How socially-responsible are the fast fashion retailers and their consumers?
Presenter: Dr Ranis Cheng

Fast fashion is the driving force for modern consumer culture, persuading consumers toward buying more and more clothing regardless of their needs. Fast fashion and sustainability are often been seen as two contradictory concepts. Fast fashion has been refereed as ‘McFashion’ (Joy et al., 2012), as the industry continues to drive the excess consumption of apparel (Cao et al., 2014). This has resulted in excessive clothing consumption and the disposal of superfluous clothing (Yee et al., 2016). Fast fashion adopts mass production and consumption, and this has often led to the section being perceived as unsustainable, and generates higher unethical and/or environmentally damaging practices (Pal, 2016). The textile and clothing industry is considered as one of the most polluting industries in the world (Austgulen, 2015). In the U.K. alone around 2 million tonnes of clothing are purchased per annum, with the fast fashion sector making up one-fifth of the UK market (Defra, 2010). These have caused significant environmental and social impacts in the UK and overseas.

From the consumers’ perspective, some argue that the change to a more sustainable fashion future has to come from the fashion consumers who take responsibility for their consumption and care about how their garments are made. Although fashion consumers are increasingly showing awareness towards sustainability (Shen, 2014), many are still reluctant to adopt sustainable changes to their consumption choices in the clothing sector (McBeill and Moore, 2015). From the retailers’ perspectives, some fast fashion retailers have started to adopt environmentally-friendly businesses strategies in recent years, for example, offering clothing made of organic cotton and involving some clothing recycle initiaties (Park and Kim, 2016).

This paper aims to investigate whether the fast fashion retailers in the U.K. and their customers are socially-responsible. The objectives of the study are as follows: Firstly, it reviews the sustainable practices of one fast fashion retailer in the U.K. and its role in facilitating socially responsible consumption in the sector. Secondly, it explores customers’ understanding and perceptions of sustainability and sustainable clothing consumption in the
U.K. fast fashion context. Thirdly, it uncovers the fast fashion consumers’ attitudes towards socially-responsible behaviours when purchasing fast fashion products.

References


