



A New Integrated Framework for the Sustainable Performance of Fast Fashion Firms

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The fast-changing consumer demands for new styles at affordable prices and the increase in global competition have led to the success of fast fashion as evidenced in the rapid global growth of Zara, H&M, and Forever 21. For manufacturers, fast fashion refers to a manufacturing strategy to release new product in a shorter cycle to satisfy volatile consumer demands (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). For consumers, fast fashion refers to hot trends, low prices, low quality, or throwaway clothing. Labeled as disposable fashion, fast fashion has often received negative media attention of being an unsustainable strategy. To address the negative perceptions associated with fast fashion and also develop sustainable competitive advantages, some fast fashion firms have started actively responding to social and environmental concerns (e.g., employing recycled materials and hemp, removing hazardous chemicals, donations). Despite of its growing importance in the fashion industry, fast fashion as a manufacturing strategy is not well identified. Fast fashion as a manufacturing strategy has potential for satisfying consumer desires for new products at affordable prices, while making manufacturing more sustainable and efficient if managed right. To guide fast fashion firms in building more robust business model, this study proposes a new conceptual framework that incorporates a sustainable business strategy for a long-term business success.

This study applies the resource-based view (RBV) theory to contextualize fast fashion in the context of global manufacturing. RBV, which is one of the most widely accepted frameworks in business management studies, states that firms have sustainable competitive advantages when they utilize their resources and capabilities (Barney, 1991; Leong, Snyder, & Ward, 1990). This study operationalizes the four key capabilities of fast fashion firms as following: 1) new product design and development (NPDD) capability referring to designing a variety of new products reflecting the latest trends; 2) just in time (JIT) capability referring to production and delivery at a right time, at a right quantity, and at a lower cost while removing waste in production, materials, and workers and simplifying all processes (e.g., cutting, marking, and sewing); 3) total quality management (TQM) capability referring to offering the best value to customers; and 4) lower cost capability referring to negotiating and procuring materials (e.g., fabric, subsidiaries, and packages) and shipments at lower prices. Business process management (BPM), referring to activities to develop constant improvements, enables the firm capabilities to improve firm performance (Ray, Barney, & Muhanna, 2004). In addition, fast fashion firms need to incorporate sustainability throughout their business practices to address growing concerns as a result of disposable fashion and build sustainable practices for long-term business success (Caniato, Caridi, Crippa, & Moretto, 2012). A growing number of consumers are conscious of sustainability and prefer to use socially and environmentally-oriented firms and products.

Moving away from a short-term insight that sustainable manufacturing costs more, fast fashion firms can implement sustainability actions such as the reduction of the usage of garment and packaging materials, as well as the avoidance of violations of the labor standards. Despite its challenges, fast fashion firms also need to build sustainable business practices in terms of environmental, organizational, and social aspects.

Through a deep-literature review, this study proposes an integrated framework to guide fast fashion in incorporating sustainability in its business processes (see Figure 1). The model provides the linkages between fast fashion capability, BPM, and sustainability actions on firm performance. Recognizing the prominence of fast fashion for improving performance, this study will make two significant contributions. First, fast fashion is articulated in terms of capabilities: NPDD, JIT, TQM, and lower cost. Second, this research shows the importance of considering the aspect of sustainability actions to seek fashion firm's long term performance. Our research can expand theoretical development, field, and survey research.

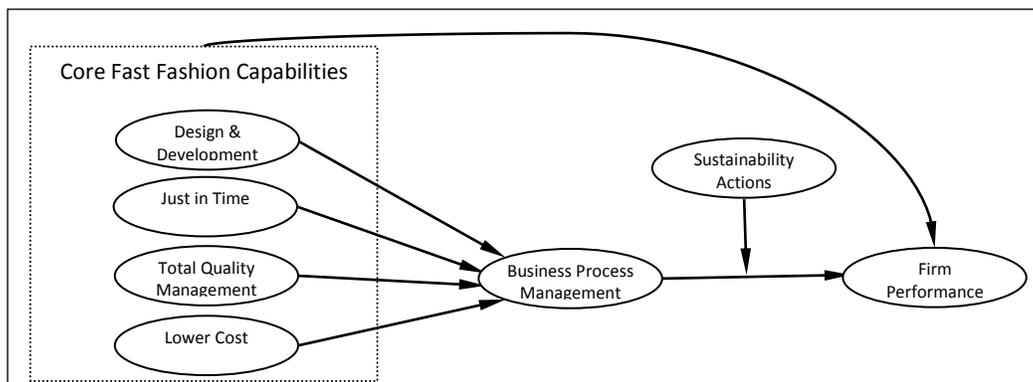


Figure 1. A Proposed Framework for Fast Fashion Firm

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