 Techniques of Neutralization

Chatzidakis et al. (2004) questioned why consumers frequently act in ways which are purely contradicting their attitude or ethical beliefs which can again be seen as a gap between attitude and behavior. In order to find explanations for this discrepancy their research
“addresses this issue by investigating the ways in which consumers rationalize their behavior in order to deal with the consequences of acting in ways that are not consistent with their care ethical values and beliefs” (Chatzidakis, et al., 2004, p. 528). Five techniques of neutralization which have been utilized by many researcher before (Strutton, et al., 1994) and can be traced back until the 1950’s when Sykes and Matza (1957) established these techniques, have been examined by Chatzidakis et al. in order to find causes for the evolving discrepancies.

The concept of neutralization has been applied on a variety of contexts which include topics such as abortion, delinquency, genocide or snitching but according to Chatzidakis et al. (2004, p. 530) “the concept of neutralization has received limited attention in relation to consumer behavior”. Therefore they question the normative behavior which influences the subjective norm and investigated how the techniques of neutralization can be motives for possible gaps in a range of consumer actions. The following will give an overview of the five techniques as they have been explained by Chatzidakis et al. (2004) and provide examples of how these techniques can be “utilized” in the field of fast fashion.

- **Denial of responsibility**: this appears when consumers argue that they are not the ones which should be held responsible since they did not have the full control over the situation. Not being informed at all or lacking knowledge about for example child labor or working conditions in sweat shops fall under this neutralization technique.

- **Denial of injury**: if it is hard for the consumers to pinpoint a person or group of persons which suffer from their actions they feel that their behavior is not really hurting anyone and they degrade their own influence. Buying fast fashion might not be something bad to many since they do not see who will suffer from it directly.

- **Denial of victim**: here the consumers blame others for their actions and feel like the ones that suffer from their actions deserve it that way. This for example describes downloading music illegally online because they argue that buying it the honest way is just overprized. Regarding fast fashion Sykes and Matza (1957, p. 534) argue that a different approach “for denying victim was through diminished awareness and indetermination”. Buying big amounts of fast fashion for example and therefore producing a lot of textile waste could fall under this neutralization technique since consumers do just not see the effect of their own decision.

- **Condemning the condemners**: a technique by which consumers find a similar wrong behavior done by the ones who condemn them for (not) doing something or they make others responsible for their lack of knowledge. In fashion this could mean that consumers blame marketers for not telling them about more ethical products.

- **Appealing to higher loyalties**: Norm-violating behavior is here justified by doing it for a higher order value. At this point consumers find themselves in an “ethical dilemma” since their actions result in a conflict, either in between what they think and what they do or the conflict that a positive outcome of an action implies a negative consequence or vice versa. This technique seems to appear a lot regarding fast
fashion if the consumers knows about working conditions or child labor on the one hand but really wants to have a certain item on the other hand.

According to Chatzidakis et al. (2004) consumers’ justifications are most of the times a mix out of more than one particular technique. In general it can be said that the more different techniques can be used to neutralize particular behaviors the higher the possibility that they will do so. Moreover it has been observed that those neutralization techniques have been used to protect the consumers’ self-image. (Chatzidakis, et al., 2004)

Giving insight into the techniques of neutralization at this point has been done in order pinpoint a different approach why gaps can occur between actual attitude and the behavior and how the consumers themselves try to explain those gaps or why they influence their subjective norm.

2.2.5 Gaps in other areas

The gap in between attitude and behavior has always been a popular research topic. Padel and Foster (2005, p. 606) for example examined “why consumers buy or do not buy organic food” and found out that most people associate organic food with a healthy diet, the decision making process in this field is very complex and consumers face trade-offs between different values.

Boulstridge and Carrigan (1993) investigated further to which degree people care about social corporate responsibility (CSR) and found that even though many consumers had a negative opinion about certain companies and very positive about others, this was at first sight not reflected in their actual buying behavior. “Price, quality and convenience are still the most important decision factors with consumers purchasing for personal reasons rather than social ones” (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 1993, p. 359) and most of the times consumers have not been very aware of companies being socially responsible or not. In the end, Boulstridges and Carrigans hypotheses about a real gap could not be supported due to the fact that most respondents never claimed to have much interest in CSR and do not know much about it which implies that no attitude-behavior gap was possible.

A gap between attitude and behavior is probably most widely seen in the field of nutrition and health. Hornik (1991) stated that most people do know about health risk and how to avoid them but they do not initiate any action to decrease certain risks. Smoking, unhealthy diets and unprotected sex are just some of the fields in which people act in contradiction to their beliefs. Here it has to be pointed out that this behavior even harms the people personally and not something more distant to them such as the environment or other parties.

Chapter 2 covered the theoretical framework of the thesis topic which is of high importance for the reader in order to understand the following methodology and empirical study.
3. Research

This chapter deals with the way research has been conducted throughout this thesis work. The research method, the way of data collection and sampling as well as the research goal are subject of discussion in this chapter. However it does not shed light on the empirical study yet which will take place in chapter 4 in order to avoid confusion.

3.1 Research Method

The objective of this study is to investigate the question if an attitude-behavior gap concerning the consumption of fast fashion among young consumers can be depicted. The study can therefore be seen as exploratory since it is done in an under researched field of interest. Consumer insights and their perception are central at this point. In order to answer the research questions and to underline some general assumptions made, a qualitative research method accompanied by a quantitative research method has been chosen after the consultation of primary research in forms of academic literature such as books and journals or other media such as websites and online articles. Therefore it can be spoken of an deductive approach.

3.1.1 Secondary Research

Since a certain degree of comprehension in the field of fast fashion and a deeper insight into to the theory of attitude, behavior and the possible gap is needed in order to fully capture the following study different kinds of literature were consulted. The first part of chapter 2 was used to generate a more detailed knowledge about the sector and its major players. This has been done with the help of company websites, online articles and journals. For the second part of the theoretical framework, academic literature was winnowed to guarantee an academic background.

3.1.2 Primary Research

According to Neumann (2003, p. 16) every research style, letting it be qualitative or quantitative, has its “strengths and limitations”. Neumann (2003, p. 16) and King et al. (1994, p. 5) therefore agree “that the best research often combines the features of each”. Exactly this has been done in this thesis. Qualitative focus groups were used in order to gain deeper insight into the consumers’ thoughts, knowledge and beliefs. These insights formed the basis for a standardized survey in form of an online questionnaire. Those research styles felt like the most appropriate concerning the research questions and background information and served perfectly to explore the topic. Other methods such as qualitative interviews only or an experiment were not worth considering as the current study does not
only focus on consumer insight but tries to draw on overall picture about consumers’ attitude and behavior. A combination of the two methods chosen therefore seemed to be the most appropriate approach.

Secondary research has been used to provide a theoretical background for the empirical study. This empirical part was split into two different dimensions in order to increase the credibility of the research results. Qualitative focus groups have been used to provide deeper insight from the side of the consumers and a quantitative survey was conducted in order to validate the preceding findings.

### 3.2 Data Collection and Sampling

The data used in this thesis work was collected in two different ways, once via a qualitative research method, namely focus groups and once with a quantitative research method in the form of an online survey. The focus groups were arranged in two different countries with the same amount of participants whom all belonged to the same age group. According to Neumann (2003) it is typical to work with nonprobability sampling when it comes to qualitative research. Nonprobability sampling implies that the research results will not reflect the whole population but only a limited part of it. Since it is not of any relevance what infants or elderly people think about the research question since it focuses on young consumers only, this kind of sample was used. Furthermore it is stated that if a topic is newly studied, which applies to the research question, nonprobability sampling is often utilized (Flynn & Foster, 2009).

The quantitative research part was organized with the help of an online platform which offers the service of setting up a survey and spreading it via a link. The survey was set up and tested before sending the link out to enhance the overall outcome. Here a nonprobability sample was used as well in form of a convenient sample since the link was spread over social media platforms and anybody who has seen it could answer the survey. Since participants were asked to forward the link to others it can be spoken of a snowball sampling as well (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008).

### 3.3 Research Goal

The goal of the conducted research is to answer the research questions as sufficient as possible. The primary research aimed to reveal the young consumers attitudes towards fast fashion and their corresponding behavior. A central question here is whether there exists a gap between the two and if yes, why this might be the case. It has to be said at this point that the reasons for such a gap are not the main aim of this research. This work focuses mainly on the questions if such a gap occurs at all as it is does in other fields of research such as in the field of food or healthcare.
4. Empirical Study

This section serves to explain the conducted empirical study in detail. Due to the limited space, only the most important extracts and statements from the focus groups will be represented. Especially those discussion topics will be displayed which have been used to draw the hypotheses which in turn formed the basis for the survey. The survey will be presented in short way as well as and the data will be analyzed in the next section.

4.1 Focus Groups

According to Neumann (2003) the focus group is “a special qualitative research technique in which people are informally “interviewed” in a group discussion setting”. In order to gain deeper insight into the consumers’ thoughts about fast fashion and to find out about a possible gap such a study was conducted in Osnabrück, Germany and in Jönköping, Sweden due to its time-efficient characteristic and simplicity. Even though a number of four to six focus groups is typical (Neumann, 2003) only two were held due to time and resource restrictions. The settings were held in a very informal way in order to get as much honest answers as possible from the participants. Due to a lack of equipment, the discussion has not been recorded but sufficient notes were taken during the process.

In Germany as well as in Sweden the groups consisted of 8 participants who were between the age of 22 and 27. This age group has been chosen because it is said to be more fashion conscious than older consumers (Wan, et al., 2001), (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009) since they often have high fashion involvement and are attracted to trends (Belleau, et al., 2007); it is therefore assumed that this group is more tempted to consume fast fashion due to their constant exposure to media and overall lower income. In Germany the group involved five female participants and three male participants of which all were still going to University and all were Germans. The group in Sweden consisted of students only as well and has been evenly distributed into male and female participants of whom two were Dutch, two were Polish, one was French and three were German.

Four main topics have been on the agenda for the discussion which were then freely talked about in the following order but in an unstructured manner to allow any kind if ideas and thoughts to come up:

1. **Shopping Behavior**: How frequent do you shop for new clothing? – Where?
2. **Fast Fashion Product Offers**: What do fast fashion retailers offer to you? What do you not like about it?
3. **Production of Fast Fashion**: What do you know and what do you think about it?
4. **Other thoughts about Fast Fashion**: Reasons for buying it? Why don’t you buy higher quality clothes?
The results of the focus groups will be represented in a short and descriptive manner in relation to the topics discussed. Additionally verbatim extracts will be presented to give an impression of the overall atmosphere during the discussion. Furthermore there is no separation between the findings of Germany and Sweden to prevent iterations since no significant differences could be observed between the two focus groups.

1) The first question about the Shopping Behavior varied widely between male and female participants. Whereas some male participants go shopping once a month and most of the time even without the intention, same female participants browse through the newest offers almost on a daily basis on their way from work or school. “I stop at H&M almost every other day to see what is new” (Theresa, 24). Some of them (females) even shop particularly for an upcoming party. The items which are mostly shopped for are T-Shirts for males and tops or dresses for females. The shops visited mostly are fast fashion retailers such as H&M, ZARA, Gina Tricot, Primark or Mango. Higher quality items are not bought on such a regular basis and department stores which carry those items are not visited so often. Items for which usually more money is spent were jeans, (winter) coats, sports apparel for males and shoes even though females buy shoes at a fast fashion retailer as well and in higher quantities. All of them claim to buy more when it is cheap and stylish at the same time. Furthermore shopping was described as a popular leisure activity by the female participants. “I never leave a ZARA or an H&M without at least some basic shirt – there is always something I feel I need” (Lotte, 22).

2) Collecting the opinions about fast fashion product offers has been a very interesting dialogue. Especially the different opinions between male and female participants were standing out. First of all, most participants liked the fact that fast fashion products are relatively cheap and available almost everywhere. In case there is no close shopping option around, the internet is used to order which makes it easily accessible. When talking about the prices many were very satisfied to be able to afford several new pieces a month even though this goes at the expense of quality. “The clothes last one season at the most”, said Sofia (25), “but that’s ok, they will be out of style by then anyways.” Meike (23) added, “when I buy some items I already know that I will only wear them a couple of times but that is ok since they are so cheap, I would not buy them if they cost twice as much.” The male participants have not been as enthusiastic about cheap clothes as the females. “I do not like that fact that everybody is running around in the same things”, (Daniel, 26), “furthermore these stores are a mess most of the time and you have to queue for a changing room.” All of the participants agreed that the low prices reflect the quality and that the items are not very durable, “either they are worn off or they are out of style after a short while” (Insa, 25). The female participants like the fact that they can try different styles and if it does not suit them, they did not invest too much. “Even
though, sometimes it gets a little tiring to keep up with every trend. My closet is about to burst and I still feel like I have nothing to wear which makes me go out and shop again – as in a vicious circle" (Sarah, 27). Almost everybody admitted that they feel overwhelmed sometimes by the inordinately large offer of different items which they face at a physical fast fashion store.

3) The next topic dealt with the production of fast fashion and what the participants knew and felt about it. Surprisingly, the room became quieter when we started to talk about this. “Well I think we all know, that it cannot be good”, Meike started the conversation. “Producing items in these masses in low-cost countries and shipping them here to sell them for such low prices must be environmentally as well as socially wrong” (Julien, 25). All of the participants have seen documentaries or read newspaper articles about the sweatshop workers somewhere in Asia. “It is like eating fast food or smoking – you know it is bad but you do it anyways. I have to admit, I push those thoughts away when I see something I would like to have for tonight’s party, and I mean what difference do I make” (Florence, 24)?

The discussion went on for quite a while since this seemed to be a topic everyone had something to say about. All in all it can be said that the participants were aware of the circumstances in which the clothes are produced. Everybody had their own way to deal with this knowledge and nobody was scared to find excuses. “I am a student; I cannot afford more expensive stuff” (Lotte, 22); “if you want to be on top of every trend this is your only choice.” All agreed that they alone cannot make a difference: “great, if I boycott fast fashion retailers, I will walk around like a grandma and nothing is going to change, just because of me” (Meike, 23)! Some criticism about this opinion came up when Sebastian (22) said: “Well, but do you girls really need this one shirt in five colors and a new outfit for every party? I have been wearing the same shirt for many parties and I do not think everybody noticed!” Other male participants agreed.

4) The fourth and last point that was discussed was fast fashion in general and the fact if the participants felt that fast fashion triggered them to buy more on a more regular basis and if they actually liked that fact or not. The opinions here were spread very widely. Some participants especially the males did not feel as tempted to buy new things as regular as the female participants did. “Sometime I feel like I HAVE to buy a new outfit for the night since I have been seen in others already” said Sarah, 27, and added “these are mostly the things I just buy to have something new and then I will never wear them again”. Thomas (25) “I recently read that fast fashion is not only a problem concerning the production, but the disposal as well, maybe it really is time to go back to higher quality stuff, usually I like those things much more anyway.”
4.2 Hypotheses

With the help of the focus groups, many interesting ideas and a deeper insight into the consumers’ knowledge, thoughts and behavior about fast fashion could be found. Since only two focus groups, with eight participants each, have been conducted, the findings need to be supported with further data in order to draw reasonable conclusions. The results of the focus groups will be turned into a number of hypotheses which will then be tried to confirm with the help of a short online survey.

Even though many insights could be found during the focus groups, the hypotheses (H) which were formulated will focus on the research question, namely the assumed attitude-behavior gap.

H1: Fast fashion retailers are the stores with the highest frequency of visits among young consumers.

H2: Low prices and the actuality of fast fashion garments are the main reasons for buying fast fashion.

H1 deals with the underlying assumption that young consumers rather buy fast fashion than higher quality clothing. H2 states the possible main reasons for this theory. H1 and H2 are drawn in order to find out if the consumers really fall for the fast fashion business model and why.

H3: Fast Fashion products are associated with lower quality.

H4: Buying higher quality items result in a higher level of satisfaction.

H3 and H4 deal with the perceived quality of fast fashion clothing (H3) and the corresponding level of satisfaction higher quality items provoke (H4).

H5: Consumers care about the production of the fashion items they buy.

H6: Consumers have a negative opinion towards the production of fast fashion.

H5 and H6 are of high importance for the study. If these hypotheses can be supported the conclusion of an existing attitude-behavior gap can be drawn in case H1 can be maintained as well.
4.3 Online survey

The online survey has the aim to support the findings of the focus groups and therefore to draw a clearer picture of the current situation concerning the research questions. The issues identified in the focus groups were mostly translated into several statements in order to be able to observe a certain trend.

4.3.1 Development of Measures

The questionnaire was designed and implemented in order to support the hypotheses drawn. This section is used to describe the layout and the reasons why particular questions were asked. According to Veal (2006) different types of information can be separated into different groups. The first group he states is the one of “respondent characteristics”. In the conducted survey, four questions regarding these characteristics have been asked, namely 1) gender, 2) age group, 3) country of origin and 4) monthly net household income. Especially age is an important matter here since the behavior of younger consumers is a main focus of the study. Gender is an important aspect as well since in the focus groups, the female participants seemed to be a lot more attracted by fast fashion and felt more pressure to buy something new on a regular basis. Additionally, only respondents from the EU countries or living in the EU countries were asked to fill out the survey, not only to avoid confusion due to cultural differences but to make sure that the number of fast fashion retailers and the overall shopping situation was more or less equal for everybody.

The second part of the survey dealt with the shopping behavior of the participants. To get insight into the shopping pattern of the consumers is crucial to know to be able to prove the existence of an attitude-behavior gap. Only consumers that shop mostly at fast fashion chains are the identified target group for such a gap. Somebody who buys higher quality items without exception is not predestined to show a gap between attitude and behavior since their attitude and behavior is different in the first place. The following questions have been asked:

5) How often in a month do you go shopping for new clothes on average?
6) Taking all of your shopping trips together, in which kind of stores do you buy the most?

The answer to question six offered different price segments to choose from. Starting with fast fashion retailers and going up designer labels. All response options can be seen in the appendix.

7) How much money do you spend on average on clothing in a month (in €)?
Questions 7 was asked to get an overview how much is really spend on clothing on average. A comparison between income and spending could be interesting in order to know how importance the purchase of new clothing is for certain age/income groups.

Question eight and question nine were designed to get a feeling what the reasons are for either purchasing fast fashion or what reasons it could have not to purchase it. The respondents were asked to choose the two main aspects in order to depict a trend what the main reasons are. **H2** states that low prices and the actuality of the items are the main reasons to buy fast fashion products which can be either supported or declined by question eight. In question eight the option “I never buy fast fashion” was added since those respondents will not have a main reason to buy it. Moreover, for those participants who ticked this box the survey was over due to a filter that has been installed. A person that never buys fast fashion is not a target for a possible gap and would therefore falsify the results of the statements in question ten.

8) **What are the TWO main reasons for you to buy fast fashion (H&M, ZARA etc.)?**

Question nine on the other hand already deals with a certain perception the participants might have. All response options were derived from the discussion of the focus groups which is why no “other” option was included. Even though such an option could have brought more insight and different opinions the main focus was to support the already observed findings. However, the option “I have no reason not to buy fast fashion” was added since it says a lot about the attitude the respondent has.

9) **What are the TWO main reasons for you NOT to buy fast fashion?**

Question ten consists of a mixture of statements which are supposed to be answered on a 5-point Likert-scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” with a neutral response option in the middle to avoid forcing respondents to an answer and to provide an equal amount of negative and positive options. Solomon and Rabolt (2008) argue that this type of analysis is typical for monitoring consumers’ attitudes. The Likert-scales have been appointed to several Likert-items, namely the different statements given. Every hypothesis drawn in 4.2 was translated into two or three statements in order to predict a trend if the hypotheses can be supported or not.

10) **Please rate the following statements.**

- The production of fast fashion is bad for the environment.
- I have heard a lot of negative press about such things as working conditions, child labor and minimum wages concerning the production of fast fashion.
- Sometimes I feel bad to buy fast fashion but in the end I do it anyway.
- Some of the fast fashion items I buy, I only wear once or twice.
- The quality of fast fashion items is fairly poor.
- It makes me happier to buy higher quality items than fast fashion items.
- I mostly buy fast fashion to be up-to-date.
In the survey the different statements have been mixed up to avoid for the participant to recognize a pattern or where the questions are leading. It is assumed that the attitude-behavior gap happens rather unconscious and honest responses are of high importance.

4.3.2 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data collected in the survey will be rather shallow than going deep into statistical analysis. This is due to the fact that the data is only supposed to underline the findings of the focus groups and to show a certain trend rather than serious statistical evidence. The results of the survey which has been explained in section 4.3.1 will be discussed in the order of the hypothesis to provide the reader a certain structure. The statements and questions relevant will then be interpreted in detail.

Tools which will be used are frequencies (percentages), arithmetic means and cross-tabulation. According to Veal (2006) these say a lot about trends and can therefore be rated as appropriate for descriptive research.
5. Results and Discussion

This section serves to analyze the findings of the survey and to either confirm or decline the hypotheses drawn earlier. First some general findings will be presented concerning the respondent characteristics and afterwards the analysis of the hypotheses will be carried out in an organized manner.

5.1 General Findings

134 of the 200 collected questionnaires were filled in by female respondents which represent 67 per cent of the whole sample. This implies the fact that only 33 per cent of the participants were male. Taking into consideration that fashion often attracts females more than males the sample is rather balanced.

The biggest age group with 102 participants (51%) was the one from 18-24, closely followed by the age group of 25-34 year olds which added up to 92 participants (46%). Only one respondent has been under the age of 18 (0.5%), three belonged to the age group of 35-54 year olds (1.5%) and one was older than 55 years (0.5%). Taken in to consideration that young consumers are the target of the study the sample with 97 per cent is very presentable.
Since only people from the EU or living within the EU were supposed to fill out the questionnaire and due to the fact that the link was spread via a snowball system through a social network starting in Germany, it is no surprise that the majority of the respondents (68.5%) either was German or lived in Germany. Respondents from Sweden made up 13 per cent, followed by Greece with 5.5 per cent and the Netherlands with four per cent. Other participants came from Poland, the United Kingdom, Spain, France, Czech Republic, Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland and Portugal.

Question number four dealt with the net-income of the participants. Since the survey was targeting young consumers, the overall income structure was rather low. 34 percent of the respondents earn between €0 and €500 and 41 percent between €501 and €1000. These findings could indicate why consumers tend to buy fast fashion in general.
Corresponding to the net-income of participants, it was of high interest to find out how much money they spend on new clothing each month. At this point it could be observed with the help of cross tabulation that even though 44.6 per cent of participants only have an income between €0 and €500, they would spend €100 - €200 (42.6%) or even €100 - €200 (14.7%) on clothing each month which indicates a high importance of fashion.

Finishing up the general findings the respondents have been asked how often they go shopping for new clothes generally within a month. 35.5 per cent of the participants go on a shopping trip at least twice a month which indicates that many are following the fast fashion principle since there is always something new on display. Using the cross tabulation tool it can furthermore be observed that about 82 per cent of these shoppers are women which could show a trend that they are more influenced by fast fashion.
5.2 Interpretation & Analysis

At this point the different hypotheses drawn earlier will be tested and they will either be supported and confirmed by the relevant survey data or declined. After this has been done the statements which have been rated on a Five-point Likert scale will receive closer attention and tried to be analyzed with the help of the relevant theories which have been clarified in section 2.2.

**H1** stated that *fast fashion retailers are the stores with the highest frequency of visits among young consumers*. By looking at the collected data and the fact that 97 per cent of the respondents belonged to the age group below 35 years, **H1** can be supported.
As it can be derived from figure 10, 67.5 per cent of the participants go shopping at fast fashion stores with the highest frequency when they think about all of their shopping trips. Middle prizes stores follow with only 15.5 per cent and department stores name only 12 per cent as their most visited store. Supporting H1 has been substantial for the study since it serves as a starting point for the assumed gap.

In the focus groups the reasons for buying fast fashion have been diverse but certain ones have been mentioned by almost all of the participants. The reasons that were standing out were the low prices of items and their actuality. In the survey the respondents had five options to choose their two main reasons from plus the option “I never buy fast fashion” for those who obviously do not have a reason to buy it at all. H2 therefore stated **Low prices and the actuality of fast fashion garments are the main reasons for buying fast fashion.** Figure 11 show the results of the survey and it can be seen that H2 can be supported as well.

![Figure 11: Main Reasons FOR Fast Fashion](source: own illustration)

Even though hypothesis H2 can be confirmed by the findings, other reasons such as “the possibility to buy higher quantities of items with a small budget” and “the availability of stores” earned high percentages (30.5% and 28.5%) as well. The combination of the reasons “low prices” and “trendiness of items” was chosen by 28% of the participants, the rest decided for only one of the reasons in question plus another option. These findings are very interesting and could be used for a deeper investigation of the question why consumers fall for the fast fashion business model however this has not been the main focus of this work.

**H3 and H4 deal with the perceived quality of fast fashion clothing (H3) and the corresponding level of satisfaction higher quality items provoke (H4).**

**H3: Fast Fashion products are associated with lower quality.** In order to find out if this was really the case, two kinds of questions have been asked. First of all the respondents were asked to name their two main reasons why they do NOT buy fast fashion and second they
are asked to rate the statement “The quality of fast fashion items is fairly poor” on a five-point Likert scale.

Figure 12 seems to confirm H3 since 55.5 per cent name low quality as a reason for not buying but taking a look at the results of the Likert items states that the majority of the respondents is either neutral or does not agree with the statement. Only 47.5 per cent agree either strongly or just agree with the statement which leads to a mean of 3.3. Even though many respondents do associate fast fashion with low quality these findings are not explicit enough to confirm H3. Additionally it can be said that there are multiple other reasons for the respondents not to buy fast fashion which gained very high percentages such as the fact that everybody is wearing the same clothes.

H4 claims that Buying higher quality items result in a higher level of satisfaction. Two statements were asked to be rated on the Likert scale in order to find out if this statement can be supported. At this point it is assumed that more expensive items are associated with a higher quality. Surprisingly as it can be seen in figure 13 about one quarter of the respondents has a neutral attitude towards the statement “I cherish more expensive items more than cheap items” and the other answers are very equally spread which results in a mean of 3.2. However a great majority of the respondents would like to buy higher quality items if they could afford them which can clearly be seen by looking at the mean of 4.2. These findings seem to contradict each other at first sight. Looking at it from another point of view however could explain this matter. Even though most respondents would like to purchase higher quality items, they still cherish (more or less) the less expensive ones they have. H4 can therefore only be partially confirmed but contains very interesting information about the reasons why fast fashion is bought.
**H5** and **H6** deal with the consumers’ opinions about the production of fast fashion and can be seen as the spine of the assumed gap in case they can be confirmed. **H5** claims that Consumers care about the production of the fashion items they buy. In order to support this hypothesis, several statements were asked to be ranked on the Likert scale: “How the items I buy are produced is important to me”, “Sometimes I feel bad to buy fast fashion but in the end I do it anyway” and “I do not care about the production of fast fashion”. Only 15.7 per cent claim not to care at all and with 23.8 per cent being neutral towards this statement, this leaves 60 per cent of respondents which clearly distance themselves from this opinion.

However on the statement “How the items I buy are produced is important to me” only 43.3 per cent agreed or strongly agreed. Almost one third (29.2%) has been neutral towards this statement and 27.5 per cent even disagreed. This leads to the conclusion that even though people claim that they do not “not” care about the production but when it comes to their buying behavior they do not act according to this. At this point a small gap becomes visible already. Next to this 48.1 per cent admitted to feel bad sometimes when they buy fast fashion and but agreed to do it anyway.
Recapturing figure 12 it can additionally be seen that the concerns about the production of fast fashion is one of the mostly mentioned reasons against the purchase of fast fashion. Bringing all of these observations together paints a very important picture and solidifies the assumption of a gap between attitude and behavior. H5 can as well neither be confirmed nor rejected since the respondents contradict themselves to a certain degree. Nevertheless these observations are of great relevance to the research topic.

The last hypothesis H6 deals with the production of fast fashion once more and if the respondents have a negative overall opinion towards the circumstances of production. Again three statements were supposed to be rated to find out more about consumers’ attitudes.

Figure 15 displays the corresponding results. 76.7 per cent of the respondents agree or strongly agree that they have heard a lot of negative press about working conditions, child labor and minimum wages. This shows a certain degree of knowledge about the production and serves again as evidence for a gap. In contrast, only 40.5 per cent claim to have negative associations with the production of fast fashion. Again the respondents contradict themselves. Either they do not believe what they have heard in the press or they do not use this knowledge to form their attitude. In comparison 58.4 per cent believe that the production of fast fashion harms the environment and only 9.7 per cent disagree with this, the rest can be found in the neutral section. Summing these findings up, more than every
other respondent feels that fast fashion is bad for the environment and a huge majority has heard much negative press but less than half of the respondents really have a negative association towards fast fashion.

![Figure 15: Opinion towards Production](Source: own illustration)

Just knowing if the hypotheses which have been drawn before can be confirmed or have to be declined is only the first and basic step in finding out more about the assumed gap in attitude and behavior.

Recapitulating the different theories from chapter 2 it is known that the construct of attitude and behavior is more complicated and embrace several components which have to be taken into consideration when trying to analyze certain phenomena.

Summing up the findings from the focus groups and the online survey reveals at first sight that the assumed gap exists to a certain degree. It was proved through the present study that young consumers favor fast fashion retailers against other forms of retailers and evidence was found for negative opinions towards this business model and its implication. The question which remains is at what point in the construct of attitude and behavior does the consumers act differently or which theories could explain this.

Going back to the “Three components of attitude” (2.2.1.1) it can be seen that normative beliefs (here ethical values and morals) form the component cognition which is referred to
as knowledge. Applying this to the findings the attitude towards fast fashion should be negative since many respondents agreed that they have heard a lot of negative press, they care about production and some even do feel bad to buy the items. A possible explanation could be found in the “Hierarchy of effects” (2.2.1.2). The experiential hierarchy which is often linked to decision making concerning fashion states that the feeling comes first and the thinking follows as the last step. Buying fashionable items can sometimes be irrational rather than rational especially if not much disposable income is at stake as with fast fashion. The consumption at this point can be described as hedonic and is therefore purely for pleasure which leads to a different process than for example high involvement decisions demand.

“The Theory of consistency” (2.2.1.3) tries to find another explanation why consumers tend to keep certain behaviors even though their attitude (here mostly the knowledge part) tells them differently. Since the feeling of dissonance within oneself is something one actually tries to reduce, either new elements are added to make a certain behavior consistent or elements are changed. In case of buying fast fashion the theory of self-perception might apply as well. Once many items are bought, consumers tell themselves to have a positive attitude towards it since they bought it and admitting that this was not smart of them hurts their self-perception. This would explain the fact that many participants feel bad to buy fast fashion but do it anyway. The change certain elements within their attitude or simply derive from the fact that they are happy about their new clothes that they had a positive attitude towards them from the start with.

It becomes even more complicated when trying to apply the “Theory of Reasoned Action” (2.2.2) and the “Theory of Planned Behavior” (2.2.3) since here many different components influence each other. Going back to the survey certain statements which have not been in the focus of the analysis yet can be described as subjective norm, including:

- I feel like I cannot wear the same outfit too many times, that is why I buy a new one for most parties. (Mean 2.2)
- In order to keep up with others I have to buy fast fashion to stay trendy. (Mean 2.1)
- I mostly buy fast fashion to be up-to-date. (Mean 2.4)
- Some of the fast fashion items I buy, I only wear once or twice. (Mean 2.6)

These statements clearly demonstrate the influence by others such as friends, peer groups or other referents such as society. However the findings of the survey do not support the results of the focus groups regarding the element of subjective norm. While in the focus groups a certain degree of pressure from others became visible in relation to following trends and wearing items only a certain amounts of times, the survey respondents did not feel that way. This can clearly be derived from the very low means which indicate that most respondents either disagreed or even strongly disagreed with those statements thinking back that they have been asked to be ranked on a Five Point Likert scale going from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
Behavioral beliefs which form the attitude towards a behavior have mostly been analyzed before and contained statements such as:

- The production of fast fashion is bad for the environment. (Mean 3.7)
- I have heard a lot of negative press about such things as working conditions, child labor and minimum wages concerning the production of fast fashion. (Mean 4.0)
- Sometimes I feel bad to buy fast fashion but in the end I do it anyway. (Mean 3.3)
- The quality of fast fashion items is fairly poor. (Mean 2.6)
- It makes me happier to buy higher quality items than fast fashion item. (Mean 3.6)
- How the items I buy are produced is important to me. (Mean 3.2)
- I have negative associations with the production of fast fashion. (Mean 3.2)
- I do not care about the production of fast fashion. (Mean 2.4)

At this point it is interesting to see that the means are very high and therefore prove a high degree of agreement with the statements. The respondents’ attitude towards many aspects of fast fashion can therefore be described as rather negative. The mean of 2.4 in the last statement has of course to be seen the other way around since the statement contains a negation.

The last element of the TPB is the perceived behavioral control which influences the forming of an intention which will lead to behavior as well. The following statements display the control consumers might have over their purchase behavior:

- I would buy higher quality items if I could afford them. (Mean 4.2)
- I alone will not make a difference, so I will continue to buy fast fashion. (Mean 2.6)

Control here can be seen in form of restrictions and obstacles. The respondents do have the control over the purchasing situation but since they are restricted in their budget they do not have the option to switch to higher priced alternatives which they would like to do if they could which is indicated by a mean of 4.2. Towards the second statement most respondents have been either neutral or even disagreed. The reasons for this are not clear maybe they feel they do have some control over the situation which would be a different focus and cannot be covered during this work.

Additionally maybe other external variables such as fashion involvement and media usage as used by other researchers should have been investigated as well since they say a lot about the way consumers are influenced and about their already formed knowledge.

Last but not least the “Techniques of Neutralization” (2.2.4) which influence the normative beliefs and therefore the subjective norm should be looked at since they could be responsible for the somehow contradicting opinions of the respondents. However this empirical study did not focus on the five techniques but operated on a more superficial level.

The techniques could be used as an explanation why consumers have a certain normative belief but do not act according to it. All five techniques could be used by the respondents when they act in contradiction to their subjective norm and all could form explanations about the question why fast fashion is bought in enormous quantities even though the consumers do not feel 100 per cent good with their choice to do so.
6. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to answer the research questions concerning a possible gap between attitude and behavior in fast fashion consumption among the young consumer group.

The first question covered the underlying assumption that young consumers have, to a certain degree, a negative perception towards fast fashion and everything attached to it. This assumption could be consolidated through the conducted empirical study. Just as many opinion leaders nowadays, consumers have different reasons to condemn fast fashion, such as low quality, concerns about the production or the simple fact that everybody seems to be wearing the same clothes. Even though the respondents in the survey contradicted themselves and the hypothesis that consumers care about the production of fashion items they buy could not be fully confirmed it could not be declined either and thus leaves room for some speculation at this point. However negative voices have been numerous during the focus groups and in the survey which leads to the conclusion, that consumers’ opinions about fast fashion are pervaded by negative associations.

The next step involved to find out if fast fashion retailers really are so popular among young consumers and if most of them shop there rather than at other retailers. This assumption could be supported and the low prices and the actuality of items could be identified as the main reasons for it. Finding this out has been a crucial point for the study since a gap between attitude and behavior is only possible if this behavior can be depicted.

After conducting the research it can be said that evidence for a gap between attitude and behavior concerning the consumption of fast fashion could definitely be found. Even though the results of the focus groups could not be fully confirmed through the online survey, a clear trend could be observed. Respondents contradicted themselves at numerous points which indicate certain discrepancies. Where those discrepancies come up exactly in the interplay between the attitude towards the behavior, the subjective norm and the perceived control is very difficult to display at this point and has not been the main aim of this study. These conclusions seem to be in line with Bhardwaj and Fairhurst (2010) who already stated that not enough research has been done on the demand side of the fast fashion phenomenon and Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) who pointed out the high importance of the interplay between the different factors.

However the third and last question the study tried to answer were possible reasons for the depicted gap. It has been assumed that peer pressure and therefore the subjective norm had a high influence on the young consumers purchasing behavior but the study could not find evidence that supported this assumption because the statements concerning the subjective norm received low means. Another assumption was the fact that consumers feel helpless since they alone are not able to change the system but this could not be proved either. The
reasons for the gap can be numerous but none can be named accurately at this point. Even though the respondents named the reasons why they purchase fast fashion (low prices and actuality of items as well as store accessibility) those do not explain how this affects their attitude in such a way that it outweighs their concerns.

7. Further Research

In order to fully understand consumer behavior in relation to fast fashion consumption more research has to be done in this field. The findings of this work have been rather superficial when it comes to reasons and appropriate evidence which is why more specific research regarding those facts should be conducted. The “Techniques of Neutralization” could be a really interesting starting point to investigate the gap further. Moreover a deeper understanding of morals and ethics concerning the consumption of fashion could give great insight into this relatively new field of study. In order to do so it would be recommended to carry out in depths interviews to be able to go deeper into the subject and to find reasons why consumers might contradict themselves.

Another interesting topic for further studies could be how other factors such as fashion involvement and the media influence the attitude-behavior relation in fast fashion. The new and upcoming topic of sustainability and the maybe therefore changing attitude towards fast fashion could be of high interest as well in order to find out if marketing measures into this direction have an influence on the consumers in question or not. As it has been mentioned in the beginning of this work, the fast fashion phenomenon has mostly been looked at from the supplier side which leaves many possibilities to conduct research on the consumer itself which do not have to be restricted to the younger consumer segment but could include behavior patterns of all age groups.
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Nobody Likes It, Everybody Buys It?! – The Attitude-Behavior Gap in Fast Fashion

Master Thesis 2012

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Appendix

Online Survey: Attitudes towards Fast Fashion

1. Welcome and Demographics

Dear Participant,

I am a student at the University of Borås in Sweden and currently writing my Master Thesis regarding the attitude towards fast fashion and certain behavior patterns. I do not want to reveal too much in order to not influence your answers.

Filling out this survey should not take you long and will help me a lot with my results and findings. Needless to say, this survey is of course anonymous and totally voluntarily.

We will start with some questions regarding your person and your shopping behavior and afterwards I am just interested in your opinion and/or attitude towards certain statements.

One more thing - throughout this survey, the term "fast fashion" is used a lot. For those of you who do not know what is meant by this: Fast fashion retailers are clothing chains such as H&M, ZARA, Mango or Topshop which manage to turn runway or street trends into merchandise in a very short time frame. The clothes are produced in enormous quantities and sold for a fairly low price. Furthermore fast fashion retailers offer many different collections per year and the clothes are only available for a short amount of time.

Thank you very much for your participation!!

1) What is your gender?*
   ( ) Male
   ( ) Female

2) Which age group do you belong to?*
   ( ) under 18
   ( ) 18-24
   ( ) 25-34
   ( ) 35-54
   ( ) 55+
3) What is your country of origin?*

Only the EU member states are listed at this point. If your country of origin is not listed but you live in the EU, please choose the country you live in at the moment.

( ) Austria ( ) Belgium ( ) Bulgaria ( ) Cyprus ( ) Czech Republic ( ) Denmark ( ) Estonia ( ) Finland ( ) France ( ) Germany ( ) Greece ( ) Hungary ( ) Ireland ( ) Italy ( ) Latvia ( ) Lithuania ( ) Luxembourg ( ) Malta ( ) Netherlands ( ) Poland ( ) Portugal ( ) Romania ( ) Slovakia ( ) Slovenia ( ) Spain ( ) Sweden ( ) United Kingdom

4) What is your monthly net-income in €?*

( ) €0 - €500
( ) € 501 - € 1000
( ) € 1001 - € 2000
( ) € 2001 - € 3000
( ) € 3001 - € 4000
( ) more than €4000

2. Shopping Behavior

5) How often in a month do you go shopping for new clothes on average?*

( ) 0 - 2
( ) 2 - 4
( ) 4 - 6
( ) 6 - 8
( ) more than 8 times a month
6) Taking all of your shopping trips together, in which kind of stores do you buy the most?*

( ) Fast Fashion stores - such as H&M, ZARA, MANGO, Topshop, Primark, Forever21 etc.

( ) Middle prized stores - such as ESPRIT, Marc O' Polo, Tommy Hilfiger, MQ, Abercrombie & Fitch etc.

( ) Higher prized stores - such as Ralph Lauren, Diesel, Gant, ACNE etc.

( ) Designer stores - such as Burberry, Louis Vuitton, Prada, Tod's etc.

( ) Department stores - which offer a mix between middle and higher prices and designer items

7) How much money do you spend on average on clothing in a month (in €)?*

( ) € 0 - € 50

( ) € 51 - € 100

( ) € 101 - € 200

( ) € 201 - € 300

( ) € 301 - € 400

( ) € 401 - € 500

( ) more than €500

3. Reasons for (not) buying fast fashion

8) What are the TWO main reasons for you to buy fast fashion (such as H&M, ZARA etc.)?*

Please tick the two boxes which seem most important to you, unless you feel never buy fast fashion, then tick the last box.

[ ] The low prices in general

[ ] The trendiness of items

[ ] The availability of stores

[ ] The possibility to buy higher quantities with a small budget

[ ] The option to follow every trend

[ ] I never buy fast fashion
9) What are the TWO main reasons for you NOT to buy fast fashion?*

Please tick the two boxes which seem most important to you, unless you feel like there are no reasons then tick the last box.

[ ] Low quality
[ ] Concerns about the production of fast fashion
[ ] The clothes do not last longer than one season
[ ] Everybody is wearing the same clothes
[ ] No need to follow every trend
[ ] There is no reason for me not to buy fast fashion

---

4. Statements

10) Please rate the following statements.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The production of fast fashion is bad for the environment.</td>
<td>()</td>
<td>()</td>
<td>()</td>
<td>()</td>
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<td>()</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have heard a lot of negative press about such things as working conditions, child labor and minimum wages concerning the production of fast fashion.</td>
<td>()</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I feel bad to buy fast fashion but in the end I do it anyway.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some of the fast fashion items I buy, I only wear once or twice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The quality of fast fashion items is fairly poor.</td>
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<td>()</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It makes me happier to buy higher quality items than fast fashion items.</td>
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<td>()</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I mostly buy fast fashion to be up-to-date.</td>
<td>()</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I would buy higher quality items if I could afford them. | () | () | () | () | () | () |

How the items I buy are produced is important to me. | () | () | () | () | () | () |

I cherish more expensive items more than cheap items. | () | () | () | () | () | () |

I have negative associations with the production of fast fashion. | () | () | () | () | () | () |

In order to keep up with others I have to buy fast fashion to stay trendy. | () | () | () | () | () | () |

I feel like I cannot wear the same outfit too many times, that is why I buy a new one for most parties. | () | () | () | () | () | () |

I do not care about the production of fast fashion. | () | () | () | () | () | () |

I alone will not make a difference, so I will continue to buy fast fashion. | () | () | () | () | () | () |

Thank You!

Thank you very much for participating in my survey.
I really appreciate your help and maybe it has been a little fun for you as well.

If you have questions or suggestions please do not hesitate to contact me: rike_307@hotmail.com

Kind regards