BUYING BEHAVIOR AND PLANNED OBSOLESCENCE IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

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Abstract

In the society of the 21st century, obsolescence as a phenomenon is all around us, it affects everyone, even if there are those who are less aware of it and do not deal with it. The aim of our study is to identify consumers' attitudes towards planned obsolescence, as well as to learn about their clothes buying habits. We conducted primary research through an online questionnaire, which was distributed using the snowball method. A total of 176 respondents participated in the research. The data analysis was carried out with the help of Microsoft Excel program. Based on our research results, the majority of respondents buy new fashion products every month or every six months. The reason for the exchange is usually that the product is no longer wearable or the customer simply wants something new. More than half of the people participating in the research fell victim to functional obsolescence as a result, but psychological obsolescence also appears. When buying new fashion products, the most important aspects are comfort and durability. On average, 34.42% of the respondents' wardrobe consists of products that are worn less often than every six months.

Introduction

Nowadays, planned obsolescence is already common practice in manufacturing and industrial production. Professionals involved in product design downgrade the products they create in order to be competitive in a market where consumerism is one of the main goals. In the last 20 years, this process has taken on even greater dimensions, thanks to the emergence of Internet of Things, Industry 4.0, smart devices and artificial intelligence. Rapidly changing market demands for new products, new technologies and new solutions have changed the way a designer must think to develop an idea (Zallio & Berry, 2017).

It can be read from the above that the phenomenon we are investigating is present in everyday life, yet in the course of our research we came across only a few domestic scientific articles that would examine the attitude of consumers to planned obsolescence. In order to fill this gap, the aim of our research was to identify the attitude of consumers towards planned obsolescence, as well as to learn about their clothes buying habits.

Obsolescence has always played a role in the development of society, it is a process that contributed to the creation of our modern society. Thanks to extremely important innovations, our current world is at this level of development. Think of electricity or the development of transport (Reuss and Dannoritzer, 2017). In many cases, consumer needs drive innovation. New ideas, new forms, new materials and technologies pushed the existing ones out of society. The reason for this is simply that the innovations really helped humanity prosper (Dabóczi, 2012). The kind of obsolescence that is present in the 20th and 21st centuries is no longer exclusively characterized by positive returns (Miskolczi, 2021). Bisschop et al. (2022) pointed out that the concept and procedure of planned obsolescence carry conceptual ambiguity and moral ambivalence. The phenomenon carries diffuse harms, and although it is beneficial for short-term corporate profits, it undermines consumer confidence and represents a serious obstacle to environmental sustainability. However, there are also authors who draw attention to the benefits of planned obsolescence: creating jobs and profits, stimulating competition between companies, improving innovation, helping efforts to

incorporate new technologies into products, and thereby generating progress .

Nowadays, we buy, throw away, and then buy a new one. Sometimes we don't even notice it, because we are so used to shopping. How is it possible, despite the enormous technical development, that the lifespan of our products is not increasing, but decreasing? An example of this is the history of women's tights. DuPont tights at the 1939 New York World's Fair, which with 64 million units sold, carried the tagline "as strong as steel and as fine as a spider's web". The female customers loved it. It was durable and hard-wearing. Since there was no reason for women to buy new tights, the company commissioned the designers to create a less durable product (Miskolczi, 2021).

There are different types of obsolescence. Tim Cooper, head of the Sustainable Consumption and Clothing Sustainability research groups at Nottingham Trent University, grouped obsolescence based on whether the product was used due to some kind of failure or not. We know relative obsolescence and absolute obsolescence (Granberg, 1997; Cooper, 2004). Absolute obsolescence means that the given product can no longer be used in the future, because it can no longer fulfill its function. In this case, the product is usually completely worn out and is replaced with a new one (Dabóczi, 2012). Relative obsolescence, on the other hand, is much more diverse. It is considered a typical characteristic of consumer society. Relative obsolescence refers to the time at which the user sets the product out of order. Thus, relative obsolescence takes place before absolute obsolescence, so a discrepancy can be observed between the product's actual lifetime and usage time. This means that customers do not use the product until the technical end of the life span, because they perceive it to be obsolete beforehand (Fels et al., 2016).

Literature overview

According to Sproles' (1974) definition, fashion can be defined as a broad behavioral phenomenon that involves many material and non-material contexts. Fashion can be understood as both an object and a behavioral process. The fashion process can be mechanistically characterized as a process of social influence and diffusion. The fashion industry occupies a very important place in the economy, as it is one of the driving forces of economic development.

Fashion is now an industry more influenced by opinion leaders than magazines or designers, so it is accepted that those people have strenght to effect the perception of a brand (Köse & Enginkaya, 2017). According to Lam and Postle (2006), the typical supply chain problems in the textile and clothing industry are short product cycles, long production lead times, and forecasting errors for fashion items. Before the democratization of fashion, it was a common phenomenon that there was a lack of basic clothing in families, which faithfully reflected the financial situation and social hierarchy. In the 20th century, as a result of mass production, this changed radically, status differences in the field of clothing were blurred. In the 21st century, the relationship with clothing is based on one's own decision and represents the consumer's own attitude (Aranyosi, 2015). In today's fashion industry, new customs are mixed with traditional ones. This means that the fashions of old times regularly return, of course in a modernized form according to current trends. The big fashion companies define fashion colors and clothing styles every year, or even several seasons, on which they spend a significant amount of money, those consumers who love to follow fashion and want to look fashionable (Sille, 2016).

We cannot determine the duration of the fashion cycle in advance. Józsa (2016) distinguishes four stages of fashion waves:

The standing out stage: here a group of consumers buys to stand out from the rest. Production only in limited quantities.
Follow-up phase: when fashion dictators are followed by more and more consumers. Demand for the product increases.
Stage of mass fashion: the product reaches its peak of popularity in this stage. The start of mass production and sales.
Decline: the fashion dictators slowly "turn away from the product" as they are already interested in other products. This is how the product became out of fashion (Józsa, 2016).

Fast fashion includes low-priced, yet fashionable products that satisfy customers' needs for fashionable clothes through vogue capture, the launching of new designs and updating of

products at the sales terminal (Mihm, 2010; Zhou et al., 2020). These fashion products have a short life cycle (Zhou et al., 2020). According to Joy et al.'s (2012) definition, the term covers low-cost clothing collections that mimic current luxury fashion trends. Fast fashion satisfies young consumers' desires for luxury fashion, even if this comes at the expense of sustainability. Fast fashion in the fashion industry is based on psychological obsolescence, which it achieved through the emotional manipulation of consumers.

The reason for the passing of the fashion wave may be that they represent a compromise for the consumer, and for this reason they try to replace the missing fashion items from elsewhere. One explanation is that the demand for another larger, more comfortable product increases due to the increasing sense of comfort. Another explanation is that if the demand increases a lot and more and more people follow the fashion, then others turn away from it. The length of the fashion cycle can also be determined by whether the fashion satisfies a real need, as well as how well it can be coordinated with other social trends. Furthermore, whether it satisfies social norms and values, or whether it stays within the technological limits when it develops, can also contribute to the passing away of the fashion wave (Kotler and Keller, 2012). In connection with that, we would like to mention fast fashion, which greatly contributes to the short life of fashion items.

Consumer demand has increased as a result of mass production. The production of ready-to-wear clothes may have spread through the industrial revolution. When production became more expensive, it was outsourced to countries with cheaper labor. Fashionable clothing has become available to everyone, as products have become cheaper and consumer preferences have changed. The trend cycle has accelerated and shopping has become a pleasant pastime. Thus, by the 21st century, fast fashion, which plays a leading role in the fashion industry, was formed, which is closely linked to planned obsolescence in the fashion industry. The Internet is an integral part of people's lives, thanks to this the rise of fast fashion products, as companies can adapt very quickly to the current trend, and some pieces reach the catwalks on the store shelves in a very short time. The term is used for those clothing brands that can ensure this short-term delivery

and always comply with the latest trends. Fast fashion gives the average consumer the opportunity to get fashionable clothes at an affordable price. These products are most often copies of high fashion (top category, designer) products. For this reason, fast fashion poses a challenge to fashion houses that introduce new collections every season (Bertalan et al., 2020; Haynes, 2022). The target market of fast fashion consists of women and men between the ages of 16 and 40, who have a medium-level income and keep up with fashion, and demand fashionable but affordable pieces. During their shopping, they buy fashion items for themselves or for other members of the family. It is not considered important to wear individual pieces for years, durability is not important, since they can get cheap seasonal pieces, so they can easily change their wardrobe at certain intervals, i.e. psychological obsolescence appears (Bertalan et al., 2020).

The subjects of our primary research, which will be presented later, are also representatives of this age group (individuals up to 40 years old). Generation Y and Z buy more low-quality, cheap, and fashionable clothes than baby boomers, who would prefer to purchase fewer number of higher quality clothes (Crewe and Davenport, 1992; Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). In the case of the younger generation, there are five factors that determine their shopping preferences: product identity, product description, external factors, deals and Internet affect (Özkan, 2017).

Among the young people of the 21st century, there is no longer the big difference between women and men when it comes to buying fashion items, as was the case in previous generations. It is a fact that women still play a bigger role in shopping in families, they are the ones who buy fashion items for themselves and for family members, but men are also interested in the topic. Today, there is no longer a significant gap between men and women when it comes to purchasing fashion items, but rather between generations and lifestyle groups. Female consumers shop much more often than men and like discount prices, while men shop less often, but then they do not particularly pay attention to the prices of products (Törőcsik, 2016).

Goal and Methodology

The aim of the research is to identify the attitude of consumers towards planned obsolescence, as well as to learn about their clothes buying habits.

During our research, we used a quantitative research method, the questionnaire survey, for which we created a questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed electronically using the snowball method. We sent the questionnaire to fifty people, who were asked to send it to five more of their acquaintances in order to complete it. A total of 176 completed questionnaires were received. The questionnaires were filled in completely anonymously. The received electronic responses were analyzed in Microsoft Excel.

During the examination of the demographic data, we realized that the majority of our respondents were women (78.4%). We see the reason for the outstanding ratio in the fact that the topic of our research preoccupies the female respondents to a greater extent than men. 55.7% of the participants in the research have a university education, and 44.3% have a high school education. 52.8% of respondents live in cities, while 47.2% live in villages. 15.30% of the respondents have no monthly income (probably because they are still studying), 34.10% have a monthly net income of over 800 euros, 24.40% classified themselves in the category between 600-800 euros, and 26.10% have a monthly net income of less than 600 euros. 41.5% of the respondents are married, 38.6% live in a relationship, and 19.9% are single. We also considered it important to ask the participants in the research how many people they support within their families. 52.8% of the respondents are self-supporting, 15.9% take care of one person, 15.3% indicated two people, 9.7% are responsible for three others, 6.3% support four or more people.

Findings

During the research, the focus was on assessing consumer awareness, on the basis of which criteria they buy new fashion products, and how aware they are of the phenomenon of planned obsolescence in the fashion industry. The first and second questions of the questionnaire are closely related, as they deal with planned obsolescence as a phenomenon. In the first question, we asked whether the respondent knew the concept of planned obsolescence. Of the respondents, 61.9% answered no, while 38.1% answered yes. For the second question, we asked an open question, in order for the people participating in the research to express their opinions, experiences, and impressions related to the topic. We were interested in the opinion of those respondents who answered yes to the previous question, that is, they have already encountered the phenomenon of planned obsolescence. Of the positive comments, most emphasized the "necessary bad" or "necessary for economic growth and sustainability" positions. The majority of respondents see the negative side of the planned obsolescence:

"The economy is artificially controlled by planned obsolescence, which encourages consumers to buy, so companies ensure continuous profit."
"Planned obsolescence takes advantage of the vulnerability of the group that is interested in the cheaper product."
"Consumption is the driving force of our economy, but on the other hand, it produces a large amount of waste, and the problem lies in the damage to nature."
"In our stimulus-rich society, it is relatively unimaginable that something is permanent and will last forever, but the desire for new things has also strengthened among customers."

In the following, we asked the respondents how regularly they buy new fashion products. 5.7% of our respondents buy new fashion products more often than monthly, 41.5% monthly, 33.5% every six months, 11.4% annually, 5.1% every 2-3 years, and 2.8% less often, than every 3 years.

In the fourth question, we asked the respondents to choose from among the options the reason why they have not yet replaced the fashion product they have had for at least 3-4 years with a new one. For financial reasons, 1.7% of the respondents did not replace it with a new one, so we can say that money plays a role in a negligible percentage of the respondents in the research. Furthermore, 8% of those surveyed will replace their fashion products within 3-4 years. In their case, an increased interest in fashion is likely. On the other hand, 90.3% did not replace their existing fashion product, because that particular clothing or accessory can still be worn.

In the fifth question, we looked for the answer to what reason the respondents buy a new fashion product. 7.4% of the respondents answered that the existing fashion product would still be

suitable for wearing, but it is no longer fashionable, it is out of fashion. 51.1% indicated that the existing fashion product is no longer able to fulfill its function, it is damaged. 39.8% of the respondents indicated that there is no problem with existing fashion products, but they like new products. In the fifth question, 1.3% shared a reason that was not among the answer options, changing their wardrobe due to a change in size or style profile. Functional and psychological obsolescence appear in this part of the questionnaire. We wanted to assess which type of obsolescence is more significant among our respondents. Consumer awareness is evident here as well, just as in the previous question. It can be said that more than half of the people participating in the research fell victim to functional obsolescence. In addition, psychological obsolescence appears, which manifests itself in the demand for fashionable items, in such a way that the existing product is still wearable and can fully fulfill its function, but newer products have appeared on the market, which are more attractive to customers.

In the sixth question, we asked the respondents to rate themselves on a five-point Likert scale, according to the extent to which they consider themselves to be conscious shoppers when it comes to purchasing fashion items (clothing, shoes, bags, accessories). 13.1% of the respondents consider themselves to be fully aware customers, 38.1% consider themselves to be aware. 35.8% could not decide how conscious they are when it comes to buying fashion items, so they classified themselves in the neutral category. 9.1% of the respondents think that they are less conscious, and 4% only think that they are not conscious at all.

For the next question, we were looking for an answer to the extent to which the certain factors are important to the respondents (Fig. 1.), measured on a five-point Likert scale, when purchasing a new fashion product. Based on this, comfort and durability are the most important aspects for the respondents. The fact that the product is branded and looks expensive is only important to a small percentage of the people involved in the research.

Fig. 1. The importance of certain factors in the case of buying fashion items
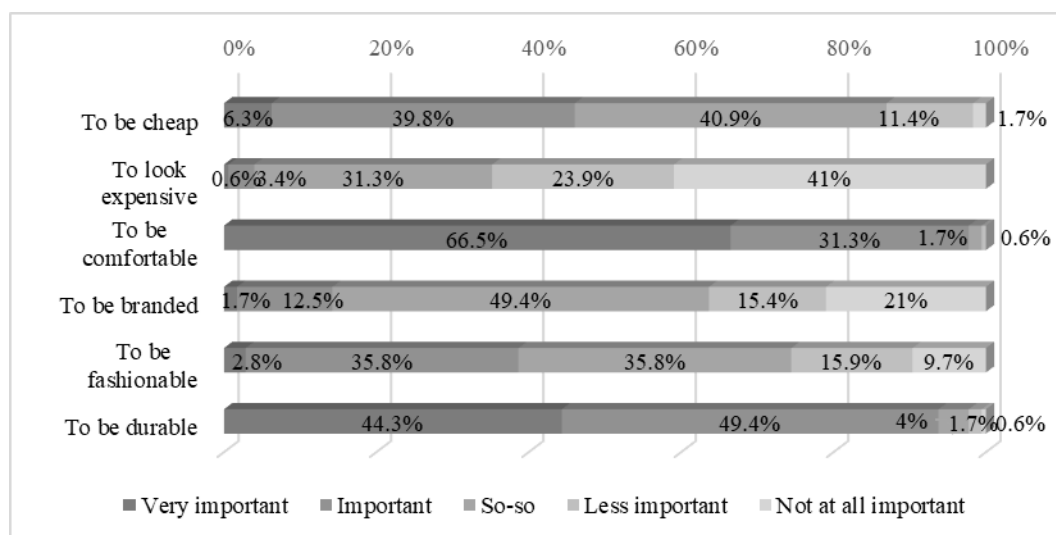
Source: own processing

In the next question, we assessed what consumers do when their clothes or accessories are no longer wearable. We presented them with two alternatives. The majority of the respondents, 56.3%, marked the first option, the answer to fix it. On the other hand, 43.8% say that if a piece of clothing or accessory can no longer be worn, they replace it with a new one, because it is cheaper to buy. It is likely that those consumers who selected the first option as an answer spend more when purchasing a fashion item, and therefore try to have it repaired if necessary.

We also asked the participants in the research what happens to those fashion products that are no longer worn, but are still wearable. Most people, 48.9%, selected the option to donate, 39.8% put these items in a clothes collection container, 7.4% sell them, and 4% throw away the clothes and accessories they don't want to wear anymore.

In the following question, we were looking for the answer to whom the respondents of the questionnaire most often buy fashion items for. Most (58.5%) buy for themselves, 25.6% for their children, and 15.9% for other family members.

In the question that followed, the respondents could choose to what extent each statement was typical of them (Fig. 2.). Regarding the four different assumptions, they could decide whether they were typical, neutral, or not typical.

The figure clearly shows that the durability of the fashion item is the most important for consumers. The second largest number of responses came to the statement that says: the respondent likes to buy new clothes and accessories. This statement is very typical for 44.80%. The next statement refers to online shopping, it is typical for 36.94%. We also wanted to find out how important they consider recycled, environmentally friendly pieces to be when purchasing a fashion item. 25.56% of the respondents consider this characteristic of themselves.

Fig. 2. Degree of agreement with certain statements in the case of buying fashion items
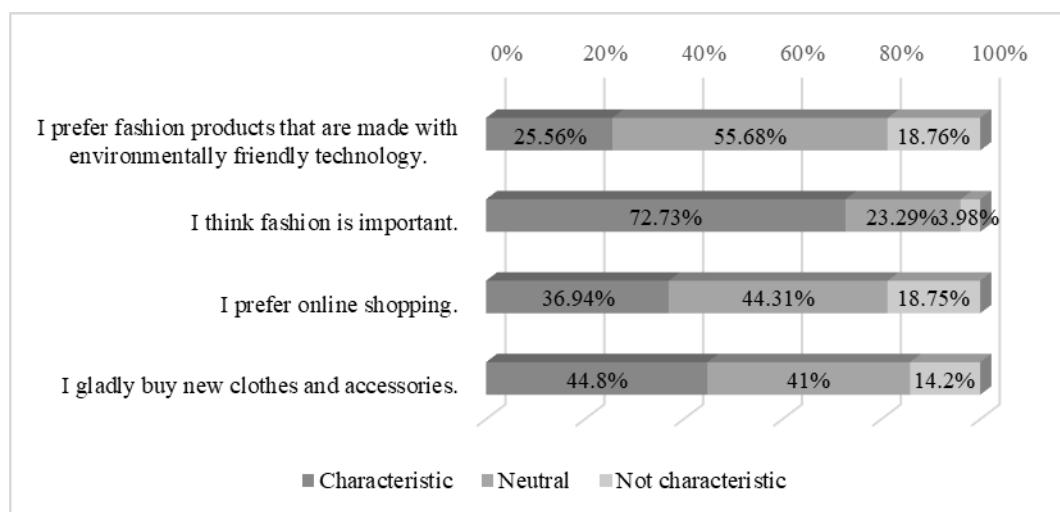
Source: own processing

As a conclusion, it can be said that the durability of fashion items is important to the respondents, but there is also great interest in new pieces, most of them like to be able to buy new fashion items. The majority of our respondents are happy to shop online. For the participants in our research, purchasing items made with environmentally friendly technology is not a primary consideration when purchasing a fashion item.

In the next question, we focused on examining the lifespan of the product, and we asked how price and lifespan are related in the case of fashion products. Our research revealed that 40.3% of our respondents believe that more expensive clothing or accessories can be worn longer, 35.8% see no connection between price and lifespan, 23.3% could not decide, and 0.6% believes that cheaper clothing or accessories can be worn longer.

Tab. 1. Minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation values for rarely worn fashion products

Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviaton
0	90	34.42	22.47

Source: own processing

In the following question (Table 1.), we wanted to know what percentage of the respondent's wardrobe is made up of clothes, shoes, or accessories that they wear less often than every six months.

We also assessed how much respondents spend on average on fashion item(s) during a purchase. The majority of respondents, 48.30%, marked the amount below 50 euros, 40.30% buy between 50-100 euros, and 11.40% spend more than 100 euros on fashion items.

Discussion

The most common definition of sustainable development is the formulation in the Brundtland report published by the United Nations, which reads as follows: "a development process or organizational principle that satisfies the needs of the present without reducing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Gyulai, 2013; Anyakoha, 2018). The environmentally conscious behavior of companies and consumers can be a big step forward in improving the condition of the Earth, preserving sustainability and preserving the health of future generations (Amberg, 2019). The textile and clothing industry is a resource-intensive industry. This industry is responsible for 3-10 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions and produces huge amounts of waste (de la Motte & Ostlund, 2022). Due to the increasing amount of textile waste and the increasing resource pressure, recycling has become an important aspect of the fashion and apparel industry (Riemens et al., 2021). Nowadays, textile waste recycling is a global challenge (Memon et al., 2022). According to Schoormans (2018), in the next ten years, sustainable fashion must first focus on moving from the linear to the circular economy and then on redefining the value of products. This in itself is an extremely difficult task. Not to mention that certain authors in the literature regard sustainable fashion as a concept as an oxymoron (Shotter, 2002; Henninger et al., 2016). These thoughts prompted us to deal with sustainability in the fashion industry. The aim of our study was to examine the attitude of consumers towards planned obsolescence, as well as to assess their clothes buying habits.

Conclusion

Based on our research results, the majority of respondents are not aware of the concept of planned obsolescence. Those who are familiar with the concept think of it more negatively than positively. Most of the respondents buy a new fashion product every month or every six months. Such products are most often worn for years because they have not yet been used, and the reason for the exchange is usually that the product can no longer be worn or the respondent simply wants something new. It can be concluded from this that more than half of the people participating in the research fell victim to functional obsolescence, but psychological obsolescence also appears. When purchasing new fashion products, the most important aspects were comfort and durability. The literature pays attention to the care of the product itself. This is closely related to how a consumer thinks about replacing their fashion products. Based on Fogg's (2009) model Ackermann (2018), defined nine different motivators related to product care. These are related to the product itself (financial aspects, pleasure, functionality, aesthetics), to the consumer (intrinsic motivation, rebellion against the brand policy) and to the relationship between the consumer and the product (fit with the participant's identity, irreplaceability, shared ownership). If the product care activity is easy, then a low level of motivation is enough to act, so the care activity takes place. On the other hand, if the care of a product is difficult, a great motivation (e.g. savings in certain cases) is needed for a product care activity. In product care, internal (appearance triggers, time triggers, social triggers) and external triggers (previous care experiences, challenge-based approach) can be distinguished.

Looking at being a conscious customer, we found that the majority of respondents consider themselves more conscious, but many could not

take a position on this issue. During our research, we also discussed whether the respondents see a connection between the product's price and lifespan. According to 40.3%, there is, but according to nearly 36%, there is no connection between the two factors. The majority of respondents spend an average of less than 50 euros on the purchase of a new fashion product. The majority of our respondents are happy to shop online. This is not surprising, since thanks to the rise of e-commerce, the online space has become the primary place for buying clothes (Chen & Yang, 2020). Despite this, there are also disadvantages to buying clothes online, as customers cannot try on the clothes and check their quality (Machová et al., 2021).

In the case of a defective fashion product, 56.3% of the respondents repair it, and 43.8% prefer to replace it because they believe that buying it is cheaper than repairing it. If the product is still wearable, but the respondent no longer wants to wear or use it, then the highest percentage of respondents give it away or put it in a clothes collection container. More than half of those involved in the research most often buy fashion products for themselves, but a quarter also for their children. On average, 34.42% of the respondents' wardrobe consists of products that are worn less often than every six months. These clothes take up unnecessary space instead of being reused.

The limitation of the research was that, in our opinion, due to the choice of topic, a high proportion (78.4%) of our questionnaire was filled out by women. A possible future direction of the research could be to expand the number of answers by sending the questionnaires to men only, as well as to expand the research to an international level.

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