The Price of Ethical Fashion

Diarra Butler | Charles Bodkin, Ph.D.

A recent trend in the fashion industry is ethical fashion, which can be defined in multiple ways. For example, from a company’s perspective, ethical fashion can be defined as the transparency, honesty, and social responsibility of businesses within the fashion industry. Yet, an individual may define it as products within the fashion industry that represent equal pay for workers, the use of organic or non-toxic materials, and the proper use of technology to produce such materials. Although awareness of ethical fashion is on the rise in the Unites States, the literature reveals that ethical fashion companies are failing to effectively target an important consumer market—Millennials. The purpose of this study is to conduct market research through focus groups and surveys in order to further develop the understanding of U.S. Millennials’ perspectives about ethical fashion, concentrating on the national demographic.

Recent literature explains the beliefs and purchasing behavior of Millennials outside the United States, but fails to present many findings about U.S. Millennials specifically. In addition, it does not discuss any explanation for the failure in pursuing this generation of consumers. First, I will examine literature regarding Millennials’ behaviors and buying patterns. I will then collect primary research through focus groups of college students. Next, I will create a survey, using my findings from the focus groups, to gain insight from a larger sample of college students, exclusively business undergraduates. Finally, I will evaluate my results to understand the current failure to target Millennials in the ethical fashion movement. If the results support the analysis, a price will be placed on ethical fashion. The thesis will be beneficial to fashion companies that sell ethical fashion and wish to better target U.S. Millennials, and can also be used to spread awareness about the trend among all consumers. The survey can be used in courses, such as marketing and environmental, for educational purposes.