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Can Corporate Social Responsibility Shift Consumer Behavior? Insights from Scenario-Based Experiment in the Fast Fashion Industry

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Abstract: This study investigates the interplay between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) engagement and pricing strategies in shaping consumer purchase intentions in the fast fashion industry. Using a scenario-based experimental design with 267 participants, this research explores how different levels of CSR and two distinct price points influence purchasing behavior. Additionally, the moderating effects of individual differences, such as consumer wealth, motivations for sustainable behavior, and income, are examined. The findings indicate that higher levels of CSR engagement significantly enhance purchase intentions, particularly when combined with higher price points, perhaps due to consumer perceptions of CSR programs associated with more expensive brands as more authentic. However, price remains a critical factor for lower-income consumers, revealing an "ethical consumption gap" where affordability outweighs ethical concerns. Extrinsic motivations, such as social pressure, strongly influence wealthier consumers' decisions, while intrinsic motivations show a more complex relationship with purchasing behavior. The findings provide practical insights for fast fashion brands, suggesting that aligning CSR with competitive pricing and authentic messaging is crucial for appealing to both price-sensitive and ethically conscious consumers.

Keywords: fast fashion; purchase intention; sustainable consumption; CSR; extrinsic motivations; intrinsic motivations; experiment

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1. Introduction

The fashion industry has undergone significant transformations over the past few decades, shifting from the production of long-lasting clothing items to the proliferation of fast fashion—affordable, trendy apparel designed for rapid consumption (Brydges 2021). Emerging in the 1990s, the concept of "fast fashion" revolutionized consumer behavior by offering the latest styles at low prices, encouraging frequent purchases (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst 2010). While this model has democratized fashion accessibility, it has also raised critical concerns about environmental degradation and ethical implications. The mass production processes inherent in fast fashion contribute substantially to waste, pollution, and carbon emissions (Niinimäki et al. 2020). Moreover, the reliance on cheap labor frequently results in poor working conditions and the exploitation of factory workers (Anner 2020). At the same time, the pervasive influence of social media (Wąsowicz-Zaborek 2018, 2020) has led to heightened consumer awareness of these environmental and social impacts of big business.

The COVID-19 pandemic added a new dimension to the industry's evolution. As brick-and-mortar retailers struggled with lockdowns and social distancing measures, e-commerce emerged as the dominant retail channel, further accelerating the rise of "ultra-fast fashion". Companies like Shein epitomize this shift, introducing thousands of new items daily while leveraging their digital platforms to reach consumers swiftly (Deighton 2023). This rapid cycle contrasts starkly with growing global awareness of environmental issues. Despite

the public's increased eco-consciousness, the fast fashion sector continues to expand, often ignoring sustainability principles (Hardy 2024).

In response to growing criticism, many fast fashion brands have initiated efforts to adopt more sustainable practices, such as launching eco-friendly collections and enhancing supply chain transparency. However, the extent to which consumers perceive and respond to these efforts remains unclear. Gheorghe and Matefi (2021) analyzed Zara's Join Life collection and emphasized that transparency and sustainability are necessary for transitioning from fast to slow fashion. Their study revealed how Zara's sustainability efforts could serve as a model for other brands, but it also pointed out challenges in fully aligning business practices with consumer expectations for transparency. Similarly, Öberseder et al. (2013) noted that consumers often view fast fashion brands' Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives with skepticism due to the inherent contradictions between their sustainability promises and profit-driven motives.

While CSR initiatives can enhance brand image and potentially mitigate negative perceptions, they also risk being perceived as hypocritical if the brand's actions are not seen as genuine (Janssen and Vanhamme 2015). Indeed, benefit appeals used in CSR communications can influence perceptions of corporate hypocrisy, potentially reducing the effectiveness of such initiatives if not carefully managed (Effron and Monin 2010). This risk of perceived inconsistencies between a company's claims and actions is underscored by Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir (2020), who, in their comprehensive review, highlight the potential for consumer "CSR fatigue". This consumer skepticism underscores the need for research that clarifies the specific factors that influence consumer perceptions of CSR and their purchase intentions, particularly in the context of fast fashion, where ethical concerns often compete with price sensitivity.

In a recent study, Wang et al. (2021) showed that the effects of CSR on consumer behavior are not direct but mediated by factors such as brand credibility and reputation. While CSR can positively impact these mediators, this does not always translate into higher purchase intentions, especially when consumers perceive CSR efforts as disconnected from the company's core activities or irrelevant to their own values (Wang et al. 2021). Additionally, research by Perrini et al. (2022) suggests that CSR's effectiveness is moderated by consumer attitudes. If consumers have low environmental concern or do not identify with the causes a company supports, CSR campaigns may not result in increased loyalty or purchase intentions. Moreover, the study emphasized that CSR needs to align with consumer self-concepts to effectively influence purchase behavior. Otherwise, the investments in CSR can fail to yield tangible business outcomes (Perrini et al. 2022).

As brands continue to introduce sustainable collections and claim more ethical practices, there is a need to better understand how these efforts, particularly when combined with different pricing strategies, influence consumer behavior. Recent research has pointed to the interplay between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and pricing strategies as a promising direction for future investigation. Lin et al. (2022), who investigated the "spillover effect" of CSR on consumer perceptions, particularly regarding price fairness, call for further research to explore how different pricing strategies can be effectively integrated with CSR initiatives to enhance consumer acceptance and purchase intentions. Additionally, Thuy et al. (2022) advocate for future research to examine how CSR can be leveraged in pricing strategies to optimize financial outcomes while maintaining ethical standards.

Although past studies have explored the relationship between CSR and brand loyalty or brand image, there remains a significant gap in understanding the interaction between CSR efforts and pricing strategies in the fast fashion sector. For instance, Biying Jiang (2022) found that while CSR contributes to brand competitiveness, other factors—such as design and price—tend to have a more direct influence on consumer purchase decisions. This highlights the importance of understanding how CSR, combined with price variations, impacts consumer decision making in an industry where price sensitivity often drives behavior.

This study aims to address this research gap by examining how three different levels of CSR engagement by fast fashion brands, at two distinct price points, influence consumer purchase intentions. Through a quantitative, scenario-based experimental design, we investigate the interaction between CSR initiatives and consumer willingness to purchase fast fashion products. Additionally, we explore the potential moderating effects of individual differences, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, and consumer wealth on this relationship. Prior research suggests that personal values and affluence can significantly shape how consumers perceive and respond to CSR efforts (White et al. 2019), making these variables critical for a more nuanced understanding of consumer behavior in the fast fashion industry.

Understanding the interplay between CSR and pricing strategies has substantial implications for fast fashion brands seeking to balance ethical practices with competitive market positioning. For instance, Hardy (2024) argues that as consumers become increasingly environmentally conscious, aligning business practices with consumer values will be essential for long-term success. By providing insights into how CSR initiatives can be effectively communicated alongside competitive pricing, this research aims to guide marketers in developing strategies that not only enhance consumer perceptions but also encourage more sustainable consumption patterns.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: We begin by reviewing the relevant literature and developing the hypotheses. Next, we describe the research methods used in the study and present the findings. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the implications, limitations of the research, and suggestions for future studies.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

2.1. CSR Engagement and Purchase Intentions

The relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and consumer purchase intentions (PIs) has been widely researched in various industries, including fast fashion. Research shows that CSR initiatives contribute to brand trust, enhancing consumer attitudes toward brands, which then lead to stronger PIs. For example, Neumann et al. (2020) found that CSR efforts increased consumer trust in fast fashion brands, resulting in higher PIs due to the enhanced perceptions of corporate integrity and responsibility. This is particularly evident in younger consumer groups such as Generation Z, who prioritize sustainability and ethical concerns (Djafarova and Foots 2022). These studies align with the notion that consumers are increasingly responsive to ethical and socially responsible behavior, even in price-sensitive sectors like fast fashion.

Mechanisms underlying this relationship can be explained by cognitive consistency theory, which suggests that individuals strive for alignment between their values and behaviors. If a brand's CSR initiatives align with a consumer's ethical values, they are more likely to feel good about purchasing from that brand (Griskevicius et al. 2015). Additionally, CSR initiatives can enhance perceived value, as consumers view their purchases as contributing to societal well-being (Luo and Bhattacharya 2006). These positive associations between CSR and consumer behavior are strengthened by factors such as price fairness and satisfaction, which mediate this relationship (Leonidou et al. 2010).

However, CSR's influence on PI is not always straightforward. The ethical consumer intention–behavior gap is a well-documented phenomenon, where consumers express support for ethical practices but fail to act accordingly (Zaborek 2021).

Yi et al. (2020) conducted an experiment examining the mediating role of trust in the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and purchasing behavior in the high-tech industry. Their findings indicated that consumers' intentions to purchase products increased when they perceived those products as ethically produced, reinforcing the notion that CSR initiatives can enhance trust and subsequently influence purchasing decisions. The authors describe the mechanism leading to higher purchase intentions as a halo effect, where consumers make inferences about the quality of high-tech products based on their trust in companies' social and environmental practices, despite these practices

offering little to no information about the products themselves. However, this pattern may not apply to the fashion industry, where offerings are much simpler and easier to assess directly, even before purchasing. Consumers can often judge the quality and style of fashion items through visual inspection, tangible interaction, and readily available information about materials. Therefore, while CSR initiatives may still contribute positively to brand perception and consumer trust in the fashion industry, their influence on purchasing decisions may be less pronounced compared to industries where product quality is more difficult to ascertain.

Research suggests that frequent exposure to CSR initiatives, particularly in industries with inherent sustainability challenges like fast fashion, can lead to consumer skepticism and cynicism. This phenomenon, often referred to as "CSR fatigue", arises when consumers perceive an oversaturation of CSR messages or inconsistencies between a company's ethical claims and its actual practices (Afzali and Kim 2021). Such skepticism can negatively impact PI, as consumers may question the authenticity of the brand's CSR efforts. Likewise, consumers might perceive CSR initiatives as greenwashing, particularly in the fast fashion industry, where fast production cycles seem at odds with sustainability claims (Mohr et al. 2001; Janssen and Vanhamme 2015; Niinimäki et al. 2020). Bray et al. (2011) show that CSR initiatives can backfire if consumers perceive them as disingenuous or motivated purely by profit. CSR initiatives in the fast fashion industry, particularly sustainable collections, can significantly influence corporate legitimacy. Miotto and Youn (2020) found that sustainable collections offered by fast fashion retailers enhance corporate legitimacy, especially when consumers attribute these efforts to altruistic motives. However, when these initiatives are perceived as inauthentic, their impact on consumer trust and purchase intentions diminishes.

These findings suggest that while CSR engagement by fast fashion brands can positively influence consumer PI, the effectiveness of CSR is contingent on consumer perceptions of its authenticity and relevance. However, Moresjö and Xin (2020) in their research, found that despite a general positive attitude towards the CSR involvement of fast fashion brands, product-related factors such as price, style, quality, etc., have a higher impact on willingness to buy. Their empirical findings revealed that consumers consider CSR involvement as the least significant factor when making a purchase decision. This study also highlighted the importance of effective CSR communication, as even though consumers are becoming more aware of environmental issues, most of them are not familiar with companies' sustainability efforts or unethical behavior. In the same vein, Byrd and Su (2021) found that consumers, while expressing positive sentiments towards sustainability, often lack specific knowledge about social and environmental practices in the apparel industry. This lack of knowledge can hinder informed decision making and underscores the need for clearer communication and labeling strategies to promote transparency.

Following the consensus that CSR tends to benefit sales, while acknowledging the factors that can have adverse effects, we propose the following:

H.1. *CSR engagement by fast fashion brands is positively associated with consumer purchase intentions for fast fashion products.*

2.2. Price and Purchase Intentions

Although lower prices are typically associated with a higher PI in fast fashion, the relationship between price and ethical consumption can be inconsistent.

Numerous studies have shown that consumers are drawn to fast fashion brands primarily for their affordability, with lower prices driving a higher PI (Macchion et al. 2018). For many consumers, price sensitivity outweighs ethical concerns, and they often prioritize immediate financial considerations over long-term sustainability (Bray et al. 2011).

While many consumers prioritize affordability, others may be willing to pay a premium for ethical products if they believe in the brand's genuine commitment to CSR (Kautish and Paul 2021). This can be explained by cognitive consistency theory, where the alignment between personal values (e.g., supporting ethical brands) and purchase

behaviors reduces cognitive dissonance (Griskevicius et al. 2015). However, when brands increase prices to cover CSR-related costs, consumers may balk, particularly if they feel that the brand's pricing does not align with their perceived value of the CSR activities (Al-Haddad et al. 2022).

Further complicating this relationship, some studies suggest that price sensitivity often overrides ethical considerations. External factors, such as convenience, availability, and product design, play significant roles in consumer decision making, leading some to purchase fast fashion despite their ethical concerns (Bray et al. 2011; Öberseder et al. 2013). For example, even among consumers who are highly engaged with CSR on social media, the influence of economic responsibility on purchase behavior remains limited (Al-Haddad et al. 2022).

The literature also points to price-related obstacles to ethical consumption. Higher prices are frequently cited as a barrier to purchasing sustainable or ethically produced goods, even among consumers who express support for CSR initiatives (Öberseder et al. 2013). This highlights the complex relationship between price, ethical values, and consumer behavior, with external factors like availability, convenience, and product quality playing crucial roles (Grimmer and Woolley 2014).

Following the above discussion and not dismissing the possibility of the reverse relationship, we assume in our hypothesis the most straightforward scenario:

H.2. *Price of fast fashion products is negatively associated with purchase intentions.*

2.3. Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations for Sustainable Behavior

Currently, many well-known fast fashion brands are promoting sustainability by introducing eco-friendly collections and publishing sustainability reports. However, Neumann et al. (2020) observed that consumers, particularly in the fast fashion sector, widely perceive these brands as unsustainable and often consider their sustainability efforts as greenwashing. This skepticism may arise from a mismatch between the brands' CSR communications and their fast production cycles, leading to perceived hypocrisy (Wagner et al. 2009; Rutter et al. 2017). Despite a growing awareness of environmental issues among consumers, this awareness often does not lead to action. To understand how brands' sustainability efforts affect consumer perceptions, we need to examine what motivates people to make sustainable choices.

Research has highlighted two key categories of motivation for sustainable behavior: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivations are internal and self-driven, reflecting personal values and environmental concerns (Schwartz et al. 2019). White et al. (2019) showed that intrinsic factors, such as personal values and concern for the environment, significantly drive sustainable consumption. Halicki et al. (2024) found that ethical motivations are a major driver of purchases in the second-hand clothes market, These internal motivations, which include a belief in one's ability to make a difference, tend to have a stronger influence on eco-friendly purchasing behavior than external incentives. Consumers who deeply care about the environment and feel a sense of responsibility are more likely to choose sustainable products over conventional options. Intrinsically motivated individuals feel a sense of personal responsibility and moral duty toward sustainability, which often leads to greater consistency in their sustainable behaviors (Carrington et al. 2016).

On the contrary, extrinsic motivations arise from external influences, such as peer pressure, social approval, or incentives (Legault 2016). Wang (2017) found that extrinsic factors like the popularity of sustainable fashion among peers significantly influence eco-fashion consumption, particularly among Generation Y and Z. Social pressure and the desire to conform to sustainable trends can drive consumers to purchase eco-friendly products, even if their personal beliefs are not aligned with sustainability goals. Similarly, research by Grimmer and Woolley (2014) supports the idea that consumers often purchase green products to enhance their social image, rather than out of intrinsic concern for the environment.

Despite these findings, not all evidence supports a straightforward link between extrinsic motives and sustainable PI. For example, Griskevicius et al. (2015) found that while social approval can drive sustainable behaviors, it can also lead to superficial actions where individuals buy green products only to appear ethical, without any deeper commitment to sustainability. This suggests that extrinsic motivations, while impactful, may not always lead to long-term changes in consumer behavior. Additionally, Goh and Balaji (2016) point out that when incentives or external rewards are removed, the likelihood of continued sustainable behavior diminishes, suggesting that extrinsic motives may not foster sustained eco-consciousness.

In line with the above discussion we formulate the third and fourth hypotheses in the following way:

H.3. *Extrinsic motives are positively associated with purchase intentions.*

H.4. *Intrinsic motives are positively associated with purchase intentions.*

2.4. Sustainable Behavior

Sustainable behavior, defined as consistent actions that minimize environmental harm, has been linked to higher PIs for eco-friendly products (Hamari et al. 2015). Individuals who regularly engage in sustainable practices, such as recycling or reducing energy consumption, are more likely to purchase products that align with their values (White et al. 2019). Furthermore, collaborative consumption—where individuals share and reuse resources—demonstrates a commitment to sustainability that enhances PI for eco-friendly products. Jung et al. (2020) argued that both practical benefits (such as saving money) and intrinsic rewards (such as a sense of community) reinforce this connection between sustainable behavior and PI.

However, some studies question the strength of the relationship between sustainable behavior and purchasing intentions. Bray et al. (2011) highlight the "ethical consumption gap," where consumers express concern for the environment but fail to act on these values in their purchasing decisions. For example, although consumers may recycle or reduce energy use, they may still opt for fast fashion due to its affordability and convenience. This discrepancy indicates that sustainable behavior in other areas of life does not necessarily translate into eco-friendly purchasing decisions, especially in industries like fast fashion, where the focus is often on trends and low prices (Niinimäki et al. 2020).

Thus, the fifth hypothesis is phrased as follows:

H.5. *Sustainable behavior is positively associated with purchase intentions.*

2.5. Wealth

The fast fashion industry has thrived by offering low-cost, trendy clothing options to a broad range of consumers. Joy et al. (2012) explain that the affordability of fast fashion makes it particularly attractive, but it often comes at the cost of quality. With mass production and lower material costs, fast fashion brands are able to keep prices low, making their products accessible to consumers across varying income levels. However, understanding the role of wealth in shaping PI in the fast fashion sector is crucial.

Bishnoi and Guru (2023) identified both age and income as significant factors in clothing purchase behavior. Their study found that as family incomes rise, so too does the proportion of income allocated to fashion, particularly fast fashion, which suggests that consumers with more disposable income are willing to spend more on clothing, regardless of its quality. Younger individuals from wealthier families are especially inclined to allocate a larger portion of their budget to clothing. This could be driven by a desire to stay trendy and fashionable, which is often reinforced by the fast-paced cycles of the fashion industry (Li and Wang 2020).

However, wealthier consumers do not always make purchasing decisions based solely on trends or price. Zhang et al. (2021) found that higher-income individuals, particularly those who are self-employed or have high purchasing power, are more likely to take sustainability into account when making fast fashion purchases. These consumers might be more critical of the ethical implications of fast fashion and thus might be drawn toward brands that demonstrate a stronger commitment to sustainability. On the other hand, lower-income individuals may prioritize affordability and convenience over sustainability, aligning with traditional fast fashion consumption patterns (Carrigan and Attalla 2020).

Beyond income levels, wealth may interact with emotional factors in shaping PI. He et al. (2023) examined how emotions influence the purchase intentions of electric vehicles (EVs) among consumers with different income levels. Their study found that higher-income consumers are more influenced by negative anticipated emotions, such as guilt or worry, particularly when faced with ethical purchasing decisions, such as buying environmentally friendly products. These negative emotions often deter wealthier consumers from making unsustainable choices, driven by their moral responsibility toward sustainability. In contrast, lower-income consumers are more driven by positive-associated emotions, such as happiness or excitement, which can be linked to the joy of finding affordable products. These emotional dynamics suggest that while wealthier consumers may have the financial means to purchase fast fashion, they are more likely to consider the ethical implications of their actions, whereas lower-income individuals might prioritize affordability and immediate satisfaction.

Another angle to consider is the relationship between wealth and materialism. For some consumers, wealth serves as a means to achieve and display social status, particularly through fashion consumption. Griskevicius et al. (2015) found that wealthier individuals often purchase fashion items to enhance their social standing, which could explain their greater willingness to spend on fast fashion despite its lower quality. However, this status-driven behavior may also increase the demand for more exclusive or premium fast fashion lines, which cater to wealthier consumers looking to distinguish themselves while still following trends. Pino et al. (2019) investigated how brand prominence and social status influence luxury consumption, comparing consumer behaviors in emerging and mature markets. The study found that wealthier consumers are more likely to engage in status-driven luxury purchases, with an emphasis on prominent brands that signal social distinction. In fashion marketing, consumers with higher wealth are particularly drawn to products that enhance their visibility and social standing, prioritizing brands that are recognized for their exclusivity and prestige.

The influence of wealth on PI is not limited to short-term spending. Wealthier consumers are more likely to view fashion as a long-term investment and may seek to purchase higher-quality items that offer better longevity (Niinimäki et al. 2020). These consumers might lean toward sustainable fashion lines, which often come with higher price points but promise durability and ethical production methods. Conversely, individuals with lower wealth may prioritize short-term affordability, purchasing cheaper fast fashion items more frequently as a way to maintain their appearance without breaking their budget (Cowan and Kinley 2014).

In our study, we take a broad view of one's material status by not only asking about current incomes, which could be misleading, but investigating four aspects of purchasing power, which we termed "wealth".

Based on this evidence, we propose the sixth hypothesis as follows:

H.6. *Consumer wealth is positively associated with purchase intentions.*

The domain and hypotheses of the study are outlined in the graphical model in Figure 1.

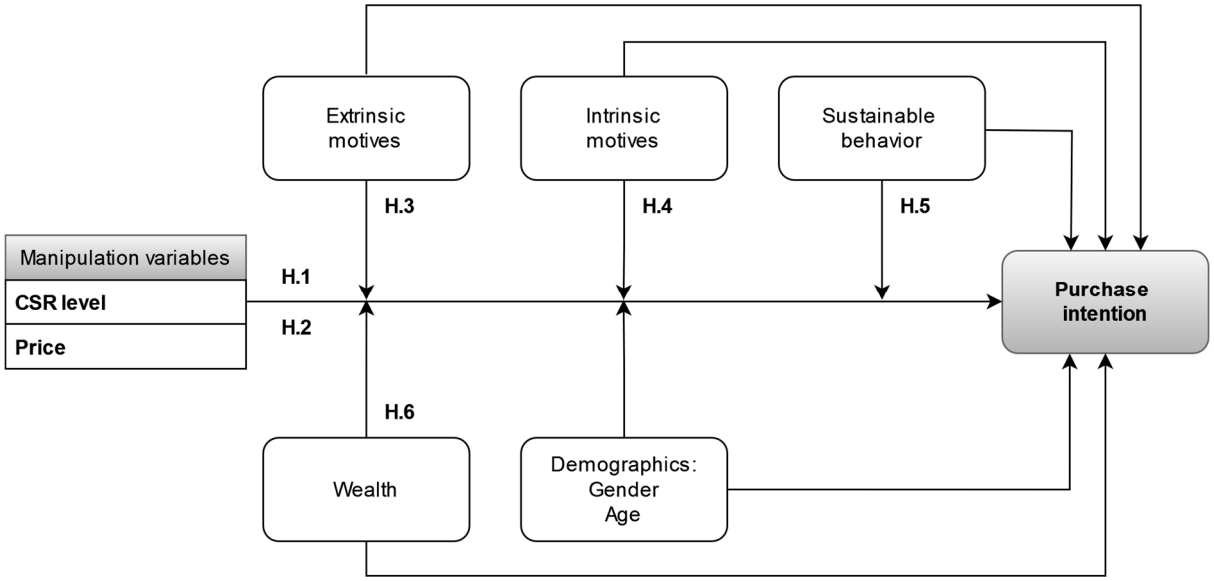

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study.

3. Research Methods

We employed a scenario-based experimental design, also known as a vignette experiment, in this study. Scenario-based experiments allow researchers to present participants with controlled, hypothetical situations (Aguinis and Bradley 2014), facilitating the examination of how manipulated variables influence their responses. In our experiment, participants were presented with six scenarios simulating fast fashion purchasing situations. Each scenario manipulated two key factors: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Level and price.

3.1. Experimental Manipulations

CSR Level: This variable was manipulated at three levels: low, moderate, and high. Each scenario provided a description of Brand A's sustainability practices, which varied to reflect these different CSR levels. For example, the high-CSR scenario detailed significant eco-friendly achievements, such as sourcing a majority of materials from sustainable sources and transparent production practices.

Price: Price was manipulated at two levels, reflecting middle–low (EUR 20–40) and middle–high (EUR 50–70) price points. These price levels were applied to the purchase of common fast fashion items, such as dresses or trousers. The lower price level is typical of retail chains such as Primark, Carry and Sinsay. The higher price levels can be found in stores like H&M, Zara and Mohito.

To illustrate the design, below is Scenario 1, representing high CSR and middle–high Price:

"Imagine that you are shopping for a new clothing item for yourself. You go to a shopping mall and enter a store of Brand A. The brand offers stylish clothing available for men and women. Every two weeks, it releases new collections that adapt to the latest fashion trends. You can find clothes suitable for a casual meeting with friends, a day at the office, or an evening out. One could buy here a dress or trousers for around 50–70 EUR. You recently learned that Brand A was rated best for its eco-friendly achievements by a highly respected, impartial organization that evaluates companies every year. The brand eliminated plastic bags and introduced reusable packaging instead. Currently, the brand sources over 50% of its collection from environmentally friendly materials like organic cotton or recycled fabrics. The brand has committed to producing all of its clothing using 100% recycled or sustainable materials within the next five years. Brand A is transparent about its suppliers, disclosing that its production mainly takes place in factories located in Europe".

3.2. Measurement of Constructs

The questionnaire's scenario descriptions were supplemented by standardized measurement scales intended to capture the constructs from this study's conceptual framework. The model employed in this study comprised six latent variables, of which five were classified as reflective constructs and one as a formative construct. The distinction between reflective and formative constructs has been a topic of debate in the literature. While some argue that constructs can be classified as inherently reflective or formative, others, such as Hanafiah (2020), propose classification based on three criteria: (i) the nature of the construct, (ii) the direction of causality, and (iii) the characteristics of the indicators.

Seven out of eight latent variables met the reflective criteria based on Hanafiah's framework:

- The construct exists independently of the measurement items.
- Causality flows from the latent construct to the measurement items.
- The construct is not sensitive to the number or types of items representing it.

These reflective constructs included attitudes toward the brand, purchase intentions, and perceived CSR.

In contrast, sustainable behavior was treated as a formative construct. This construct is shaped by its indicators (i.e., specific sustainable actions reported by respondents) rather than causing them (Zaborek 2016). As a formative construct, the indicators do not need to correlate, as is required for reflective constructs. Sustainable behavior encompasses a range of eco-friendly actions that individuals undertake, from recycling to choosing environmentally friendly products. We operationalized it using a 16-item dichotomous scale, where respondents indicated whether they regularly engage in specific sustainable behaviors. Example items included "*I try to throw away as little food as possible*" (adapted from Quoquab et al. 2019) and "*When choosing among similar products, I select the one which is more environmentally friendly*" (adapted from Piligrimienė et al. 2020). The composite score for sustainable behavior was obtained by summing the responses across the items and then standardizing the outcome for use in regression models.

The next table presents the measurement scales employed for the reflective constructs in the study. To save space, Table 1 presents not only the content of the Likert items and literature sources but also the reliability and validity metrics derived from confirmatory factor analysis, which will be discussed later.

Table 1. Likert scale items for reflective construct with CFA diagnostics.

IDs	Items	Factor Loadings	Literature Sources
	Intrinsic motives for sustainable behavior Cronbach's alpha = 0.914; AVE = 0.608		
I.1	I choose sustainable clothing options because they align with my personal values.	0.82	Adapted from Clary et al. (1998)
I.2	My concern for the environment strongly influences my decision to shop for sustainable clothes.	0.80	
I.3	Buying sustainable clothes gives me a sense of personal fulfillment.	0.81	
I.4	I feel good about myself when I purchase sustainable clothing.	0.79	
I.5	I feel a moral obligation to buy sustainable clothing.	0.76	Adapted from Piligrimienė et al. (2020)
I.6	I believe that choosing sustainable clothing is a way to contribute positively to the environment.	0.68	
I.7	Buying sustainable clothes aligns with my lifestyle and personal identity.	0.80	Adapted from Grønhøj and Thøgersen (2017)

Table 1. *Cont.*

IDs	Items	Factor Loadings	Literature Sources
	Extrinsic motives for sustainable behavior Cronbach's alpha = 0.923; AVE = 0.574		
E.1	I was influenced by the growing popularity of sustainable fashion among my peers.	0.55	Adapted from Wang (2017)
E.2	The opinions of friends or public figures I admire played a role in my decision.	0.63	Adapted from Grønhøj and Thøgersen (2017)
E.3	I chose sustainable clothing to be perceived as a socially responsible person.	0.77	Adapted from Bakewell and Mitchell (2003)
E.4	I wanted to be acknowledged for making an environmentally friendly choice.	0.84	Adapted from Hamari et al. (2015)
E.5	Maintaining a certain image of environmental consciousness influenced my purchase.	0.81	
E.6	Being seen as someone who supports sustainable causes was important to me.	0.80	Adapted from Piligrimienė et al. (2020)
E.7	I wanted to keep up with the trend of environmentally conscious shopping.	0.82	
E.8	I thought this purchase would garner appreciation or recognition from others.	0.81	
E.9	It was important for me to show my support for sustainability in a visible way.	0.73	
	Wealth Cronbach's alpha = 0.890; AVE = 0.522		
W.1	I can easily afford a spontaneous fashion purchase of 200 EUR without financial strain.	0.72	Adapted from Prawitz et al. (2006)
W.2	My current financial situation allows me to purchase the clothing and accessories I desire.	0.82	
W.3	I have money left at the end of the month.	0.66	
W.4	I worry that my current financial situation prevents me from having the clothes I want.	−0.68	Adapted from Archuleta et al. (2013)
	Trust in the brand's ethics and social responsibility Cronbach's alpha = 0.927; AVE = 0.714		
T.1	I trust that this brand operates ethically in all aspects of its business.	0.91	Adapted from Garcia-De los Salmones et al. (2005)
T.2	I trust this brand to act responsibly and ethically in its dealings with customers and suppliers.	0.88	
T.3	I believe this brand is transparent about its business practices.	0.68	Adapted from Delgado-Ballester (2004)
T.4	I believe this brand is genuinely committed to social responsibility.	0.89	Own elaboration
	Purchase intentions Cronbach's alpha = 0.895; AVE = 0.749		
PI.1	I would buy from brand A in the near future.	0.94	Khan et al. (2014)
PI.2	I would consider buying from brand A in the future.	0.79	
PI.3	I have intention to buy this brand in the future.	0.86	

3.3. Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis followed a two-step process to investigate the relationships between the hypothesized variables.

1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA):

CFA was performed using the Lavaan and semTools packages in R to estimate the reliability and validity of the latent constructs. This step ensured that the measurement model derived from the observed indicators was robust, with acceptable levels of internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair et al. 2007).

2. Hierarchical Regression Analysis:

To examine the antecedents of purchase intentions (PIs), we used hierarchical regression analysis. We built three progressively complex models, starting with the manipulated variables (CSR Level and Price) as predictors. In subsequent steps, we added variables related to consumer motivations (intrinsic and extrinsic), sustainable behavior, and personal characteristics (e.g., income, age). Additionally, significant interaction terms between CSR and Price, and between motivations and sustainable behavior, were included in the final model. A stepwise selection procedure was employed using the MASS library in R to retain only statistically significant two-way interactions in the final regression model.

This two-step analytical approach allowed us to validate the measurement model and test the hypothesized relationships in a structured and systematic manner, providing comprehensive insights into the determinants of consumer purchase intentions for fast fashion products.

4. Research Results

4.1. Sample Characteristics

We gathered 331 responses using an online questionnaire distributed via social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram and on survey websites like Survey Circle. The data collection process spanned over a month, starting on 25 February 2024 and concluding on 3 April 2024. To maximize participation within the social media platforms, invitations to participate were strategically placed as highlighted posts within groups specifically dedicated to sustainability topics (e.g., "Sustainable Fashion" with 15,000 members). This prominent placement ensured visibility and facilitated easy access to the questionnaire through a provided link. Furthermore, these invitations remained featured for several weeks, allowing ample opportunity for the majority of group members to encounter the request.

This targeted approach to sampling within social media groups dedicated to sustainability suggests that non-participation was likely influenced by factors such as time constraints or survey fatigue, rather than systematic differences related to the research topic. While acknowledging the limitations of convenience sampling, it can be argued that the sample derived from these social media groups exhibits a reasonable degree of representativeness of the broader population interested in sustainability. This, in turn, supports the application of inferential statistics in subsequent data analysis.

This research was designed and executed in a manner consistent with established ethical guidelines. The study utilized an anonymous online survey format, ensuring participant confidentiality and eliminating the collection of personally identifiable information. As such, formal ethical approval from the authors' respective universities' ethics review boards was not required. The survey instrument employed non-invasive questions that posed no risk to participants' well-being. Additionally, this study utilized previously validated scales from established research, which have not been associated with any ethical concerns. Adherence to informed consent principles was maintained by providing participants with clear information regarding the research objectives and their right to discontinue participation at any time.

The sample comprised 331 respondents, of whom 267 provided complete answers. Table 2 provides an overview of the demographic structure of the sample.

Table 2. Sample characteristics.

	Sample (N = 267)	
	n	**%**
Gender		
Female	182	68.2
Male	85	31.8
Education		
Secondary	32	12.0
Tertiary	235	88.0
Age (mean = 25.4; sd = 5.2)		
16–20	29	10.9
21–25	147	54.7
26–30	48	18.0
31–35	20	7.5
Other (over 36)	23	8.9
Country of Residence		
United Kingdom	91	34.1
Poland	54	20.2
United States	28	10.5
Italy	11	4.1
Sweden	6	2.2
Hungary	5	1.9
Other [a]	72	27.0

[a] The participant's countries with fewer than 5 respondents.

The majority of the respondents were female (68.2%), with the largest group being in the 21–25 age range (54.7%). Respondents were predominantly from the UK (34.1%), followed by Poland (20.2%). The sample primarily consisted of individuals with tertiary education (88%).

4.2. Experimental Scenarios

The responses were spread across scenario groups as below (the numbers are not equal due to the nature of the random selection process and the removal of some participants with incomplete answers):

- Scenario 1 (high CSR, middle–high Price): 41;
- Scenario 2 (high CSR, middle–low Price): 51;
- Scenario 3 (moderate CSR, middle–high Price): 38;
- Scenario 4 (moderate CSR, middle–low Price): 41;
- Scenario 5 (low CSR, middle–high Price): 42;
- Scenario 6 (low CSR, middle–low Price): 54;

4.3. Manipulation Checks

A manipulation check was conducted using the variable Trust in the brand's ethics and social responsibility ("Trust"). Trust was measured with four items directly assessing participants' perceptions of the brand's ethics. A one-way ANOVA showed significant differences in Trust across the three CSR Levels ($F = 35.94$, $df = 2, 264$, $p < 0.001$). Respondents' Trust levels increased progressively with CSR engagement: low CSR (−0.34), moderate CSR (−0.14), and high CSR (0.55). Considering that Trust (similar to the other latent variables in the model) is standardized with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1, these group differences are not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful, confirming the success of the experimental manipulation.

4.4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Before proceeding to the regression analysis, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the reflective latent variables in the model. A CFA measurement model with inadequate reliability and validity is prone to yield constructs that are difficult to interpret and could produce spurious correlations.

The reliability of a CFA solution can be assessed with average variance extracted (AVE) and Cronbach alphas, which can be found in Table 1.

An AVE informs us of the average amount of variance explained by a latent variable in its indicators, which should be more than 0.50 (Hair et al. 2007, p. 605). Cronbach alphas provide a measure of the correlations among the indicators of a construct and should exceed 0.7 (Malhotra 2010, p. 287). Considering that for each latent variable in the measurement model these two metrices surpass the recommended thresholds, sufficient reliability is demonstrated.

Table 1 also contains factor loadings, which are correlation measures for each Likert item and its corresponding construct. When squared, they inform on the proportion of variance in each indicator variable that is explained by its construct. The majority of factor loadings have absolute values greater than 0.7, with none falling below 0.5, indicating a robustly estimated model.

Discriminant validity is frequently assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker 1981), which postulates that latent variables possess distinct meanings if their average variance extracted (AVE) surpasses the maximum shared variance. In essence, a construct should exhibit stronger correlations with its own indicators than with other latent variables within the model. Table 3 shows pairwise correlation coefficients between CFA-estimated constructs.

Table 3. Correlation coefficients between latent variables.

Variable 1		Variable 2	Correlation Coefficient
Intrinsic motives	~~	Extrinsic motives	0.49
Intrinsic motives	~~	Wealth	0.07
Intrinsic motives	~~	Trust	0.03
Intrinsic motives	~~	Purchase intention	0.04
Extrinsic motives	~~	Wealth	0.20
Extrinsic motives	~~	Trust	0.40
Extrinsic motives	~~	Purchase intention	0.26
Wealth	~~	Trust	0.03
Wealth	~~	Purchase intention	0.07
Trust	~~	Purchase intention	0.67

The estimated latent variables display low to moderate mutual correlations, in no single case exceeding 0.7. This indicates that no variable is explained in more than 50% by any other variable, suggesting that the constructs are semantically different. Also, none of the bivariate correlations is smaller than the square root of their corresponding AVE scores (ranging from 0.722 to 0.865). This fulfills the Fornell–Larcker criterion, corroborating the discriminant validity of the model.

Finally, overall goodness-of-fit indices should be examined to ensure that the covariance matrix recreated from the CFA model is close enough to the input covariance matrix computed from the sample data. As suggested by Garson (2012), the acceptance values for the indices are as follows:

- Relative chi-square < 3;
- CFI, TLI and RNI > 0.9;
- NFI and PNFI > 0.8;
- RMSEA < 0.05 for good model fit; <0.08 for acceptable model fit.

The goodness-of-fit indices reported in Table 4 are all within acceptance ranges, which implies a good model fit to the empirical data.

Table 4. Overall goodness-of-fit measures for the CFA model.

Diagnostic	Value
Chi-square	879.594
Df	390
Relative chi-square	2.255
CFI	0.911
TLI	0.900
RNI	0.911
NFI	0.851
PNFI	0.821
RMSEA	0.067

Source: own elaboration.

4.5. Regression Analysis

The subsequent step in the analysis involved saving the latent constructs as new variables, which were then utilized in regression modeling. To examine potential mediation effects induced by intrinsic and extrinsic motives, sustainable behavior, wealth, age, and gender, and to explicitly illustrate the impact of incorporating additional predictors on the models' explanatory power, as measured by the R-squared coefficients, three progressively more complex regression models were developed (Table 5).

Table 5. Regression models explaining purchase intentions of fast fashion brands.

	Purchase Intention					
Predictors	**Estimates**	***p***	**Estimates**	***p***	**Estimates**	***p***
(Intercept)	−0.25 **	0.046	−0.25 *	0.070	−0.36 ***	0.006
CSR [Moderate]	0.22	0.239	0.42 **	0.016	0.47 ***	0.005
CSR [High]	0.62 ***	0.001	0.99 ***	<0.001	1.10 ***	<0.001
Price	−0.32 *	0.097	−0.21	0.248	−0.10	0.552
CSR [Moderate] × Price	0.27	0.320	0.08	0.747	−0.06	0.808
CSR [High] × Price	0.58 **	0.040	0.14	0.588	−0.07	0.783
Gender			−0.17	0.141	−0.09	0.409
Age			0.02	0.662	0.11 *	0.056
Sustainable behavior			−0.09	0.148	−0.12 **	0.036
Wealth			0.08	0.287	0.38 ***	<0.001
Intrinsic motives			−0.05	0.595	−0.04	0.631
Extrinsic motives			0.58 ***	<0.001	0.52 ***	<0.001
Age × Wealth					−0.20 ***	0.001
Wealth × Intrinsic motives					−0.52 ***	<0.001
Wealth × Extrinsic motives					0.51 ***	<0.001
Price × Wealth					−0.35 **	0.014
Sustainable behavior × Wealth					0.20 **	0.020
Observations	267		263		263	
R^2/R^2 adjusted	0.146/0.130		0.300/0.270		0.407/0.368	

Source: own elaboration. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

The first, simplest model is analogous to a two-way ANOVA and investigates the impact on PI of the main effects and interactions of the two manipulation variables. The model explains 14.6% of the variance in PI due to the effect of the level of CSR engagement of the brand and the interaction of CSR with Price. Figure 2 illustrates this relationship for added clarity.

In the first model, the three levels of CSR were converted into dummy variables, assigning a value of 0 when a particular level of CSR was absent or 1 if it was present. To avoid perfect multicollinearity that would preclude the estimation of the regression equation, the dummy for the low level of CSR was omitted, serving as the reference point. Accordingly, the nonsignificant regression weight for moderate CSR implies a lack

of meaningful differences from low CSR, while the significant coefficient for high CSR indicates a positive influence on respondents' willingness to buy fast fashion. The role of Price is somewhat unexpected. As the chart reveals, at the low CSR level (which is not explicitly included in the model) the lower Price corresponds to a lower proclivity to buy. For moderate CSR, both price levels correspond with similar PI, while at the high CSR, a higher Price induced a greater willingness to buy (this effect is flagged in the model as significant).

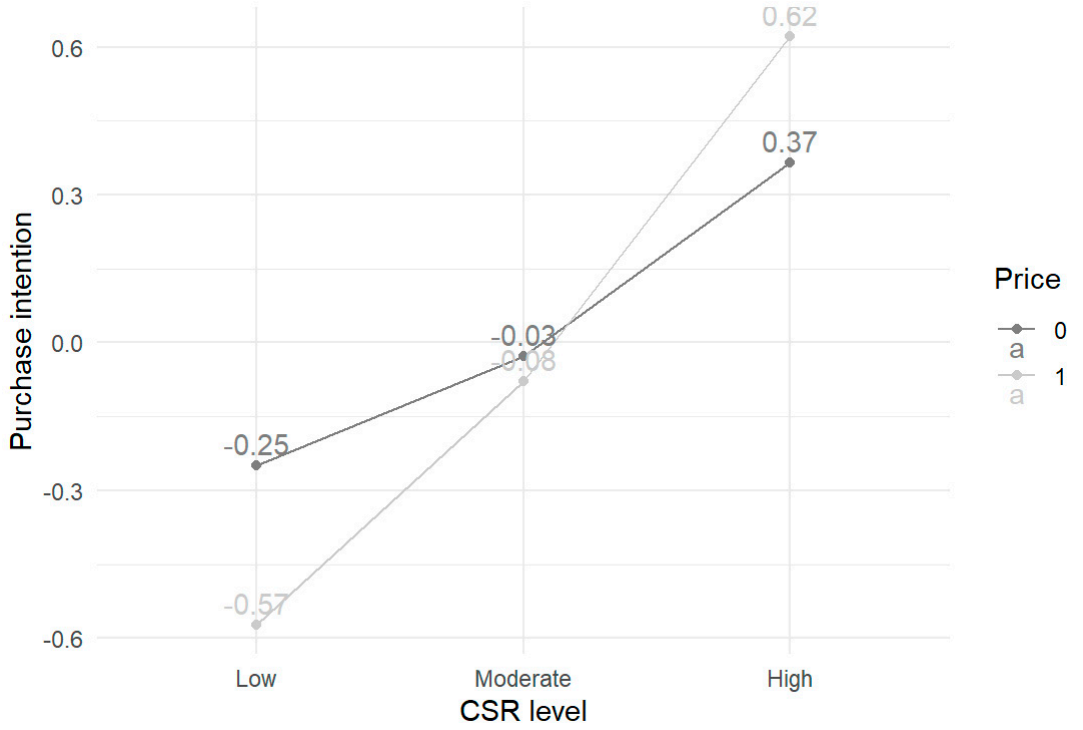

Figure 2. Marginal means of Purchase intention for combinations of CSR and Price. Source: own elaboration.

With the addition of new terms to Models 2 and 3, the interactive effect of Price was suppressed by other antecedents, in particular Wealth which negatively moderates the association between Price and PI. However, considering that Price was one of the manipulation variables, while the other terms had a descriptive nature and, as such, were more susceptible to measurement errors, the revealed moderating effect of Price should not be dismissed.

Overall, these findings confirm the positive effect of CSR on PI give full support to **Hypothesis 1**. The fact that the impact of Price is rather weak and easily suppressed by control variables, and shows a negative association with PI only for a low level of CSR offers, at best, only weakly and partially supports **Hypothesis 2**.

Adding only the main effects of the other antecedents in Model 3 strengthened the main effects of CSR by increasing their regression coefficients, which made the dummy variable for moderate CSR a statistically significant component of the model. The only other significant variable was Extrinsic motives, which increased PI on average by 0.58 standard deviations for a one-unit increase on this variable with all the other model components held constant.

The third model adds significant two-way interactions, involving variables other than CSR and Price. Interestingly, all five interactions that were subsumed in Model 3 have Wealth as one of the two component terms. This makes Wealth the consumer attribute with

the broadest and more complex impact pattern on Purchase intentions. The comprehensive estimation of Wealth's effect is given by the following equation:

$$\text{Purchase intention} = (0.38 - 0.20 \times \text{Age} - 0.52 \times \text{Intrinsic motives} + 0.51 \times \text{Extrinsic motives} - 0.35 \times \text{Price} + 0.20 \times \text{Sustainable behavior}) \times \text{Wealth}$$

The main effect of 0.38 in the equation, also known as the APE or average partial effect (Wooldridge 2018, p. 195), informs us about the expected effect of Wealth on PI with all the other moderators held at their mean values, which are equal to zero for standardized variables. Assuming moderators are at their average values is impractical; hence, examining the interaction effects when all variables are one standard deviation away from their mean offers valuable insights. This results in intervals for conditional regression parameters when interacting variables are within the range of non-extreme values around the mean. Substituting 1s or −1s for moderators in the equation gives a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 2.16. Given that, in usual circumstances, the association between Wealth and PI is positive or, at worst, insignificant, this validates **Hypothesis 6**.

The interactive effects of Wealth are consequential for the other variables in the model as they can change their significance, the relationships' strength, and, on rare occasions, also their direction. Accounting for the interactions, the associations between the model's predictors (other than CSR, Price and Wealth) and PI can be described as follows:

1. **Age** effect depends on Wealth such as more affluent consumers show a negative correlation between Age and PI, while those of less than the average financial standing have a positive link.
2. The participant's **Gender** was nonconsequential to the regression model.
3. **Extrinsic motives** display a significant positive main effect, which is further strengthened in people who are richer than average. The opposite is true for less wealthy consumers. Considering that in most circumstances this relationship is positive, this substantiates **Hypothesis 3**.
4. **Intrinsic motives** do not have a significant main effect; however, if Wealth diverges from the average, Intrinsic motives can lead to higher PIs (for lower Wealth) or lower PI (for higher Wealth). Given that the analysis confirms both a positive and negative relationship, **Hypothesis 4** can be deemed partially corroborated.
5. **Sustainable behavior** has a negative main effect, which tends to be augmented for less affluent people. Conversely, consumers who are more affluent than average can show positive associations between their engagement in Sustainable behavior and PI. This permits to claim partial support for **Hypothesis 5**.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate how different levels of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) engagement, combined with varying price points, influence consumer purchase intentions in the fast fashion industry. Additionally, we sought to explore the moderating role of individual differences, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, sustainable behavior, and consumer wealth, on this relationship.

Our findings largely corroborated the hypothesized relationships. CSR engagement by fast fashion brands was positively associated with consumer purchase intentions, supporting similar findings in the existing literature (e.g., Du et al. 2015; Joergens 2006; Cheng et al. 2024). This results underscore the growing importance consumers place on ethical and sustainable practices, even within the fast fashion sector, which has traditionally been criticized for its environmental and social costs. The findings align with Byrd and Su's (2021) emphasis on consumer demand for transparency and informed decision making in the apparel industry. The positive association between CSR engagement and purchase intentions suggests that consumers are increasingly seeking out brands that align with their values and provide clear information about their social and environmental practices.

However, the role of price turned out to be quite complex and different from what was discovered in some other industries. For instance, Boccia et al. (2019), investigating CSR purchasing behavior in the food industry, found that 83% of their participants refused to pay a premium for CSR products. In contrast, our study revealed that a higher price for a high level of CSR led to greater purchase intentions. For a low level of CSR, a lower price increased the willingness to buy, while for a moderate level of CSR, both price levels were associated with similar purchase intentions. This suggests that when brands demonstrate a strong commitment to CSR, consumers are willing to pay a premium for their products. However, if CSR engagement is perceived as low, the traditional price-sensitivity patterns associated with fast fashion tend to hold. Another, not mutually exclusive, explanation is that consumers may find CSR claims more believable for higher-priced products. This aligns with research emphasizing the roles of trust and credibility in influencing purchasing behavior (e.g., Yi et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2021).

From a practical perspective, these results imply that fast fashion brands can successfully integrate CSR initiatives into their strategies without alienating price-sensitive consumers, provided that the CSR efforts are communicated effectively and perceived as authentic. Brands may need to focus on transparent CSR messaging and aligning their sustainability claims with visible, impactful actions that resonate with consumers. For instance, highlighting concrete steps like using sustainable materials or fair labor practices can help bridge the gap between consumer awareness and purchase behavior.

Interestingly, the inclusion of individual difference variables in the regression model suppressed the interactive effect of price. This highlights the importance of considering consumer characteristics when examining the relationship between CSR, price, and purchase intentions. In particular, consumer wealth emerged as a critical moderator, influencing how other variables in the model impact purchase intentions.

Specifically, we found that wealth tends to increase purchase intentions, but this effect is moderated by age, intrinsic and extrinsic motives, the product's price, and engagement in sustainable behavior. The positive link between wealth and purchase intentions is weakened for older consumers, suggesting that younger individuals are more likely to spend more on fast fashion, which aligns with the industry's focus on trends and rapid consumption cycles.

For consumers with above-average wealth, extrinsic motives further strengthen the positive association with purchase intentions, while intrinsic motives have the opposite effect. This indicates that wealthier individuals may be driven more by social status and external validation when making purchasing decisions, especially in the context of fast fashion, which is often associated with superficial trends and image enhancement (Han et al. 2010).

Interestingly, this study found a negative relationship between sustainable behavior and purchase intentions for less affluent consumers, which could be attributed to financial constraints limiting their ability to act on ethical values. This reinforces the idea that sustainable behavior in other areas of life does not necessarily translate into eco-friendly purchasing decisions in fast fashion, where affordability and convenience often take precedence (Bray et al. 2011). For wealthier consumers, however, sustainable behavior is positively associated with purchase intentions that wealthier individuals are more likely to align their purchasing decisions with their sustainable values, while less affluent consumers may face financial constraints that limit their ability to purchase eco-friendly products, which are often more expensive.

The negative moderating effect of wealth on the association between price and purchase intentions indicates that wealthier consumers are less price-sensitive, particularly when considering fast fashion purchases. This finding supports previous research that suggests wealthier individuals are more likely to view fashion as a long-term investment and may be willing to pay more for higher-quality, sustainable items.

Our study contributes to the growing body of the literature on CSR, pricing strategies, and consumer behavior in the fast fashion industry. By examining the interplay

of these factors alongside individual difference variables, we provide a more nuanced understanding of how brands can effectively communicate their sustainability efforts while maintaining competitive market positioning. The results suggest that fast fashion brands should prioritize authentic and impactful CSR initiatives, as these efforts can positively influence consumer perceptions and purchase intentions, particularly among wealthier consumers who are less price-sensitive and more likely to invest in sustainable products.

However, brands must be mindful of the potential for consumer skepticism and "CSR fatigue" (Wagner et al. 2009), especially in a sector often associated with superficial trends and rapid consumption. Effective communication strategies should focus on transparency and consistency, ensuring that CSR initiatives are perceived as genuine and aligned with the brand's overall practices.

The findings also highlight the importance of considering individual differences when developing marketing strategies. Brands should tailor their messaging to specific consumer segments, taking into account factors such as wealth, age, and motivations for sustainable behavior. For instance, promoting the social status benefits of sustainable fashion may resonate with wealthier, extrinsically motivated consumers, while emphasizing the environmental impact could appeal to those with strong intrinsic motivations.

6. Limitations and Further Research Directions

This study is not without limitations. First, the sample was collected online and consisted mainly of young adults from developed countries. This limits the generalizability of the findings to other demographics and cultural contexts. Future research should consider more diverse samples to explore potential cross-cultural variations in consumer responses to CSR and pricing strategies in the fast fashion industry.

Second, the study used a scenario-based experimental design, which, while allowing for the controlled manipulation of variables, may not fully capture the complexity of real-life purchasing decisions. Future research could employ field experiments or longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of CSR and pricing on consumer behavior in naturalistic settings.

Finally, this study involved a limited set of non-manipulation variables. Future research could expand this scope by considering additional factors, such as environmental attitudes, fashion involvement, and social norms, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between consumer characteristics, CSR efforts, and pricing strategies in shaping purchase intentions.

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