



## **O comportamento do consumidor rumo a uma moda mais sustentável e justa: proposta de perfis de consumo *Slow fashion* no Brasil**

### ***Consumer Behavior Towards a More Sustainable and Fair Fashion: proposal for Slow fashion consumption profiles in Brazil***

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#### **Resumo**

O interesse pelas questões de justiça social e sustentabilidade na indústria da moda tem crescido exponencialmente nos últimos anos, dada a preocupação com a preservação mundial dos bens naturais que permanecem na terra e a valorização dos profissionais da cadeia produtiva. O *Slow fashion* surge como um movimento relevante neste contexto, pois busca desacelerar a produção industrial massiva da área da moda. Este artigo tem como objetivo traçar perfis de consumo de produtos *Slow fashion*. Assim, planejamos e aplicamos um questionário virtual utilizando a escala “*Consumer Orientation to Slow fashion*”, com 414 voluntários do Brasil. Os dados coletados foram tratados por k-means e análise de variância. Como resultado, identificamos três perfis de orientação para o consumo *Slow fashion* no Brasil: averso à exclusividade, alta e baixa orientação.

**Palavras-chave:** Moda lenta; Consumo; Feira comercial; Sustentabilidade; Escala COSF.

#### **Abstract**

*Interest in issues of social justice and sustainability in the fashion industry has grown exponentially in recent years, given the concern for the global preservation of natural assets that remain on earth and the appreciation of professionals in the production chain. Slow fashion emerges as a relevant movement in this context, as it seeks to slow down massive industrial production in the fashion area. This article aims to outline consumption profiles of Slow fashion products. Therefore, we planned and*

applied a virtual questionnaire using the “Consumer Orientation to Slow fashion” scale, with 414 volunteers from Brazil. The collected data were treated by k-means and analysis of variance. As a result, we identified three orientation profiles for Slow fashion consumption in Brazil: averse to exclusivity, high and low orientation.

**Keywords:** *Slow fashion; Consumption; Fair trade; Sustainability; COSF scale.*

## 1. Introduction

In an increasingly connected and immediate world, fashion is not left behind when it comes to meeting the desires and needs of consumers, who yearn for products that are delivered quickly and efficiently (Joy *et al.*, 2015). This massive demand is quickly supplied through a business model called Fast fashion. Solino *et al.* (2015, p. 1036, translated by us) explain that Fast fashion “can unite the quick-response productive strategy with the use of advanced resources for product design,” in addition, they complement by explaining that it offers “current trends quickly and effectively in the form of products with short life cycle and low cost.” As a result of its quick response to the market, this fashion production system emphasizes mass consumption, encouraging environmental wear and tear and human labor exploitation.

As an alternative to this production model, the *Slow fashion* (SF) movement arises from the slow food movement, acting as a possibility to bring ideas of sustainability, ethics, and respect for human beings to the dynamics of the fashion industry (Fletcher, 2008). Based on Fletcher (2008; 2010), the precursor of *Slow fashion*, it can be defined as a movement that aims to design, produce, consume, and live fashion more healthily, considering environmental, social, ethical, and moral sustainability and the impact of your clothing production on the world.

Considering that *Slow fashion* is a research area with just over ten years of exploration, its studies of practical applications were only enhanced in 2018 (Solino, Teixeira, and Dantas, 2020). Initially, the researchers aimed to understand and conceptualize the phenomenon (Fletcher, 2008); then, there was an increase in empirical research characterizing companies and consumers. With this in mind, we did not find any work discussing the Brazilian consumer’s general orientation towards *Slow fashion* products; therefore, it has not yet been understood scientifically or from a marketing point of view.

In-depth knowledge about the consumer is a crucial element for the success of any business. According to Porter (2015), understanding consumers’ needs, desires, and behaviors is essential for formulating effective market strategies. This understanding allows companies to identify market opportunities, develop products and services that meet consumers’ needs, and create marketing and sales strategies that effectively connect with their target audience. In addition, consumer knowledge can also help companies predict and respond to changes in consumer behavior and market trends.

From a management perspective, consumer knowledge is essential for making informed and strategic decisions. As argued by Drucker (2017), companies that understand their consumers can better manage their resources effectively, adapt to changes in the business environment and maintain a competitive advantage. In marketing, Kotler, and Keller (2018)

emphasize that consumer knowledge is the basis for developing effective marketing campaigns that communicate the value of a company's products and services in a way that resonates with consumers. Finally, in product development, Ulrich and Eppinger (2020) argue that consumer knowledge is crucial for designing products that meet consumers' needs and expectations, contributing to customer satisfaction and product success in the market.

Research in the area of consumer perception and orientation of *Slow fashion* started in the studies by Jung and Jin (2014), where the authors defined five dimensions that guide their consumption, namely: a) equity, referring to the gaze of consumers on the payment of fair values to everyone involved in the production chain; b) authenticity, about the valorization of artisanal and traditional techniques; c) functionality, dealing with maximizing the practical potential of the product; d) localism, aiming to discover the orientation to the valorization of what is produced on a local scale over imported products; e) exclusivity, about the need to own products that no one else has. The authors developed a scale format method based on these dimensions to measure consumers' orientation towards *Slow fashion* products (Jung and Jin, 2016a).

Called "Consumer Orientation to *Slow fashion*" (or COSF), the scale developed by Jung and Jin (2014) seeks to discover the purchase possibilities of consumers of fashion products from the *Slow fashion* movement and identify the dimensions that guide this consumer in a specific environment. This scale was applied in other countries (Şener; Bişkin; Kılınc, 2019), where the orientation of consumers in Turkey and Kazakhstan was discussed and in the study by Suhud *et al.* (2020), in which Indonesia was investigated.

Concerning Brazil, this scale was first applied and validated by Sobreira, Silva, and Romero (2020), but the authors investigated only Ceará, a Brazilian state, not expanding the work focusing on the entire country. The authors (Sobreira; Silva; Romero, 2020) investigated a total of 461 volunteers; with this, the researchers discovered the existence of three consumption profiles: "high orientation to *Slow fashion*", "functionality-oriented,"; and "averse to exclusivity".

In Brazil, *Slow fashion* is a response to Fast fashion's rapid and unsustainable production, which significantly negatively impacts the environment and working communities. Brazilian *Slow fashion*, therefore, seeks to promote more sustainable and ethical production and consumption practices, valuing quality, durability, and social justice (Fiorin; Sehnem; Mattei, 2020). This includes, for example, using sustainably sourced materials, promoting fair and safe working conditions, and promotion of more conscious and responsible consumption (Fiorin; Sehnem; Mattei, 2020).

Furthermore, *Slow fashion* in Brazil is also characterized by a strong emphasis on valuing Brazilian culture and identity. As Assunção, Martinez, and Jacques (2021) pointed out, Brazilian *Slow fashion* brands incorporate elements of Brazilian culture and aesthetics into their designs to celebrate and preserve the country's cultural diversity. In addition, these brands also seek to promote inclusion and diversity, challenging conventional standards of beauty and promoting a more inclusive and diverse view of fashion. Thus, *Slow fashion* in Brazil is not just a question of sustainability, identity, and inclusion.

However, we argued that there is a possibility to understand which aspects are inherent to *Slow fashion* that these consumers tend to value the most in the Brazilian scenario. This information can be captured by understanding and discussing the perception and orientation

of products' practical, aesthetic, and symbolic functions resulting from the slow movement in the local context. Based on what we discussed above, this paper aims to draw consumption profiles of SF products in this exact scenario.

## 2. Methodology

This paper presents an exploratory-descriptive study with a quantitative approach. Concerning technical procedures, we conducted survey-type research, which Fowler (2014) defines as the direct questioning of groups of individuals who are expected to know. This data collection took place virtually, disseminating the questionnaire through social media, reaching more people, and meeting the current requirements of social isolation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. We follow all required ethical procedures.

### 2.1. Research instrument - “Consumer Orientation to Slow fashion” (COSF) scale

Regarding the instrument for data collection, we used the psychometric scale developed by Jung and Jin (2014), called the Consumer Orientation to *Slow fashion* (COSF), as explained above in the introduction topic. In the scale composition, the authors considered fifteen items consisting solely of statements, subdivided among the five dimensions of the SF: equity, authenticity, functionality, localism, and exclusivity (Table 1).

Table 1: Consumer Orientation to *Slow fashion* scale.

<b>Consumer Orientation to <i>Slow fashion</i> scale (COSF)</b>
<b>Equity</b>
Equi.1 – I am concerned about the working conditions of producers when I buy clothes.
Equi.2 – I am concerned about fair trade when I buy clothes.
Equi.3 – Fair compensation for apparel producers is important to me when I buy clothes.
<b>Authenticity</b>
Auten.1 – Handcrafted clothes are more valuable than mass-produced ones.
Auten.2 – Craftsmanship is very important in clothes.
Auten.3 – I value clothes made by traditional techniques.
<b>Functionality</b>
Func.1 – I tend to keep clothes as long as possible rather than discarding quickly.
Func.2 – I often enjoy wearing the same clothes in multiple ways.
Func.3 – I prefer simple and classic designs.
<b>Localism</b>

Loc.1 – I believe clothes made of locally produced materials are more valuable.
Loc.2 – I prefer buying clothes made in Brazil to clothes manufactured overseas.
Loc.3 – We need to support Brazilian apparel brands.
<b>Exclusivity</b>
Exclu.1 – Limited editions hold special appeal for me.
Exclu.2 – I am very attracted to rare apparel items.
Exclu.3 – I enjoy having clothes that others do not.

Fonte: Adaptado pelos autores de acordo com as pesquisas realizadas (Sweeney; Soutar; Johnson, 1999; Jung; Jin, 2014; Jin, 2016a; Jung; Jin, 2016B; Şener; Bişkin; Kiliç, 2019; Suhud et al., 2020; Sobreira; Silva; Romero, 2020).

The COSF scale was previously validated in Brazil, focusing on the Brazilian state of Ceará through Sobreira, Silva, and Romero (2020). Therefore, in this research, the aim is to investigate the consumption orientation profiles of Brazilians in general from a new perspective.

We created the virtual questionnaire using the Google Forms platform, which is self-administered. The questionnaire consisted of three stages. In the first stage, respondents were asked to read about the research and accept the Informed Consent Form. After this stage, in the second stage, questions regarding the sociodemographic profile were presented to the participants, consisting of nine questions: gender, sexual orientation, marital status, age, ethnicity, Brazilian region, academic-school education, work situation, and monthly income.

The third stage referred to a perception survey containing the Consumer Orientation to *Slow fashion* scale (COSF) (Table 1). Each of the items was presented to the respondents and asked to rate their level of agreement considering a five-point Likert scale, where number one corresponded to “strongly disagree” and five to “strongly agree” (Jung; Jin, 2016a).

## 2.2. Participants

Men and women aged from less than 18 years to more than 60 years participated in the research. Regarding the most apparent sociodemographic profile, it was primarily female (72.3%), aged between 19 and 29 years (41.1%), heterosexually oriented (74.6%), single (69.6%), white (61.6%), mainly from the Brazilian Northeast (65.9%), with higher education (48.1%), active professional in the market (55.8%) and with income of less than BRL 1,000 per month (26.3%).

## 2.3. Analysis and treatment of data

The data were submitted to statistical analysis software, such as Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20, IBM SPSS Amos, and XLAST. In addition to the basic



descriptive analysis, we used clustering by k-means, and analysis of variance (ANOVA), as observed in other published works on the same subject (Jung; Jin, 2014; Jung; Jin, 2016a; Jung; Jin, 2016b; Şener; Bişkin; Kiliç, 2019; Sobreira; Silva; Romero, 2020).

### 3. Findings

According to the exploratory and confirmatory statistical analysis, we observed that the functionality dimension did not adequately fit the data. Therefore, this was discarded from subsequent analyses. Nevertheless, to delimit consumption profiles aimed at the *Slow fashion* from the collected data, the k-means grouping technique was used, applying the Euclidean distance method (Kuswandi *et al.*, 2018). For constructing these classes, we considered the respondents' interaction relationships with the four dimensions of *Slow fashion* that apply to the context of this research: equity, authenticity, localism, and exclusivity.

One of the k-means technique assumptions is that the analyst must define the number of groups/clusters/profiles to generate. In previous research on the same subject, Jung, and Jin (2016b) defined four groups, while Sobreira, Silva, and Romero (2020) defined three as appropriate. To define the amount that would apply in this work, we decided on a minimum of three and a maximum of four groups using the XLSTAT software.

We observed the characteristics of each grouping possibility. After the preliminary analysis, it was found that both had significant results; however, the definition by three groups represented a segmentation with more significant variance. Thus, we considered the grouping into three profiles of orientation to the consumption of *Slow fashion* products in the context of this research (Table 2).

Table 2: Clusters – *Slow fashion* consumer orientation profiles in Brazil.

Dimensions	<i>Averse to</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	Anova	
	<i>exclusivity</i> (Cluster 1)	<i>orientation</i> (Cluster 2)	<i>orientation</i> (Cluster 3)	F	Sig.
<i>Equity</i>	4,456	4,410	3,135	294,730	< 0,0001
<i>Authenticity</i>	3,898	4,447	3,920	19,250	< 0,0001
<i>Localism</i>	3,947	4,241	3,775	4,050	0,018
<i>Exclusivity</i>	1,867	3,789	2,640	250,377	< 0,0001
<b>Orientation</b>	Medium, lower for exclusivity	High	Low	<b>Participants</b>	
<b>Participants per cluster (N)</b>	141	160	113	414	

Fonte: Autores.

In the research by Jung and Jin (2016b), the authors identified four consumption profiles, which they called: “high involvement”, “conventional”, “exclusivity-oriented”, and “low involvement”. On the other hand, in the research by Sobreira, Silva, and Romero (2020),

focusing on the Ceará scenario, the Brazilian state, three groups different from the other authors' proposal were observed configuring: “high orientation”, “functionality-oriented” and “averse to exclusivity”. In the context of this work, we identified three groups – those that were conceptually correlated at certain levels with those previously found in the literature review – namely: “averse to exclusivity”, “high orientation”, and “low orientation”.

Regarding the configurations of each cluster, the first group was called “averse to exclusivity” (n = 141; 34%). This group has a medium orientation average in all other three dimensions, with a lesser focus on authenticity; however, it presents an exceptional refusal when consumption involves rare, limited-edition pieces that few people have (exclusivity). It is also worth noticing a slightly lesser tendency towards authenticity, demonstrating that this group does not care much about handcrafted or traditional sewing techniques. This group opposes the “exclusivity-oriented” profile identified in the work of Jung and Jin (2016b). However, this same group was found in Sobreira, Silva, and Romeiro's (2020) research, demonstrating a tendency in Brazil to have a group that refuses the context of exclusivity in *Slow fashion* products.

In the case of the second cluster, we called “high orientation” (n = 160; 39%), the group with the highest number of respondents. This group comprises people with a higher orientation towards the consumption of *Slow fashion* products, with a high average in all dimensions studied. There is also a greater focus on authenticity; however, unlike the previous one, there is a positive attitude towards handmade clothes and handcrafted products. Therefore, they present a lesser orientation towards exclusivity, although this was the only cluster with a positive average for this dimension. This same group was found in Jung and Jin (2016) and Sobreira, Silva, and Romeiro (2020), with the same characteristics.

Finally, the third cluster was called “low orientation” (n = 113; 27%), comprising the group with the smallest number of individuals. It comprises people with little orientation to all *Slow fashion* product consumption dimensions. The authenticity dimension is highlighted as having a more positive relationship with this group, demonstrating that, despite the resistance to consumption, its components tend to be more interested when there is a context of traditional techniques and crafts. On the other hand, like the other clusters, the dimension of exclusivity was the one with the lowest level of orientation. This group was also identified in the research by Jung and Jin (2016b), named “low involvement”, but not in the research by Silveira, Silva, and Romeiro (2020).

As shown in Table 3, there is statistical significance for all dimensions of *Slow fashion* orientation, which indicates the validity of the results for the context of this research. After ANOVA, to identify where the differences between the groups and their respective dimensions were located, the post hoc test of Turkey HSD was carried out, comparing two by two each of the generated clusters (Table 3).

According to the results presented in Table 3, we observed that the first cluster (averse to exclusivity) demonstrates a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.001$ ) in all dimensions, except equity, compared to the second cluster (high orientation). Regarding the third cluster (low orientation), compared to the first (averse to exclusivity), a statistically significant difference was identified ( $p < 0.05$ ) in all dimensions except for authenticity. Comparing the second (high orientation) and third (low orientation) clusters, we found a statistically

significant difference ( $p < 0.001$ ) among all dimensions of orientation to the consumption of SF.

Table 3: Comparison of averages between *Slow fashion* consumption-oriented profile clusters in Brazil.

Groups		Equity		Authenticity		Localism		Exclusivity	
(A)	(B)	(A-B)	Sig.	(A-B)	Sig.	(A-B)	Sig.	(A-B)	Sig.
1	2	0,458	0,653	-0,549	0,000	-0,293	0,000	-1,922	0,000
1	3	1,320	0,000	0,022	0,938	0,172	0,030	-0,592	0,000
2	3	1,274	0,000	0,527	0,000	0,465	0,000	1,329	0,000

Fonte: Autores.

#### 4. Theoretical implications

The findings of this study have several theoretical implications. Firstly, the study highlights the importance of understanding consumer profiles in the context of *Slow fashion* (SF) consumption. The identification of three distinct consumer profiles – “averse to exclusivity”, “high orientation”, and “low orientation” – suggests that consumers’ attitudes towards SF are not homogenous. This aligns with the consumer behavior theory, which posits that consumers’ attitudes and behaviors are influenced by various factors, including personal values, beliefs, and social influences (Solomon, 2014).

Secondly, the study’s findings suggest that equity, localism, and authenticity are essential for the “averse to exclusivity” group. This supports the notion that consumers’ attitudes towards SF are influenced by their perceptions of fairness, localism, and authenticity (Niinimäki; Hassi, 2011). This group’s positive relationship with these dimensions suggests that they value fair trade, locally produced goods, and authentic products.

Thirdly, the “high orientation” group’s positive orientation to all dimensions of SF consumption, with a higher level for the authenticity dimension, and less for exclusivity, suggests that this group values authenticity more than exclusivity. This aligns with the authenticity theory of consumption, which posits that consumers increasingly seek authentic experiences and products (Gilmore; Pine, 2007).

Fourthly, the “low orientation” group’s average below the general average in all dimensions of SF suggests that this group may be less engaged with SF. However, their better relation to the dimensions of authenticity and localism suggests that they may be potential traditionalists. This aligns with the traditionalist theory of consumption, which posits that some consumers prefer traditional products and practices (Sheth; Newman; Gross, 1991).

The study’s implications for the national apparel industry suggest that understanding consumers’ attitudes towards SF can inform product development strategies. This aligns with the market orientation theory, which posits that understanding consumers’ needs and preferences can enhance firms’ competitiveness (Kohli; Jaworski, 1990).



## 5. Managerial implications

The managerial implications of this study are manifold and can provide valuable insights for businesses operating in the *Slow fashion* (SF) industry, particularly in Brazil.

Firstly, the Identification of three distinct consumer profiles - “averse to exclusivity”, “high orientation”, and “low orientation” – can help businesses segment their market and tailor their marketing strategies accordingly. For instance, businesses can target the “averse to exclusivity” group with marketing messages emphasizing equity, localism, and authenticity. For the “high orientation” group, businesses can highlight all dimensions of SF consumption, emphasizing authenticity. For the “low orientation” group, businesses can focus on promoting the authenticity and localism of their products.

Nevertheless, understanding that today the creation process increasingly seeks to develop a production model centered on the user/target audience, knowing the desires, perceptions, and what adds value to future consumers is essential to obtain satisfactory results (Löbach, 2001). Thus, if designers had access to safer data about users’ aesthetic, symbolic and practical needs, product designs would have fewer launch risks, as they would be based on rationally taken decisions based on statistical data (Löbach, 2001).

The study’s implications for the national apparel industry suggest that businesses can leverage these insights to develop SF products that cater to the preferences of different consumer groups. This can enhance their competitiveness and help them meet the growing demand for SF products.

Finally, the study’s limitation regarding the distribution of volunteers across all Brazilian states suggests that businesses should be cautious when generalizing these findings to the entire Brazilian population. They should consider conducting their own market research to better understand their target market’s attitudes towards SF.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights that can help businesses in the SF industry better understand their consumers, tailor their marketing strategies, and develop products that meet their consumers’ needs and preferences.

## 6. Final considerations

In summary, the group “averse to exclusivity” was positively related to equity, localism, and authenticity, the latter being at a lower level. In contrast, the “high orientation” group was found to be positively orientated to all dimensions of SF consumption, with a higher level of authenticity and less for exclusivity. The “low orientation” group has an individual average below the general average in all dimensions of *Slow fashion*. In comparison, it was better related to the dimensions of authenticity and localism, which makes them be read as potential traditionalists. It was impossible to statistically relate the demographic variables to these groups, so drawing a profile based on this information was impossible.

The results of this research imply social developments, where trends in how consumption has been developing can be observed and correlated with consumer preferences; with that, the national apparel industry can appropriate this information and plan *Slow fashion* products that have their configurations oriented to these groups of consumers. It ends by saying that one of the limitations of this research was that there was not a normal distribution of volunteers among all Brazilian states. Based on this, it is concluded that its results cannot be generalized, as they do not represent the perception of a probabilistic sample of the Brazilian population.

For future work, it is possible to go deeper into questions referring only to the value perceived by the customer, appropriating the PERVAL scale and measuring the influence of the dimensions of quality, emotion, price, behavior, and reputation on the purchase intention. In addition, one can also investigate the visual attributes, and aesthetic aspects, used in the visual language of *Slow fashion* products, tracing which elements are most used to refer to the ecologically oriented and if this has a significant relationship in the purchase of products. From this, one can also focus on the visual quality perceived by customers, comparing the intention with the interpretation.

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