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THE AGE OF FAST FASHION: HOW CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR HAS CHANGED AND HOW IT'S IMPACTING THE COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT

Giulia Barbato: The age of fast fashion: how consumer behavior has changed and how it's impacting the companies

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Consumer trends are constantly evolving, nowadays choosing a garment could have significant environmental and social impacts. Therefore, to understand if consumers make informed choices, fast fashion companies were analyzed in the first part of the thesis. Through the research, I found that the business model of these companies focuses on a quick response to the growth in demand, which constantly requires the production of a new selection of clothes but low prices. Unfortunately to do this, companies produce abroad by exploiting workers and polluting the surrounding environment. From here I tried to analyze if there could be solutions to this situation, one of these is the introduction of sustainability within fast fashion companies.

How? through the implementation of CSR and Green standards and labels. With this new information, consumers are able to recognize companies that are committed to being more transparent, so as to guarantee them a more conscious choice. In fact, the sustainable options on the market are various, from vintage to slow fashion. Other consumers, on the other hand, prefer not to give up on trendy products at low prices. This, as we will see, is due to the fact that some are simply not interested in purchasing products with a lower environmental and social impact, but in other cases they are simply not informed enough to understand what other options are available, or they are deceived by misleading words that convince to buy sustainable products, as in the case of the strategies used by H&M.

Keywords: Sustainability, Fast-Fashion, Consumer behavior;

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is one of the most widely used terms right now because it is related to the impacts that has on the climate change, which is the biggest environmental threat humanity has ever faced. The concept of "sustainability" arises, in a certain sense, from the instinctual need of the human being to consider every resource next to him as precious and unique, already predisposed in nature to its own reuse and, possibly, its recycling. The consequences of climate change, in fact, force human being to reconsider the importance of the environment in which he operates.

This ongoing topic is changing many things making the future uncertain, which this reflects in the markets, in the companies and consequently in people's choice.

To understand these changes, this thesis will focus on behavioral economics, because it combines elements of economics and psychology to understand how and why people behave the way they do in the real world. The big problem of climate change proves even more that people are not always "rational" or "optimal" when they have to choose, especially at a time like this when the information are too many and too confused.

Especially for this reason, it seemed convenient for companies to invest in communicating their commitment in terms of sustainability, even if in several cases with mainly opportunistic purposes. These practices, generally referred to as *Greenwashing*, tend to capitalize on the advantages (development of reputation, attraction of eco-conscious consumers, etc.) of a business approach based on sustainability, trying to divert attention from one's 'unethical' or unethical conduct, properly aligned with the principles of sustainability. In fact, more recent studies¹ have shown how the abuse of activities attributable to greenwashing is generating opposite effects in terms of communication effectiveness, increasing the skepticism of consumers with respect to corporate social responsibility communication.

A clear example is fast fashion business model like H&M and Zara. This kind of business models use a retail strategy of adapting merchandise assortments to current and emerging trends as quickly and effectively as possible. Usually, these low-cost collections presented annually are 4 but in the case of fast fashion 52 collections are proposed per year. But still, many people choose to buy from fast fashion businesses making it the only growing sector in the last 15 years, ignoring the fact that in 2015, according to The Guardian, it was the sector

¹ DELMAS M.A., BURBANO V.C. (2011), "The drivers of greenwashing", California Management Review, vol. 54, n. 1, pp. 64-87.

that created the most pollution. In fact, the fashion industry, as will be described in this thesis, is a major contributor to problems of social and environmental sustainability. The environmental impacts include energy use and generation of greenhouse gas emissions in production and use, water use, toxicity, hazardous waste, and effluent associated with production stage pre-treatment chemicals, dyes, and finishes. Social impacts include poor working conditions, including sweat shops and child labor, low wages and long hours, workers' rights and health and safety risks. All impacts are exacerbated by the ever-increasing volume of clothing consumption.

Contrary to this, a lot of consumers have evolved over the ages and have become educated about the materials and manufacturing process, which results in their growing interest to make socially responsible choices while updating their wardrobes with a value tag.

In conclusion, the goal of my thesis will be to analyze behavioral change starting from the reasons for which it was generated in fast fashion companies, to then understand how people have decided to act.

1. WHAT HAS CHANGED IN THE COMPANIES?

1.1.THE EVOLUTION OF FAST FASHION COMPANIES

In the last few years the fashion market has changed. Globalization, changes in competitiveness and variations in consumer preferences have led to the development of new logics in the fashion market that have favored the spread and success of new business models.

Among the most significant circumstances for this revolution in the fashion market is the appearance of globalization, which changed and has profoundly upset the balance of markets around the world. Moreover, it contributed, also thanks to technological developments, to the modification of consumer preferences by standardizing the needs of people and reducing the differences in purchasing choices and preferences. This allowed fashion companies to take advantage of a standard production for all markets in which they could begin to compete and also being able to exploit the advantages of building economies of scale. In fact, all the factors analyzed, from the opening of international markets to the decrease in labor costs and the change in consumer needs, had increased the level of competition in the fashion market, giving the impetus to companies to develop new structures and ways of differentiation. In order to outperform the competition. Since the price could not be the point on which to compete, the idea spread that competence should be based on time, flexibility, and speed in satisfying the market.

In this context, Fast fashion is beginning to be mentioned.

Fast fashion can be defined as “a retail strategy of adapting merchandise assortments to current and emerging trends as quickly and effectively as possible²”, but it has also been characterized by several marketing factors such as low predictability, high impulse purchase, shorter life cycle, and high volatility of market demand.

To understand the origin of this business model it is necessary to focus on history because the world of fashion has changed and with it also business models.

The fashion trend until the Second World War was much more contained, most women sewed their clothes at home only the upper class could afford to go to the tailor and have new custom-made suits. In the post-war 1950s, it became common to buy mass-produced garments

² Sull & Turconi, 2008, p. 5.

in the factory, especially young people looking for ready-made clothes in stores. In the 1960s, as the number of textile industries grew, some stages of production began to be located in underdeveloped countries, where there are no landfill systems for the chemicals used in dyeing fabrics, nor is there any type of disposal of the waste generated. In this specific period, they saw a possibility, as small shops, those that would later become the great models of Fast Fashion.

Since the 1980s a typical life cycle for fashion apparel had four stages:

- 1) Introduction and adoption by fashion leaders;
- 2) Growth and increase in public acceptance;
- 3) Mass conformity (maturation);
- 4) Decline and obsolescence of fashion.

The fashion calendar during this time was primarily based on the fabric exhibitions, fashion shows and trade fairs, that consisted of the basic pattern of Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter ranges which typically resulted in developing a seasonal range in one full year.

However, towards the beginning of the 1990s, retailers started focusing on expanding their product range with updated products and faster responsiveness to the ‘newness’ of the fashion trends; and providing ‘refreshing’ products instead of only cost efficiencies for manufacturing. This was mainly due to the fact that fashion shows and catwalks became a public phenomenon, where photographs of the recent fashion shows could be seen in magazines and on the web leading to demystification of the fashion process. As a result, fashion conscious consumers were exposed to exclusive designs and styles inspired from runways.

Retailers such as Zara, H&M, Mango, New Look, and Topshop were adopting these designs rapidly to attract consumers. Then, they started introducing interpretations of the runway designs to the stores in a minimum of three to five weeks, creating like this 52 seasons per year, and this made them more and more popular.

Figure 1 shows, an example of this behavior, an Emilio Pucci look for Spring and Summer season 2022, Figure 2 shows a quite similar look that Zara proposed. Some details must be specified, these two are very similar but with some differences. In fact, fast fashion brands usually copy designs and patterns, but with notable differences. The Emilio Pucci version is 100% silk, the Zara version is 100% polyester, both with completely different prices.

In Figures 3 and 4, there’s a clear similarity between the two shoes. The Versace collection is also current (2022), Asos design has managed to copy and produce it very quickly, in order to always keep up with the current trend.



Figure 1: Emilio Pucci SS '22 (750 € pants, 1100 € shirt);



Figure 2: Dupe from Zara (50 € pants, 50 € shirt);



Figure 3: Versace "Plateau intrico" SS '22 (1090 €);



Figure 4: Asos design dupe (46 €);

In order to increase the variety of fashion apparel in the market, the concept of adding more phases to the existing seasons (which is the period during which fashion products are sold) in a fashion calendar came into existence.

To respond to the new production and the need to satisfy consumers' demand, in the early 2000 the global apparel industry has experienced a compound annual growth rate of 4.3%,

reaching a market size of USD 1.7 trillion in 2012 (Euromonitor International 2013), thanks to these new industry players – known as “fast-fashion retailers”. Consumption has changed, people buy more clothing pieces, for example, in the UK it increased from 18,7 to 29,5 between 2000 and 2012³.

Table 1 shows 35 clothing and accessories companies with the typical characteristics of the system analyzed so far: affordable fashion products, a wide and changing offer, speed in responding to the market.

1	ASOS	19	Next
2	Bershka	20	Oysho
3	Bestseller	21	Peacocks
4	C&A	22	Primark
5	Charlotte Russe	23	Pull & Bear
6	Cotton On	24	Rainbow Shops
7	Esprit	25	Renner
8	Comme ça ism	26	Riachuelo
9	Forever 21	27	River Island
10	Giordano	28	s. Oliver
11	H&M	29	Shasa
12	Label Rose	30	Stradivarius
13	Mango (clothing)	31	Topshop
14	Massimo Dutti	32	United Colors of Benetton
15	Metersbonwe	33	Who.A.U
16	Miss Selfridge	34	Uniqlo
17	New Look	35	Zara
18	NewYorker		

Table 1: List of fashion brands, (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fast_fashion);

Nowadays, these are companies that sell their products mainly in shops located all over the world but with a precise geographical distribution of the offices.

More than half of the brands are based in Europe, between England, Spain, and Italy, only 5 brands are present in both Asia and North America, while the percentages in South America and Oceania are very low.

In terms of their size and global importance, Spain's Zara and Sweden's H&M are at the top of the rankings. The two companies rise above the others to be the most recognized,

³ Euromonitor International 2013.

globally, as a Fast Fashion brand. With a value of \$ 17,712m and \$ 16,826m respectively, they were included in the Interbrand Best Global Brands⁴ 2018 ranking at 25th and 30th place.

⁴ Best Global Brands, 2018 Rank: www.interbrand.com/best-brands/best-global-brands/2018/ranking/.

1.2. THE FAST FASHION BUSINESS MODEL

In this chapter will be analyzed the fast *Fashion Business Model*, which has the following specific features:

- Highly responsive supply chain.
- Speed-to-market.
- Sensitivity to trends from catwalks.
- Image of product scarcity.
- New merchandise every week.
- Flexibility.

Its success comes from its ability to be extremely fast, thanks to the fact that it uses these logics:

- 1) *Pull logic*: it allows to activate the production on the basis of the actual needs of the market;
- 2) *Just in time logic*: which allows you to minimize stocks by producing only what you expect to sell in a very short time or that has already been sold.

The fast fashion system combines these logics in the *quick response and enhanced design systems*. The first one has standard design abilities, but the production phase is fast. As we can see in the Figure 5 the process of event in the quick response systems before the selling season and during the selling season⁵.

⁵ Gérard P. Cachon, Robert Swinney, 2011.

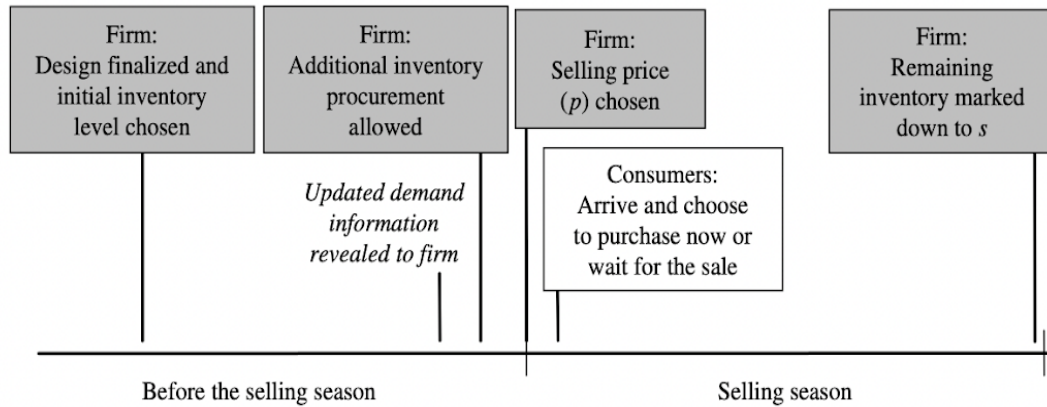


Figure 5: “Sequence of events in the quick response system” Cachon and Swinney: *The Value of Fast Fashion Management Science* 57(4), pp. Figure 4778–795, © 2011 INFORMS

With this model the firm can procure inventory both before and after receiving a forecast update prior to the start of the selling season. Inventory procured prior to learning demand information is obtained for a low cost, whereas additional inventory procured after learning the realized value of market size incurs an additional cost because of expedited manufacturing and shipping expenses. When making the inventory procurement following the realization of demand information, it is easy to see that as long as the margin on each unit is positive, the optimal action of the firm is to produce precisely enough inventory to cover all full price demand⁶. The only possible candidate equilibrium is one in which all consumers attempt to purchase at the full price. In this case, the firm’s expected profit with quick response as a function of the initial inventory procurement and price. In sum, quick response provides value to the firm via two distinct effects⁷:

1. *The sales effect:* All else being equal, the sales effect is the reduction in lost sales when quick response is implemented.
2. *The behavioral effect:* The behavioral effect is the increase in the selling price when quick response is implemented because consumers anticipate a lower probability of a sale (so they are willing to pay a higher initial price).

In the second design, the enhanced design, the production lead times are long, but the firm invests in improved design efforts that result in greater value to consumers. The sequence of events is identical to that depicted in Figure 1, thus, the firm can exploit enhanced design capabilities to raise prices without increasing strategic waiting, which is clearly beneficial to

⁶ Gérard P. Cachon, Robert Swinney, 2011.

⁷ Gérard P. Cachon, Robert Swinney, 2011.

the firm if the increase in costs is not too high. The enhanced design influences firm profit via three distinct effects⁸:

1. *The valuation effect*: The valuation effect is the increase in price.
2. *The cost effect*: The cost effect is adding costs to the marginal production cost, which decreases the product margin and increases the loss incurred on excess inventory, holding all else constant.
3. *The behavioral effect*: Because of the change in valuations and costs, the optimal inventory level changes, resulting in either a decrease or increase in the probability of a clearance sale, which in turn increases or decreases the price consumers are willing to pay.

Similar to the quick response case, the first two mechanisms (the valuation and cost effects) exist even if customers are completely nonstrategic. Another mechanism, called latter mechanism, exists only if customers exhibit strategic behavior. Unlike the quick response case, these effects need not be beneficial to the firm. In particular, the cost effect clearly decreases firm profit, and the behavioral effect may either increase or decrease firm profit (because the price may go up or down as a consequence of this effect).

The fast fashion system combines operating characteristics of both designs systems. As, a result, the firm is capable of both raising consumer values for the product and reducing supply-demand mismatch. The sequence of events in the fast fashion system is the same as that depicted in Figure 5. The fast fashion model takes from the enhanced design model the fact that consumers earn an extra value per unit and every unit incurs an additional cost. As in the quick response system, the firm has the option of obtaining additional inventory close to the selling season after receiving perfect demand information, at an additional cost. In this specific case, the firm can leverage a fast fashion system to raise the equilibrium selling price in multiple ways via the mechanisms generated by the component strategies of fast fashion: quick response allows the firm to raise the price via the behavioral effect, whereas enhanced design allows the firm to alter the selling price via both the valuation and behavioral price effects. The combination of these effects results in a fast fashion system yielding the greatest equilibrium price (provided, as in the quick response system, costs are not too high so as to make the second inventory procurement option unprofitable).

⁸ Gérard P. Cachon, Robert Swinney, 2011.

On the other hand, fast fashion results in higher equilibrium selling prices, this does not necessarily imply that a fast fashion firm (such as Zara) will have greater prices than a firm using traditional production. This apparent discrepancy is due to the fact that our analysis compares prices for different production systems holding all else equal, in particular, baseline product quality. In addition to being famous for low prices and fast fashion production, these firms are also known to use cheaper materials, resulting in less durable, lower quality products.

For these firms the base consumer value and base production cost are both likely to be lower than at a higher-quality competitor, like traditional department store. These kinds of companies get to choose where the products are being made, they have the possibility to switch if the factory that produces the garments can't make it that cheap anymore.

1.3. THE IMPACTS OF THE WORLD OF FASHION

A natural question after analyzing this business model can be: is this kind of process environmentally friendly? The answer seems to be “no” because consumers only use the fashion items for a short period before replacing them with new ones. These fashion products can easily become “fashion-obsolete”, and this will lead serious environmental problems, in fact, the fashion industry is the second largest polluter in the world, just after the oil industry. But the overall industry has one of the highest levels of negligence concerning exploitation of the workplace and social well-being. For these reasons, these companies can be called *Sweatshop*⁹ and they are the main responsible of the following environment and social related problems.

Water pollution: in most of the countries in which garments are produced, untreated toxic wastewaters from textiles factories are dumped directly into the rivers, which makes it responsible for the 20% of industrial water pollution from textile treatment and dyeing¹⁰. This water can contain mercury, arsenic and among others that can be extremely harmful to the aquatic life and the health of millions of people living by those riverbanks, like in the case of Bangladesh. In fact, Bangladesh is the world’s second biggest garment manufacturing hub after China exporting \$34 billion worth of garments in 2019. Ridwanul Haque, chief executive of the Dhaka-based NGO Agroho, provided thought his organization clean drinking water and free medical care to marginalized communities in Bangladesh, because the rivers and canals that run through the city of Dhaka have turned black due to the sludge and sewage produced by textile factories. But the contamination sometimes doesn’t stop there and can reach the sea and eventually the oceans¹¹.

Another major source of water contamination, for example, is the use of fertilizers for cotton production, which heavily pollutes runoff waters and evaporation waters¹². The chemical-laden water is also used to irrigate crops, a recent study¹³ showed that textile dyes

⁹ The true cost, *Sweatshop* is a pejorative term for a workplace characterized by poor and socially unacceptable working conditions. Work can be difficult, dangerous, climatically contestable, and underpaid. Sweatshops workers can work long hours on low wages, despite laws requiring the payment of a minimum wage; laws against child labor can also be violated.

¹⁰ Global Fashion Agenda (GFA) & The Boston, Consulting Group (BCG). Pulse of the fashion industry. https://www.globalfashionagenda.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Pulse-of-the-Fashion-Industry_2017.pdf (2017), (visited on March 5, 2022).

¹¹ Helen Regan, 2020.

¹² The True Cost, 2015.

¹³ Maiko Sakamoto, Tofayel Ahmed, Salma Bagum and Hamidul Huq, “Water pollution and the Textile Industry in Bangladesh: Flawed Corporate Practices or Restrictive Opportunities?”, MDPI, 2019, (visited on March 5, 2022).

were present in vegetables and fruit grown around Savar (Bangladesh). Once in the wastewater, dyeing chemicals are very difficult to remove, because the substances don't degrade so they remain in the environment. European Union, China, Japan, India, and Vietnam have all banned some azo dyes because under certain conditions they break down and release aromatic amines, which is a type of chemical compound that can increase the risk of cancer.

Water consumption: This industry is also the second largest consumer of water (1.5 trillion liters per year). As reference, it can take up to 200 tons of freshwater per ton of dyed fabric¹⁴. An example is cotton, which needs a lot of water and heat to grow, so it is usually cultivated in warm and dry areas. Up to 20,000 liters of water are needed to produce just 1 kg of cotton. This creates dramatic ecological consequences such as the desertification of the areas where the cotton production (an example is the Aral Sea).

Microfibers pollution: there's a connection between synthetic garment, like polyester, nylon, etc. and the release of microfibers into the water. The fashion industry contributes for 190,000 tons per year of the 35% of the oceanic primary microplastic pollution and produces vast quantities of textile waste¹⁵. But the problem doesn't stop only there, Ocean Wise, a marine conservation organization, estimated in October 2019, that U.S. and Canadian households release over 870 tons of plastic microfibers into the ocean every year from laundry alone. This can increase the problem of pollution especially in the food chain, because diverse marine species from plankton to mammals have been found to accidentally ingest the plastic microfibers and microplastics. Ocean Wise's report raises concerns about marine life mistaking them for food because that can work their way up through the food chain, potentially causing harm to human consumers.

Waste problem: The fashion industry produces >1.7 billion tons annually of CO₂, basically the 10% of the global emissions¹⁶. The rising of the environmental impact can be attributed to the substantial increase in clothing consumption and textile production. Global per

¹⁴ Mathilde Charpail, 2017.

¹⁵ Quantis, Measuring fashion: insights from the environmental impact of the global apparel and footwear industries. Full report and methodological considerations. [quantis-intl.com https://quantis-intl.com/measuring-fashion-report](https://quantis-intl.com/measuring-fashion-report) (2018). This report provides calculations of the impacts of fashion, including the footwear industry, (visited on January 7, 2022).

¹⁶ United Nations Climate Change. UN helps fashion industry shift to low carbon. [unfccc.int https://unfccc.int/news/un-helps-fashion-industry-shift-to-low-carbon](https://unfccc.int/news/un-helps-fashion-industry-shift-to-low-carbon) (2018), (visited on November 20, 2021).

capita textile production has increased from 5.9 kg to 13 kg per year over the period 1975-2018. On the other hand, the global consumption has risen to an estimated 62 million tons of textile productions per year and is projected to reach 102 million tons by 2030. As a result, fashion brands are now producing almost twice the amount of clothing today compared with before the year 2000, in order to cover the constant request of trendy low-priced products.

Around 92 million tons of clothing per year ends up in landfill or is burnt including unsold product¹⁷. The average American throws away 82 pounds of textile waste each year, adding that up to more than 11 million tons of textile waste from the USA alone. Most of this waste is non-biodegradable, so, it means that it sits in landfills for 200 years or more, while realizing harmful gases into the air.

The journey of these unsold clothes begins with donating them to local charity shops, 10% of them are sold to local thrift stores and the rest is donated¹⁸. But the unsold is not kept in the shops, in fact, they pack and ship them to developing countries, like Haiti. In this specific country, as the amount of secondhand clothing coming into Haiti has increased, the local clothing industry here has disappeared.

Chemicals pollution: Chemicals are used in every part of the textile production for making fiber, dyeing, bleaching, and wet processing of fabrics¹⁹. Since these clothes can contain a lot of chemicals, this can be dangerous for our body and, of course the environment. For example, producing a single pair of jeans consumes around 7,500 liters of water, from growing raw cotton to finished product, according to the UN²⁰. To ensure the typical blue color of the jeans, the thread or fabric is repeatedly dunked in huge vast of synthetic indigo dye. After dyeing, the denim is treated and washed with more chemicals to soften or texture it. In order to get specific shades like the faded or “worn in” look requires even more chemical bathing, which uses acids, enzymes, bleach and formaldehyde. For this reason, the heavy use of chemicals, especially, in cotton farming is causing diseases and premature death among cotton farmers.

In the case of India, most of its cotton is grown in the Punjab region, which has quickly become the largest user of pesticides in India. Dr. Pritpal Singh, director of the Faridkot center,

¹⁷ Dahlbo, H., Aalto, K., Eskelinen, H. & Salmenperä, H. Increasing textile circulation — consequences and requirements. *Sustain. Prod. Consumption* 9, 44–57 (2017). Ellen MacArthur Foundation (EMF). Circular Fibers Initiative analysis in EMF (2017).

¹⁸ The True Cost, 2015.

¹⁹ Mathilde Charpail, 2017.

²⁰ Helen Regan, 2020.

started studying the effects of these chemicals on human health, and the reports showed a dramatic rise in the number of birth defects, cancers, and mental illness especially in this region.

Some studies²¹, also, showed that certain chemical substances contained in pajamas, can be found in a child's urine 5 days after wearing those pajamas for one night. A recent study²² found hazardous chemicals in 63% of the items tested from 20 different textile brands (including fashion giants). Nearly 70 million barrels of oil are used each year to make the world's polyester fiber, which is the most used fiber in the clothing industry²³. But this material, besides being dangerous, takes 200 years to decompose, also creating waste.

Greenhouse gases emissions: The apparel industry accounts for 10% of global carbon emissions²⁴. The fast fashion industry, but also the global fashion industry, is generating a lot of greenhouse gases due to the energy used during its production, manufacturing, and transportation of the million garments purchased each year. The most common synthetic fibers used in the majority of the clothes, are made from fossil fuel, making production much more energy-intensive than with natural fibers²⁵. Most of the apparel are produced in China, Bangladesh or India, countries essentially powered by coal. The use of coal creates energy for the production, but on the other hand it produces a number of profoundly harmful environmental impacts like air pollution and global warming²⁶.

Soils degradation: The soil is very important for the ecosystem, it's necessary for the food production and helps absorb CO₂²⁷. The fashion and fast fashion industry play a major part in degrading soil in different ways, like, overgrazing the pastures through cashmere goats and sheep that are raised only for their wool. The 90% of Mongolia's surface is facing the threat of desertification, principally due to the breeding of cashmere goats. The 20% of Patagonia is affected by desertification due to sheep grazing. But also, the massive use of chemicals to grow cotton and the deforestation caused by wood-based fibers like rayon. This intensifies the global

²¹ Giovanna Luongo, Chemicals in textiles – A potential source for human exposure and environmental pollution, Doctoral Thesis – Department of Environmental Science and Analytical Chemistry, Stockholm University (2015).

²² Greenpeace International, Toxic Threads: The Big Fashion Stitch-Up, How big brands are making consumers unwitting accomplices in the toxic water cycle.

²³ James Conca, 2015.

²⁴ Mathilde Charpail, 2017.

²⁵ Mathilde Charpail, 2017.

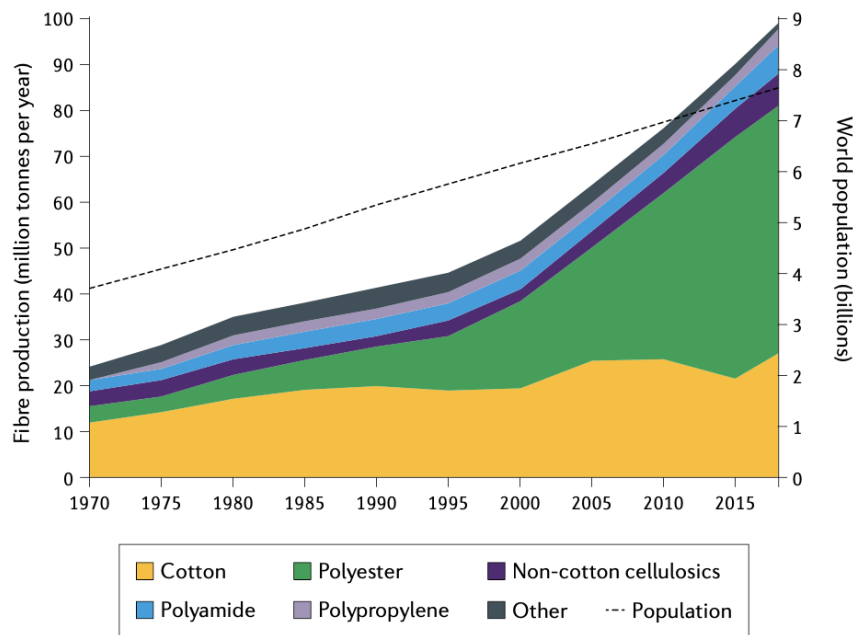
²⁶ Union of Concerned Scientists, 2017.

²⁷ Mathilde Charpail, 2017.

food security and, also, contributes to global warming. In fact, degraded soil will lead to a decrease of 30% in food production over the next 20-50 years if nothing changes²⁸.

Rainforest destruction: In order to produce wood-based fabrics such as rayon, viscose, and modal every year, thousands of hectares of endangered and ancient forests are cut down and replaced by plantations of trees. The 5 % of the global apparel industry uses forest-based fabrics²⁹. According to Global Forest Watch, in Indonesia over 15 million hectares (60,000 square miles) of tree cover were cut between 2001 and 2013³⁰.

Graphic 1 shows the increase in the production of synthetic materials and the increase in the population from 1970 to 2015. With the increase of the world population, the clothing market began to change and produce types of fabrics, this increased especially the problems listed above.



Graph 1: Growth in global population and textile production by fiber type.

Fast fashion brands, in order to being able to offer their products at such a low price, subcontract the production of their garments to factories located in peripheral countries, where workers' protections are much lower than in European or North American legal systems.

²⁸ The True Cost, 2015.

²⁹ Mathilde Charpail, 2017.

³⁰ Margaret Badore, 2018.

According to the World Trade organizations (WTO), Asia in the 2014 exported the 58,4% of the world clothing and textile. More than 70% of the EU imports of textiles and clothing come from Asia. The customers of garment producers are most often global brands looking for low prices and tight production timeframes. They also make changes to product design, product volume, and production timeframes, and place last-minute orders without accepting increased costs or adjustments to delivery dates. The stresses of such policies usually fall on factory workers. The harsh conditions in which many Asian workers perform their jobs have even been qualified as "*slave labour*"³¹.

These problems became of public concern unfortunately only due to deadly incidents. The *Tazreen Fashion factory*, a multi-floor fashion-garment factory burned down, killing 112 workers. The fire was initially presumed to be caused by an electrical short circuit, but Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has suspected that the fire had been arson as an act of "sabotage" due to the occurrence of previous comparable events.

It was followed by another tragedy, on 24 April 2013 the *Rana Plaza building* in Savar Upazila (Bangladesh), containing five clothing factories, a bank and shops collapsed completely, killing 1138 workers, and injuring over 2500. At least 27 global garment brands, especially fast fashion, had recent or current orders with the factories in the building. The catastrophe was do the fact that the building's owners ignored warnings to avoid using the building after cracks had appeared the day before. Garment workers were ordered to return the following day and the building collapsed during the morning rush-hour. The negligence of this case is also due the necessity to being able to remain competitive in the market and therefore have low prices, companies cut costs, so they decided to cut safety checks. It's still considered to be the most serious fatal accident in a textile factory in history, as well as the deadliest accidental structural failure in modern human history³².

³¹ Mathilde Charpail, 2017.

³² The True Cost, 2015.



Figure 6: The Rana Plaza building, Savar Bangladesh, 2013 (SHUTTERSTOCK / SK HASAN ALI)

These tragedies started some intense protests, like in the case of Cambodia. In 2014 Cambodian police shot and killed at least four people and wounded nearly 40 others as they broke up a strike by garment workers³³. The workers started a strike 10 days earlier asking minimum wages (160\$ per month), eyewitness, and rights groups.

Many fashion brands assure their costumers that the workers who made their clothing are paid at least the *minimum legal wage*. In most of the manufacturing countries, like China, Bangladesh, India, the minimum wage represents between half to a fifth of the living wage³⁴. The last one, represents the bare minimum that a family requires to fulfill its basic needs, for example food, rent, healthcare, and education³⁵. These brands are bragging about paying their employees 5 times less than what a person actually needs to live with dignity. In fact, workers' wages represent only a fraction of what consumers pay for the clothes because of deep-rooted structural power dynamics.

An example is the national kit of the England football team at the 2018 World Cup³⁶, embellished with a well-known sportswear brand logo and the most expensive England kit ever. They were sold to fans for as much as €180 – while the workers in Bangladesh who made them were earning less than €2 per day. As Figure 7 shows, the difference between the living and minimum wage are quite high. In 2013, Bangladesh workers were paid 19% less of what its required to live, same in the case for the Sri Lanka's workers. In 2010, Pearl Global, which is

³³ Radio Free Asia, 2014.

³⁴ Mathilde Charpail, 2017.

³⁵ The True Cost, 2015.

³⁶ Clean Clothes Campaign.

the supplier of Gap³⁷ and Next based in Gurgaon (India), was the first exposed by the Observer for rights abuses, in fact, the company admitted that they underpaid workers for overtime and asked them to work illegally long hours. Recently, the right to a living wage has been recognized by the Council of Europe and by the UN in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights among others, but it is not respected in global production supply chains, even where legally set minimum wages are in place.

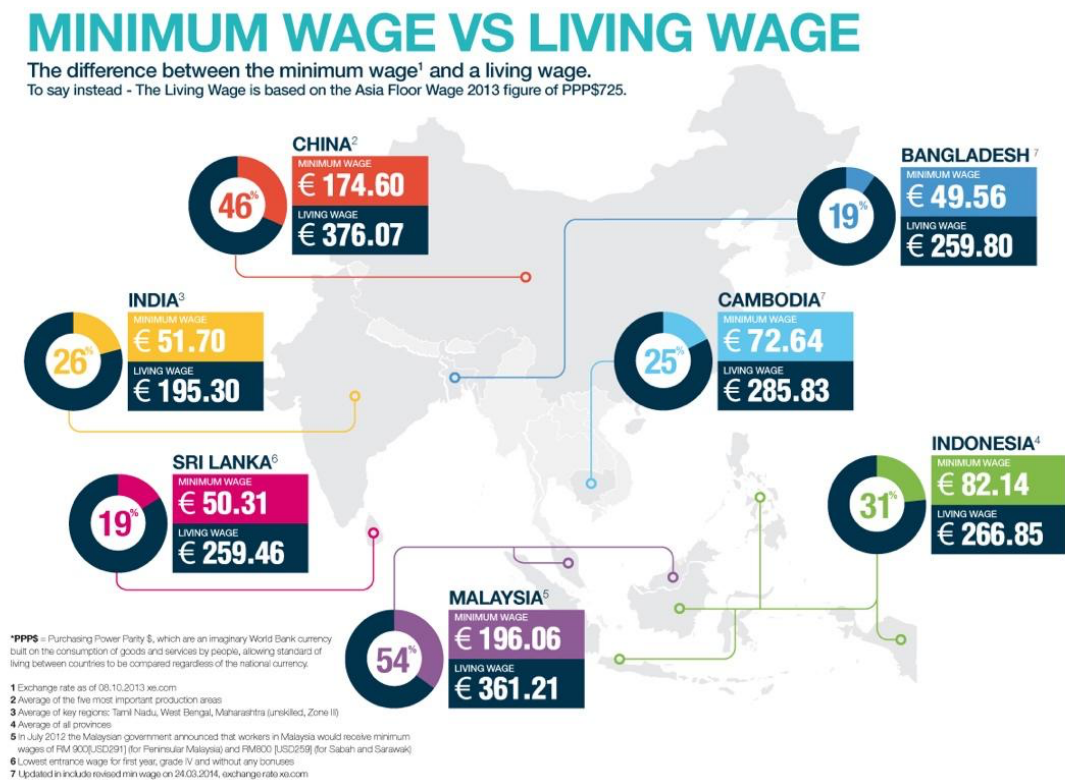


Figure 7: Minimum wage VS Living wage, based on the Asia Floor Wage 2013;

After the tragedies, especially the Rana Plaza, the environmental conditions in which the workers worked were revealed. Employees worked, actually they are still working, with no ventilation, breathing in toxic substances, inhaling fiber dust or blasted sand in unsafe building. Accidents, fires, injuries, and disease are very frequent occurrences on textile production sites. But why they are still working there? Because they can have much worst work alternatives.

³⁷The Gap, Incorporated is a San Francisco-based US company that manufactures and retails clothing and accessories.

Another problem that emerged relates to *working hours*. Garment workers are often forced to work 14 to 16 hours per day, 7 days a week, which is actually the normal working schedule for them³⁸. Normally, in Italy, an amount of 40 hours per week is considered full time, in these countries the normal amount of hours is 96. Especially during peak season, the garment workers might work until 2 or 3 am in order to meet the fashion brands' deadline. Since their wages are quite low, they cannot refuse overtime, also for the fact that many would be fired if they refused to work overtime. In some cases, overtime is not even paid at all³⁹. On top of that, clothing workers regularly face verbal and physical abuse. In some cases, when they fail to meet their (unreachable) daily target, they are insulted, denied breaks, or not allowed to drink water⁴⁰. In order to ensure an education and a future for the garments' workers kids, they are leaving them to be raised by family or friends in villages outside the big cities, so they will see them only once or twice a year⁴¹. 160 million children in the world are forced to work⁴². Because the fashion industry requires low-skilled labour, child labour is particularly common in this industry. In South India, for example, 100,000 girls work under the Sumangali scheme, a practice which involves sending young girls from poor families to work in a textile factory for three or five years in exchange for a basic wage and a lump sum payment at the end to pay for their dowry. Girls are overworked and live in appalling conditions that can be classified as modern slavery.

Initially, for the fast-fashion producers and retailers' pollution and waster were not the primary concern, in fact, they reduced the costs and increased speed delivery to the market⁴³. However, with public attention now very much on the climate crisis, environmental degradation, and sustainability more broadly, the industry is being forced to seek more sustainable practices and to take not of its environmental impacts. But the main problem is that for the environment the great threat is that capital must continue to expand infinitely to survive, it can't have any limits on its expansion and its growth⁴⁴. But the natural world clearly does have well fined limits, how much the world can sustain, in terms of production, trade, transport and distribution. This industry has overstepped a lot of those limits.

³⁸ Mathilde Charpail, 2017.

³⁹ The True Cost, 2015.

⁴⁰ Gethin Chamberlain, 2012.

⁴¹ The True Cost, 2015.

⁴² Mathilde Charpail, 2017.

⁴³ Turker, D. & Altuntas, C. Sustainable supply chain management in the fast fashion industry: An analysis of corporate reports. *Eur. Manag. J.* 32, 837–849 (2014).

⁴⁴ The True Cost, 2015.

1.4. A CHANGE IN THE COMPANIES: INTRODUCTION OF SUSTAINABILITY

The sustainability concept was introduced in 1972 at the *United Nations Conference on the Environment in Stockholm*. This conference marked a turning point in the raise of awareness of sustainable development issues, international environmental policies, and research on human/environment relations. The representatives of 113 nations from industrialized and developing countries met together with more than 400 government organizations to establish the need for a coordinated approach to global environmental issues.

The participants adopted a series of principles for sound management of the environment including the Stockholm Declaration and Action Plan for the Human Environment and several resolutions.

The *Stockholm Declaration*, which contained 26 principles, placed environmental issues at the forefront of international concerns and marked the start of a dialogue between industrialized and developing countries on the link between economic growth, the pollution of the air, water, and oceans and the well-being of people around the world⁴⁵.

The *Action Plan* contained three main categories:

1. Global Environmental Assessment Programme;
2. Environmental management activities;
3. International measures to support assessment and management activities carried out at the national and international levels.

One of the major results of the Stockholm conference was the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

In 1980, *UNEP* (United Nations Environment Programme), together with *WWF* (World Wide Fund for Nature) and *IUCN* (International Union for the Conservation of Nature), elaborated the *World Conservation Strategy*, an international document to guide the management policies of world resources implemented by⁴⁶:

- government policy makers and their advisers;
- conservationists and others directly concerned with living resources;
- development practitioners, including development agencies, industry and commerce, and trade unions.

⁴⁵ Michela Granzo, page 20, 2017/2018.

⁴⁶ Michela Granzo, page 20, 2017/2018.

This document was intended to be an operational guide to harmonize the sustainable development plans of various nations and to encourage communities to develop plans and policies in order to achieve the following objectives:

1. Maintain essential ecological processes and life-support systems;
2. Preserve genetic diversity;
3. Ensure the sustainable utilization of species and ecosystems.

The document develops a series of issues with a view to understanding the changes to be made for sustainable development.

The *WCDE*, the World Commission for Environment and Development, prepares and publishes the Our Common Future Report, also known as the *Brundtland Report*, named after its then president⁴⁷. This report introduced the concept of sustainable development and described how it could be achieved. For this report: “*Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”⁴⁸.

The Brundtland Report requires is a change of course that separates the concepts of growth and development, economic growth will be necessary to improve the living conditions of all but development must focus on conceiving and managing new technologies, policies, structures. social networks to usher in a new era of growth that does not compromise the ability to meet the needs of future generations⁴⁹.

The international initiatives on the relationship between man and the environment continued over the years and in 1991 the *IUCN*, *UNEP* and *WWF* group published a new strategy for sustainability, *Caring for the Earth - A Strategy for Sustainable Living*. This document focuses on the sustainable living, because sustainability has to enter in every aspect of human's life

Another important step was taken during the *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)*, also known as the '*Earth Summit*', that was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 3-14 June 1992. The conference achieved important results regarding environmental problems and their relationship to economic development.

⁴⁷ Michela Granzo, page 21, 2017/2018.

⁴⁸ WCDE, Our common Future, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987, p. 41.

⁴⁹ Michela Granzo, page 22, 2017/2018.

Two international conventions are signed, one on climate change and one on the protection of biological diversity; three declarations of principles are also approved by consensus:

1. *The Rio Declaration*, a document on environmental protection and development which, “recognizing the integral and interdependent nature of the Earth, our home” 30, proclaims 27 principles for sustainable development.
2. *The Declaration of principles*, without legally binding value, on the management, conservation, and sustainable development of forests.
3. *Agenda 21*, a manual that lists a series of objectives and develops an action plan, activities and means of implementation for the sustainable development of the planet between now and the twenty-sixth century.

In the 2000, the *Millennium Summit* took place in New York, 149 heads of state and government and senior officials from over 40 countries were present with the aim of coordinating global engagement in various global issues⁵⁰. The objectives that the Summit were:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
2. Achieve universal primary education;
3. Promote gender equality and empower women;
4. Reduce child mortality;
5. Improve maternal health;
6. Combat HIV / AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
7. Ensure environmental sustainability;
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

During the Summit they planned the common effort and to intensify the collective efforts in the management, conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, reduce biodiversity losses, reduce the population without access to drinking water and improve the living conditions of at least 100 million inhabitants.

In 2005 a new *UN Summit* was held in New York with the aim of summarizing the current situation and the work done in recent years, monitoring the achievement or failure of the objectives set in previous Summits and identifying the actions to be taken to improve the

⁵⁰ Michela Granzo, page 24, 2017/2018.

global conditions of the planet in terms of poverty, sustainable development, security, terrorism and crimes against humanity. The Summit, once again, took place in a climate of dissatisfaction with the results obtained, the *Millennium Development Goals* were once again reassessed, and a commitment was made to achieve them by 2015.

In 2012, *The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)* took place in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)⁵¹. It was focused on the political outcome document which contains clear and practical measures for implementing sustainable development. In Rio, Member States decided to launch a process to develop a set of *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, which will build upon the Millennium Development Goals and converge with the post 2015 development agenda.

There will be 17 *Sustainable Development Goals*, that will be achieved by 2030, included in the *Global Agenda for Sustainable Development* approved on 25 September 2015 by the United Nations, divided into 169 Targets and 240 indicators for monitoring results.



Figure 8: “17 Sustainable Development Goals”, The United Nations, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>;

As Figure 8 shows, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN⁵² are:

1. *No poverty*: end poverty in all its forms, everywhere;

⁵¹ Michela Granzo, page 25, 2017/2018.

⁵² UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION GENERAL ASSEMBLY, A / RES / 70/1, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015 - Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Development Sustainable, United Nations, New York, 2015.

2. *Zero Hunger*: end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture;
3. *Good Health and Wellbeing*: ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, at all ages;
4. *Quality Education*: ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all;
5. *Gender Equality*: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;
6. *Clear Water and Sanitation*: ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;
7. *Affordable and Clean Energy*: ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all;
8. *Decent Work and Economic Growth*: promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;
9. *Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure*: build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation;
10. *Reduced Inequalities*: reduce inequality within and among countries;
11. *Sustainable Cities and Communities*: make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable;
12. *Responsible Consumption and Production*: ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns;
13. *Climate Action*: take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;
14. *Life Below Water*: conserve and sustainability use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development;
15. *Life on Land*: protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, manage forests, combat desertification and biodiversity loss, and halt and reverse land degradation;
16. *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions;
17. *Partnerships*: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Sustainability is not only environment but, as we saw for the first time in the Declaration adopted during the *Earth Summit* 2002 in Johannesburg, it is made up of at least three large

dimensions that are interconnected and interdependent: *the economic dimension, the social dimension and finally, the environmental dimension.*

The economic dimension mainly refers to the ability to generate wealth with available capital, sustainable economic models must therefore be able to produce goods and services efficiently and effectively.

The social dimension refers to the concept of inter and intra generational equity. To be socially sustainable, development must include in its objectives that of pursuing the elimination of poverty, guaranteeing decent living conditions and affirming the fundamental rights of every individual of present and future generations.

Finally, *the environmental dimension* refers to ecological resources and natural capital, the use of which must be aware and responsible. The conservation of this capital, which guarantees the functioning of natural systems, must be taken into consideration in development planning. The objective of environmental sustainability is to maintain biodiversity, reduce the impacts of human activities that cause the planet's environmental and climatic degradation, limit the production of waste and pollutants that affect environmental ecosystems and in general, frame development in an environmental balance regime.

The interaction between the dimensions defined above can vary depending on whether sustainable development is considered as a process or as a strategic objective.

After this, the term *Triple Bottom Line* was coined in 1994 by John Elkington, founder of a consultancy firm called *SustainAbility*⁵³. The term was used to signal to companies the need to integrate the three dimensions of sustainability when planning and monitoring company performance. According to Elkington's theory, companies must measure this performance by building three different and separate bottom lines according to three aspects (3P):

1. *Profit*: This one is related to the economic business profit according to the traditional measure of profit (revenue and loss account), the company must obtain good economic results by efficiently using scarce resources. The Profit area includes all those activities of maximizing revenues by increasing revenues, quantities sold and / or price of products, reducing short- and long-term risks, controlling and reducing production costs, evaluating investments and quality control of goods and services offered.
2. *People*: it is necessary to measure the responsibility of the company towards the company in which it operates, the company must take into consideration the relationship

⁵³ Michela Granzo, page 38, 2017/2018.

between internal choices and the consequences they produce in the external company and consider itself responsible towards the people and groups that deal with the company. This means measuring the impact of company policies, at the level of social responsibility, on people's lives.

3. *Planet*: refers to the environmental impact of the company. The company must measure the consequences of its operations on natural systems and assess how responsible and attentive it has been towards the environment.

Due to economic, social, and environmental problems, companies more and more focus on sustainability and try to ensure the same quality and standards in working and production conditions throughout their supply chains, here is where the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) started to be mentioned.

The fact that the sustainability theme is still intensively debated, discussed, and researched, reflects the multi-dimensional character of the concept itself, which includes not only ecological, political, and ethical but also socio-economic, democratic, cultural, and technological development. In fact, sustainability can be understood as a process of actively and innovatively searching, learning and shaping the present and future of human activities on Earth. The open concept of sustainability requires the participation of public life by civil society, especially with climate change problem, they are required to react.

1.4.1. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR), GREEN STANDARDS AND LABELS

The impacts of the fashion world, described in the previous chapters, are no longer acceptable, nowadays, companies have increasingly started focusing on sustainability in order to ensure the same quality and standards in working and production conditions throughout their supply chains.

Consumers require more guarantees, and companies must try to adapt accordingly. One way to do this is to acquire certifications: they guarantee the execution of environmental or social services by the companies that own them, thanks to the verification of a third party that certifies that a company or a product complies with specific requirements.

Obtaining a certification therefore means acquiring the brand and the guarantee of purchase, bringing a benefit to the environment and people and gaining greater credibility in the eyes of customers.

The approach to sustainability takes into account both the ecological aspect and social equity, understood as respect for people, workers and consumers, and the purely economic point of view. The application of sustainability principles will never take place if it is contrary to market rules. Furthermore, the functioning of the economy is necessary to ensure the same scientific innovation functional to reducing the impact of human activities on the environment.

Sustainability can spread if industrial production processes are transformed in the same way, and this is true for every economic sector.

The commitment aimed in this direction has, in recent years, taken the name of *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)*, understood as management that creates value for a wide audience called stakeholders (customers, employees, suppliers, public and financial institutions, civil society) and it has to satisfy the international requirements and guidelines that increasingly push companies to realize their responsibility for natural and social systems and require the application of sustainability in business logic. There is also an internal need to invest in human capital and in relationships with collaborators and employees who are now considered as another determining factor for the success of the company.

Archie B. Carroll provided a pyramid, a framework, that helps understand the most important types of responsibility. The vision that Carroll wants to give is that of a pyramid of

responsibilities and obligations that are found in a relationship of continuous but dynamic tension.



Figure 9: Archie B. Carroll – The pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

From the bottom, as Figure 9 shows, the economic responsibility of companies is about producing goods and services that the society needs and to make a profit on them. This helps them survive and support society in the long term.

The *Legal Responsibility* of companies is about complying with the minimum rules from international, national and local regulations. Basically, those rules help to determine how organizations can conduct their business practices in a fair manner.

The *Ethical Responsibility* consists of what is generally expected by society over and above economic and legal expectations. Ethical responsibilities are not necessarily imposed by law, but they are expected from ethical companies by the public and governments.

On top of the pyramid, there's the *Philanthropic Responsibility*. This focuses on more luxurious things such as improving the quality of life of employees, local communities, and society in general.

Another example is the recent change in EU is the introduction of *Sustainability reporting*. From the 2014, the law requires to disclose information on the way large public-interest companies. This kind of reporting can help organizations measure, understand and communicate their economic, environmental, social and governance performance, and then set

goals, and manage change more effectively. Under *Directive 2014/95/EU*, large companies have to publish information related to

- Environmental matters;
- Social matters and treatment of employees;
- Respect for human rights;
- Anti-corruption and bribery;
- Diversity on company boards (in terms of age, gender, educational and professional background).

Sustainability reporting is a useful risk management tool and improves operational efficiency, in fact, the 2015 *EY Global Institutional Investor Survey* of over 200 institutional investors showed that they are increasingly using companies' non-financial disclosure to inform their investment decisions. A study by *IssueLab*, a non-profit that studies social impacts of initiatives, noted that companies with strong corporate responsibility reputations experience no meaningful declines in share price compared to their industry peers during financial crisis. An example, a survey called "*Green Winners*" by A.T. Kearney revealed that during the 2008 recession companies committed to sustainability practices achieved "above average" performance in the financial markets, translating into an average of \$650 million in incremental market capitalization per company. Thus, nowadays, most companies creating value through sustainability, look first to improving returns on capital, which often means reducing operating costs through improved natural-resource management (such as energy use and waste). Companies are also driving down costs by systematically managing their value chains. Moreover, companies are adding value by improving employee retention or motivation through sustainability activities or by raising prices or achieving higher market share with new or existing sustainable products.

Over 90 percent of the world's largest companies are already reporting on their sustainability impacts, with smaller companies following suit. While the majority decide to report using the *GRI Standards*⁵⁴, which provides a comprehensive, flexible, and adaptable framework for companies of any size to report on their economic, environmental, and social impacts; some have chosen to follow the methodology recommended by the *International*

⁵⁴ The *GRI Standards* are modular systems of interconnected standards. They allow organizations to publicly report the impacts of their activities in a structured way that is transparent to stakeholders and other interested parties.

Integrated Reporting Committee (IIRC), and US-based Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB). Whether to choose one of these standards, depends on the organization's goal.

An important revolution took place with the introduction of sustainability standards and labels also known as environmental labelling and information schemes. For the fashion world, certifications, in parallel with the actions that companies undertake to implement sustainability, can be divided into certifications regarding the working conditions of workers in the supply chain; certifications regarding the safety of products; certifications regarding the environmental impacts of the processes carried out for the production of the clothes.

Along the various phases of the fashion production chain, companies can adopt the *SA8000* certification, a voluntary standard that defines a series of requirements that organizations must meet with reference to workers' rights and workplace conditions⁵⁵. The purpose of SA8000, based on international regulations and declarations on human and labor rights, is to protect all personnel falling within the sphere not only of control but also of influence of companies. This fits perfectly with the needs of the fashion supply chains which often do not have direct control of the working conditions of the clothing manufacturing companies from which they source but, nevertheless, are indirectly influenced and responsible. A standard thus constituted becomes indispensable for a world such as that of fashion in which, as we have seen, the supply chains are often long and located throughout the world.

The requirements⁵⁶ of standard SA800 are related to:

- Child Work;
- Forced or compulsory labor;
- Health and Safety;
- Freedom of association and the Right to collective bargain;
- Discriminations;
- Disciplinary Practices;
- Working Hours;
- Remuneration;
- Management System.

⁵⁶ SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY INTERNATIONAL, Social Accountability 8000 (SA8000), Social Accountability International, New York, 2008.
www.saintl.org/_data/n_0001/resources/live/2008StdEnglishFinal.pdf, (visited on May 1, 2022).

Alternatively, or concurrently, companies can use the *Fairtrade* mark, a registered certification for products from producers in developing countries and which have complied with a series of specific requirements such as "*better prices, decent working conditions, local sustainability, and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers*"⁵⁷.

As for the certifications on the safety and safety of products in the textile and clothing industry as well as some mandatory regulations to which companies must comply such as the *REACH*⁵⁸ regulation, there are voluntary standards and certifications that want to expand the safety guarantees of clothes in relation to the use of chemicals that come into contact with the skin.

The tools available to companies to certify their commitment to the safety of textile products placed on the market are the following:

- *ECOLABEL*⁵⁹: ecological quality mark established by the European Union which certifies ecological products by standardizing the European context with respect to their labeling in different countries. The *ECOMark*, recognized all over the world, certifies the ecological sustainability of the products and the fact that they are not dangerous to human health in relation to the use of chemicals.
- *OEKO-TEX 100173*⁶⁰, an independent control and certification system managed by a private association of European laboratories of raw materials, semi-finished and finished products of the textile industry. The *OEKO-TEX 100* standard helps to ensure product safety towards the consumer by checking and certifying the absence of certain chemical substances from fabrics (azo dyes, formaldehyde, pentachlorophenol, cadmium nickel and other substances governed by the European REACH Regulation and the American CPSIA).

A lot of certifications and tools that aims to evaluate the environmental impacts and guarantee the conservation of natural resources in textile production⁶¹. The useful tools for this analysis can be divided as follow:

I. SINGLE-CRITERION LABELS that certify and ensure a specific characteristic of the textile product in relation to environmental impacts, like:

⁵⁷ FAIRTRADE FOUNDATION, www.fairtrade.org.uk, (visited on January 7, 2022).

⁵⁸ EUROPEAN CHEMICALS AGENCY, www.echa.europa.eu/it/regulations/reach/understanding-reach, (visited on February 4, 2022).

⁵⁹ ECOLABEL, www.ecolabel.com/en/, (visited on February 4, 2022).

⁶⁰ OEKO-TEX, www.oeko-tex.com, (visited on February 4, 2022).

⁶¹ ICMA, 2020.

1. *Carbon Footprint Standard*⁶²: an internationally recognized standard that allows companies to promote awareness of CO2 emissions; the standard, by measuring the quantity of carbon that has been emitted during the entire life cycle of the product, can attest to three levels: Carbon Footprint Assessed, Reduced or Carbon Neutral;
2. *Global Water Footprint Assessment Standard*: Internationally accepted standard that, through a scientifically rigorous methodology, measures water consumption in the life cycle of the product and assesses its water footprint. Through a series of specific analyzes, this tool allows you to calculate the water footprint and the geographical and temporal allocation of the water resources exploited, to conduct an assessment of the sustainability of the water footprint, to implement strategic operations for the improvement of fair and intelligent water during industrial production;
3. *Global Recycle Standard (GRS)*: tool promoted by Textile Exchange which certifies products obtained from recycled raw or intermediate materials and compliance with environmental and social criteria along the textile supply chain. Products with at least 20% of materials obtained from recycling can obtain this certification;

II. ORGANIC LABELS that certify the organic origin of the raw materials used to produce clothes in compliance with the requirements of organic farming. The certifications developed are:

1. *Global Organic Textile Standard*⁶³ (*GOTS*): which guarantees the organic origin of the raw materials used in the products, only textile products that contain at least 70% organic fibers can obtain the GOTS certification. The requirements to be met are different and concern the production of fibers, the transformation and manufacturing processes, the analysis of specific environmental, technical and quality, social criteria and regarding the use of toxic substances;
2. *Organic Content Standard*⁶⁴ (*OCS*): it's a tool that aims to guarantee the truthfulness and transparency of the statements on the organic contents of the fabrics. The OCS verifies the presence and quantity of biological material in the final products through custody checks along the production chain. Unlike the previous tool this does not cover the certification of the raw material itself, it is instead a certification of the production

⁶² CARBON FOOTPRINT, www.carbonfootprint.com, (visited on February 4, 2022).

⁶³ GLOBAL ORGANIC TEXTILE STANDARD, www.global-standard.org, (visited on February 4, 2022).

⁶⁴ TEXTILE EXCHANGE, www.textileexchange.org/integrity/, (visited on February 5, 2022).

process. It also does not address processing inputs (e.g. chemicals), environmental aspects of treatment (e.g. energy or water use), social issues, safety issues, or legal compliance.

III. MULTI-CRITERIA BRANDS that take into consideration different areas of sustainability of textile products, some examples of tools are:

1. *STeP⁶⁵ model of OEKO-TEX*: A certification system for retail companies and producers of the textile supply chain that allows them to communicate to consumers the commitments and results achieved in terms of sustainability of production processes. The certification can be obtained for the plants in all the various production steps (spinning, weaving, finishing and packaging). The STeP certification allows to have a transparent, clear and credible guarantee of the sustainability of production processes through the analysis of all company areas with reference to the management of chemicals, environmental performance, environmental management, health and safety at work, social responsibility and quality management;
2. *Bluedesign⁶⁶*: a certification that evaluates and checks compliance with certain requirements on various areas such as production inputs, production sites and final products. The certification guarantees the elimination of toxic substances potentially harmful to human health already in the initial stages of the textile production chain by establishing and controlling standards for environmentally friendly, sustainable and safe production. The certification is based on certain principles: resource productivity, consumer safety, water and air emission, occupational health and safety;
3. *Environmental Product Declaration⁶⁷ (EPD)*: it is an instrument envisaged by community policies with the aim of standardizing and improving the environmental communication of companies. The Declaration is based on the ISO 14020 standards and, through the application of the LCA method, allows you to declare the strategies, commitments and results achieved in terms of respect for the environment. It is applicable to both products and services and is carried out within a precise classification of the product categories to allow for correct comparability. The EPD allows to, through the final verification of the information by an independent body, the communication of

⁶⁵ OEKO-TEX, www.oeko-tex.com, (visited on February 10, 2022).

⁶⁶ BLUESIGN, www.bluesign.com/index.html, (visited on February 10, 2022).

⁶⁷ EPD, www.environdec.com, (visited on February 10, 2022).

objective, comparable and credible information relating to the environmental characteristics of products or services;

4. *Cradle to Cradle*⁶⁸ (C2C) system: a recent US certification that provides an approach for system design and for the evaluation of the results of an environmentally friendly production system. This type of scheme aims to go beyond sustainability and design a circular economy so that products, in this case of the fashion system, can travel "from cradle to cradle".

It is important to mention also the *Higg Index*, which was developed by the *Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC)*, which aims to include in a single index the assessments on the sustainability of the textile, clothing and footwear industries. SAC has developed the Higg index by offering a package of standardized tools that can be used by companies to accurately measure and evaluate the sustainability performance of a company or product and offer transparent, comparable and meaningful communication.

The system includes 3 pack of tools:

1. *Product tools*: they help users calculate the impact of clothing products footwear and textiles. They are tools that can be used in the product design phase to measure an environmental and social impact forecast or be applied at the end of the production process for a final budget calculation. The tools specifically deal with measuring the sustainability of the raw materials used, helping in the design and development of products through the use of more sustainable manufacturing techniques and processes, determining the dimensions of the impact of the entire life cycle of the product.
2. *Facility tools*: they measure the impacts on environmental and social sustainability in production plants along the entire fashion supply chain. The proposed tools measure sustainability in the individual supplier factories through analyzes that are repeated at least once a year, allowing the evaluation and comparison of the structures along the supply chain. The analyzes that are carried out concern the following topics: Environmental management systems, Energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, Water use, Wastewater, Emissions to air, Waste management, Chemical use and management;
3. *Brand tools*: they are used by companies to assess the sustainability of the life cycles of their brand products as a whole by measuring the environmental performance and social

⁶⁸ CRADLE TO CRADLE, www.c2ccertified.org, (visited on February 20, 2022).

impacts of their operations and possibly making improvements or studying strategies to increase the sustainability of the brand.

Certifications are necessary in order to provide guarantees to consumers, even if they do not constitute a precise indicator of the level of sustainability of the company. Each certification, in fact, ensures compliance with some of the aspects of corporate sustainability, which, in reality, is influenced by many factors.

1.4.2. THE INTRODUCTION OF SUSTAINABILITY IN THE FASHION WORLD

As seen, the textile and clothing sector is one of the most polluting in the world. Furthermore, the characteristics of the Fast Fashion business model like high volumes, fast delivery times and low prices, increase the criticality contrasting the sustainability challenges associated with the sector. For all the reasons listed, the fashion environment has increasingly inserted itself into the logic of sustainability and its practical business models which had the aim of trying to reduce its “unsustainability”.

Over the course of history there have been various typical characteristics of sustainability that have been placed side by side with the history of fashion.

Before industrialization, the sustainability of fashion was present in the artisanal production processes, which in a certain sense respected the limits of nature without particular alterations of this in daily practices. Due to the lack of technological progress, the production and use of clothing did not alter the social and natural balance because, spontaneously, the problem of scarcity of resources was solved by respecting these resources and through their optimal use. The clothes were not wasted because there was no possibility and recycling was almost a necessary and normal action for the lifestyle of people who still did not attribute a great immaterial value to the dress. This can be defined as a first start of *Circular Fashion*. It can be said that, in these periods, a virtue was made of necessity and, unwittingly, sustainability was inherent in human behavior. The culture of consumption and waste was not found even in the more affluent classes, despite the greater features of the clothes.

During the Middle Ages and subsequent eras, it is color that makes the difference in fashion and dictates the guidelines for the intangible value that is beginning to be assigned to clothes. Wealthy people dressed in bright colors dyed with dyes that were extracted from various natural resources while the less affluent kept clothing with neutral colors, it is the latter who maintain the sustainability of fashion mostly out of necessity while in the wealthier classes, the immaterial function of the dress begins to take hold, stripping fashion of its, until then, natural sustainability.

With the industrialization a new social class was born, the entrepreneurial middle class, which started using dark colors and simple clothes with attention to detail and refinement. On the other hand, the diffusion of industrial techniques and technological progress allows the

diffusion and standardization of fashion allowing the reproduction and imitation, even for the less well-off classes, of the opulent and excessive dress that until then had been a prerogative only from the upper classes. In response to the democratization of high fashion, the wealthier classes begin to diminish the pomp and magnificence of their clothes to differentiate themselves from the lower classes who could now copy and wear the clothes of the rich. The choice of an excessive cut, although mainly dictated by a need for differentiation, is a first flash of sustainability in the logic of fashion. Not surprisingly, in these years between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, we can find the first research and studies in the production of textile filaments and fabrics which, aiming at the reduction of production and environmental costs and the maintenance of the final quality of the product, portend the modern idea of sustainability.

After the Second World War, society explodes in the abundance of consumption and mass, the economic boom allows a copious development of production and consumerism between excesses and well-being. Paradoxically, it was in this period that the idea of the recovery and aesthetics of waste was born, which, being so abundant due to the surplus of production, is reused and made an object of fashion. Fashion interprets the explosion of many movements and social changes that it begins to exploit for the production of trends destined to become universal fashions.

In the following decades, however, the abundance and waste of consumerism began to be opposed. Between the 60s and 70s, currents antagonistic to economic development models developed which, even in fashion, are reflected in a symbolism of clothing that becomes simpler and more naturalistic with looks that are increasingly representative of the need to reduce the excesses of models of consumption. The refusal of consumerism creates the basis for the establishment, even political, of sustainability, despite the fact that in this period it is still seen as a synonym of renunciation, abandonment of well-being, poverty. This also reflected in the world of fashion, as mentioned, through the spread of trends that make simplicity and renunciation their must. In this sense, sustainability is given an almost negative meaning or in any case the loss of a part of the well-being that could be enjoyed in the era of the economic boom and consumerism that one was willing to give up in order to support new ideals.

In the 90s sustainable fashion became more and more trendy, it was linked to the concept of renunciation born in previous years. In fact, in these years the concept of eco-sustainability spreads and identified a new trend that gave value to objects, and to clothing, for their respect for nature, putting creativity and the aesthetic value of fashion in the background. Awareness of the social and environmental impacts of human activities spreads in society and in the

business environment with the development of theories that confer social responsibility on companies, even in fashion.

Finally, in recent years, everyone's awareness and responsibility towards social and environmental balance has been affirmed. This phase can be defined as an intermediate between the end of the massive consumer society and the passage to a new conscious diversification in individual and collective decisions. Sustainability is no longer renunciation but a necessary element of differentiation that fashion products must incorporate before being placed on the market.

This current trend is still fluctuating but more and more companies are making sustainability a key in the business model to be exploited as a competitive advantage. Companies started to adopt policies for the sustainability of fashion can be identified in macro-trends.

- *Policies for the exploitation of the circular economy* (through recycling and reuse campaigns of garments that have become waste or scraps),
- *Policies that leverage the concept of CSR* (the construction of a solid relationship and interest in customers and of suppliers, support for the good living conditions of workers in delocalized production chains and the enhancement of local resources);
- *The use of economic and collaborative consumption strategies* (common use of clothing, management of the sale of clothing second hand and collaboration of the production chain);
- *The development and research in technological innovations* (in the use of more effective and efficient materials and less impacting from the environmental point of view, the minimization of waste along the production chain);
- *The influence for the creation of a greater awareness of sustainability in the mind of the consumer* (through the proposal of sustainable collections and the enhancement of the commitment to slower fashion).

1.4.3. THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

In order to understand the relationship between fashion and the circular economy firstly it is important to define the difference between the circular economy and circular business models.

The *Circular Economy* is a production and consumption model that involves sharing, lending, reusing, repairing, reconditioning, and recycling existing materials and products for as long as possible⁶⁹. This extends the life cycle of products, helping to reduce waste to a minimum. Once the product has finished its function, the materials of it are in fact reintroduced, where possible, into the economic cycle. Thus, they can be continuously reused within the production cycle, generating additional value.

The principles of the circular economy contrast with the traditional linear economic model, based instead on the typical "extract, produce, use and throw" scheme. The *Traditional Economic Model* depends on the availability of large quantities of materials and energy that are readily available and at low prices. The European Parliament calls for the adoption of measures also against the planned obsolescence of products, a strategy typical of the linear economic model.

Some advantages of the circular economy can be defined as:

- Reduction of pressure on the environment;
- More security about the availability of raw materials.
- Increased competitiveness;
- Impetus for innovation and economic growth (an increase in GDP of 0.5%);
- Increase in employment - it is estimated that in the EU, thanks to the circular economy, there could be 700,000 new jobs by 2030;
- Consumers will also be able to have more durable and innovative products capable of saving money and improving the quality of life. For example, refurbishing light commercial vehicles rather than recycling them could lead to material savings of € 6.4 billion per year (around 15% of material spending) and € 140 million in energy costs, with a reduction in emissions of greenhouse gasses equal to 6.3 million tons.

A *Circular Business Model* articulates the logic of how an organization creates, delivers, and captures value to its broader range of stakeholders while minimizing ecological and social

⁶⁹ Archana Shrivastava, Geetika Jain, Sachin S. Kamble, Amine Belhadi, (2021).

costs. For example, instead of using natural resource inputs more efficiently, renewable energy generation and the production of raw materials from scrap do not use them at all. The principals of a circular business model are:

1. Source products and materials from the economy, not from ecological reserves;
2. Create value for customers by adding value to existing products and materials.
3. Create valuable inputs for businesses beyond the customers.

To better understand the relationship between a circular economy (the bigger picture) and circular business models (the smaller picture), it is helpful to understand how businesses form a value chain. No singular business is the circular economy, in fact, the circular economy is not one single vertically integrated business. Companies are like dots along the circle, forming a network between suppliers and customers called a value chain. This network can either be organized as a straight line between natural resources and landfills (linear economy) or creating a perpetual cycle of value with zero waste. like the one previously mentioned.

Textiles and clothing are an essential part of everyday life and a relevant sector in the global economy. Globally, the 1.3\$ trillion clothing industry employs more than 300 million people along the value chain, the production of cotton alone accounts for almost 7% of all employment in some low-income countries. Clothing represents more than 60% of the total textiles used and in the last 15 years, clothing production has approximately doubled, driven by a growing middle-class population across the globe and increased per capita sales in mature economies. At the same time, clothing use has declined by almost 40%. This is mainly due to the “fast fashion” phenomenon, with quicker turnaround of new styles, increased number of collections offered per year, and often, lower prices.

560\$ billions of economic opportunities can be unlocked by moving to an industry with a circular system. But this opportunity requires new business models and collaboration across the entire value chain in order to keep safe materials in use. In fact, the new business models focus on restore and regenerate, it means that clothes, textiles and fibers are kept at their highest value during use and re-enter the economy after use, never ending up as waste.

The system will produce and provide access to high-quality, affordable, individualized clothing. In a new textile’s economy, everyone has access to the clothes that they need, when they need them. new business models can give customers more flexibility on the clothes they’d like to wear and provide access to clothes that might not be affordable through traditional sales.

Clothes are designed and produced at a high quality, are durable, and provide different functionalities and flexibility.

Another important characteristic is that the system captures the full value of clothing during and after use. In a new textiles economy clothes are used more often, which allows their value to be captured fully. Once clothes cannot be used anymore, recycling them into new clothes allows the value of the materials to be captured at different levels. In order to do this, it is necessary to ensure that design aligns with recycling processes that are available today.

The energy required to fuel a new textiles economy is renewable, decreasing resource dependence and increasing system resilience. Renewable resources are extracted from nature by regenerative and restorative methods that rebuild natural capital, the world's stock of natural resources. In this case, resources are kept in the system and where input is needed, this comes from renewable resources. This requires the usage of regenerative agriculture for biological-based input such as cotton, and sustainably managed forests for wood-based fibers, avoiding fossil-fuel-based fertilizers or pesticides in the farming of biologically based input. A new textiles economy further enables this shift to renewables as its very nature ensures that less energy and fewer resources are consumed, and that won't leak into the environment or risk the health of textile workers and clothing users. Plastic microfibers won't be released into the environment and ocean, which is a major problem for the fast fashion industry.

In a new textile's economy, the price of clothing reflects the full costs of its production, including negative environmental and societal impacts. These costs will be first analyzed and presented in company reporting, and then reflected in product prices.

This new economy will present new opportunities for distributed and inclusive growth. It will create a thriving ecosystem of different enterprises, retaining and then circulating enough of the value created so that companies and their employees can participate fully in the wider economy.

The main goal is to ensure that clothes are durable and not disposable. This means designing and producing garments of higher quality and providing access to them via new business models would help shift the perception of clothing from a disposable item to a durable product. Quality purchases encourage the use of new technologies that provide customization for maximum customer satisfaction. For clothes that become unwanted but are still usable, enhanced resale models offer an attractive opportunity. For customers who want to retain their clothes for longer, appropriate care should be encouraged and facilitated.

This can lead to new opportunities for innovative business models to be employed by the fashion industry. Subscription services, clothing rental and Peer-to-peer sharing could be some new options.

Rental fashion and clothes rental services have been gaining in popularity and like this the rental market is expected to reach a value of US \$ 2.08 billion by 2025. These services give the possibility to rent one or several items for an event or for a few days. According to *Glam Corner's Anastasia Pappa*⁷⁰ the rental model can massively reduce the environmental impact of a garment. “By sharing a designer item with 20-30 other women who would have otherwise purchased a single item to use once and dispose of you can help to reduce the environmental impact of such a wear by up to 95%,” Anastasia says.

A study from the *Finnish scientific journal*⁷¹ revealed that renting clothes could be worse for the planet than throwing them away. It found that renting clothes has the highest climate impact of all⁷². The hidden environmental cost was mostly found to be delivery and packaging costs. In fact, renting involves a large amount of transportation, taking the clothes back and forth between the warehouse and the renter. Dry cleaning is also harmful to the environment. If rental companies change their logistics to make them more climate friendly, renting would, environmentally, be on a level with reselling. But, for rental marketplaces featuring ‘on-trend’ brands, styles still become obsolete alarmingly quickly, contributing to the problem of excess textile waste. It’s important that all clothing can be recycled or upcycled, and pressure should be applied to brands to do this.

⁷⁰ Solene Rauturier, “Is clothing Rental The Sustainable Option For Your Next Big Event?”, Goodonyou, September 2018, <https://goodonyou.eco/is-clothing-rental-the-sustainable-option-for-your-next-big-event/>, (visited on May 1, 2022).

⁷¹ Jarkko Levänen et al 2021 Environ. Res. Lett. 16 054069, <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/abfac3/pdf>, (visited on May 1, 2022).

⁷² Solene Rauturier, 2021.

2. WHAT HAS CHANGED IN THE PEOPLE?

2.1. THEORIES BEHIND THE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

In the next chapters it will be studied and analyzed how consumers behave and what kind of options they have available. The choice of what to buy is based on many factors, including behavioral economics theories⁷³. In fact, consumer behavior theory explores how consumers make decisions. Sustainability is an attribute of products explicitly or implicitly relevant to consumer buying decisions. Therefore, it is important for businesses to understand the process and the factors that affect the design and deliver their products.

First it is important to mention the fashion cycle⁷⁴, or fashion life cycle, that usually has a regular pattern. In general, a fashion life cycle starts with innovation and rise, both compose the first step called Introduction Stage, followed by the Acceptance Stage, in which the fashion reaches the culmination, after the acceleration of adoption. After that, the fashion adopters gradually decline as time goes by, until it becomes obsolete, or even disappears from people's sight. The cycle's length and shape can be various due to different kinds of fashion, in fact, they can exhibit a moderate cycle, others are longer-lived or shorter-lived, and also the changing trend of stages are various. According to the relative length of acceptance cycle, there are other three kinds of "fashion" besides Moderate Fashion, which can be named Fads, Fast Fashion and Classics.

The fast fashion one is located between Moderate fashion and Fad, which is a short-lived fashion that suddenly becomes popular and quickly disappears and does not perform any meaningful function. Moderate Fashion is a style prevalent in a moderate period, there is big possibility for it to be cyclical. And Fast fashion can be defined from the perspective of business concept as a strategy which aims to reduce the processes involved in the buying cycle and lead times for getting new fashion product into stores, in order to satisfy consumer demand at its peak.

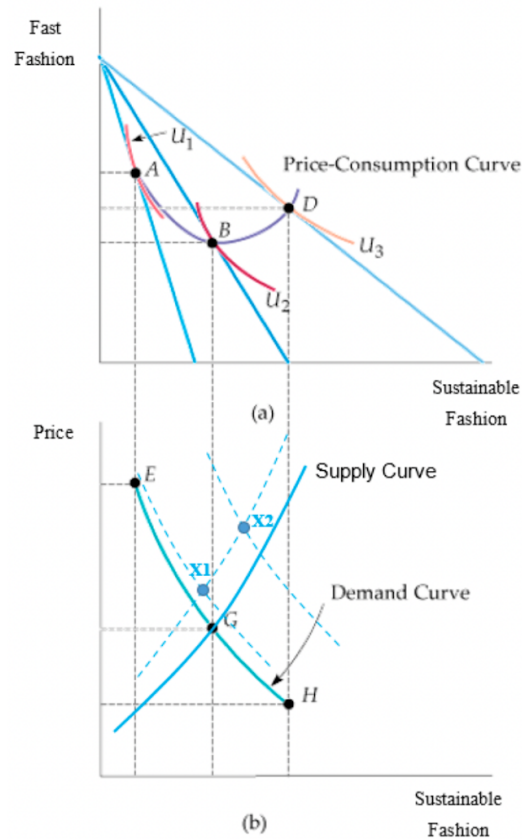
Let now focus on the theory that evolves around the fast fashion consumer behavior.

⁷³ Zhang B., Zhang Y., Zhou P, 2021.

⁷⁴ Tina Yinyin Wang, 2010.

2.1.1. ECONOMIC THEORY ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Fast fashion products can be considered as economic goods. Therefore, the demand for these products follows basic economic laws, a higher price leads to lower demand and higher income leads to higher demand. In fact, a common assumption of almost all modern economic interpretations is that consumers are rational optimizers. The consumers know exactly what they want (Utility Function), and what they have (Budget Constraint)⁷⁵.



Graphic 2: Consumer Optimization Behavior and Market Equilibrium.
 Panel (a): price – consumption curve, Panel (b): supply-demand curves. (Zhang, B.;Zhang, Y.;Zhou, P. Consumer Attitude towards Sustainability of Fast Fashion Products in the UK. Sustainability 2021, 13, 1646. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13041646>);

As Graphic 2 shows the price drops for sustainable fashion products, the budget constraint, which is what the consumer can afford, is relaxed and it shifts outward, resulting in higher utility level (from point A to B to D). Each optimal demand corresponds to a point along the demand curve, which contains all the possible combinations between price and optimal quantity of demand.

⁷⁵ Zhang B., Zhang Y., Zhou P, 2021.

On the supply side, there is a similar optimization decision for the producers resulting in a supply curve. The market interactions between consumers and producers determine the general equilibrium price and quantity (shown in panel b).

Price and income can be defined as the two most important factors underlying consumer's decision-making. In this context, sustainability can affect both subjective preferences and objective prices. On the other hand, as more people are aware of environmental issues and importance of sustainability, consumers tend to prefer natural, more durable materials, so this means sustainable fashion, rather than artificial, non-biodegradable materials, like in the case of fast fashion clothes. The demand curve for eco-friendly clothes shifts out.

On the other hand, most eco-friendly materials are more expensive, so higher prices may deter customers from purchasing clothes with sustainability features. As a result, the supply curve for eco-friendly clothes shifts up. These two forces are opposite and cancel out each other.

2.1.2. PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Sometimes the traditional economic interpretations of consumer behavior ignore the emotional aspect of buying activities. It is effectively a normative analysis (what people should do) rather than a positive analysis (what people actually do). Humans are not machines, so they don't always make rational choices as economics predicts.

In contrast to economics, psychology offers a different perspective to understand consumer behavior, including cognitive, emotional, and social needs. Abraham Maslow was the first who introduced the concept of hierarchy of needs in 1943. He started analyzing the human needs and found that different levels of consumption products belong to different levels of needs. For example, food and clothing are physiological needs, but gym and fashion are belongingness and love needs. Consumers who do not resolve the lower needs get stuck in that level. Sustainability can be treated as part of belongingness, love and esteem needs, because ethical and responsible consumption is beyond individuals⁷⁶.

⁷⁶ Zhang B., Zhang Y., Zhou P, 2021.

2.1.3. MARKETING THEORY ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

The decision-making process of a consumer is influenced by a lot of factors, if the buying decisions are treated as economic decisions, then the perceived values of the product purchased are given. The only variables to consider are the prices of products and its alternatives as well as the income of consumers⁷⁷.

One influential factor in modern consumption is information research, like social media. It is becoming more common that commercial campaigns include digital marketing tools as an indispensable part. Once purchase decisions are made, consumers will rank products in their evoked set according to pre-set criteria (preferences orderings) and select the most desirable product (optimizations). After this, the actual purchases occur, but marketers still try to influence the consumers with offers right up until the purchase. However, this is not the end, as consumers will automatically provoke post-purchase evaluation of the product and feed forwards to future purchases.

In the process of consumption decision-making, different individual units can be involved:

- A decision-making unit (DMU): can be an initiator and it's who begins the process of considering a purchase;
- An influencer: who attempts to persuade others in a purchase;
- A decider: who has the power to make the decision;
- A buyer: who conducts the transaction;
- A user: who actually use the product;
- A financier: who pays;
- A gatekeeper: who discloses information;

⁷⁷ Zhang B., Zhang Y., Zhou P, 2021.

2.1.4. THE DIFFERENT CONSUMERS BUYING SITUATIONS

Usually, the fast fashion consumer decision process varies, and happens in following three main patterns:

1. Purchasing in accordance with certain expectation;
2. Purchasing some unexpected item during the shopping with certain expectation;
3. Go shopping without any expectation (*Impulse Purchasing*⁷⁸).

The most common consumers buying situations is the *routine rebuy*, including items that are bought frequently on a regular basis, an example are toilet rolls. In this kind of purchase, the two primary factors to be considered are the needs and prices, secondly, the purchase has little to do with cultural or social factors. An exception was at the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic, toilet rolls became in shortage due to psychological sentiment and social herding behavior. In this specific case, it is no longer a routine rebuy, but a panic hoarding.

The second type of buying is *modified rebuy*, in which case consumers are familiar with a range of alternatives and may choose different brands in purchases, like in the case of fashion products. Consumers, in this case, may want to change brands from time to time to reflect their versatility in tastes.

Completely novel purchases are the third type of consumer buying, in this case there is no previous experience of the product. This is also a common phenomenon with sustainable fashion products, given that consumers may have an open mind in new fashion trends and needs.

Buying situations can be also categorized by the level of involvement of consumers in the purchase, which can be affected by:

- Self-image (how we see ourselves);
- Perceived risks (e.g., financial, physical, functional, social and psychological);
- Associated costs of purchase (e.g., return policy);
- Social factors (e.g., wealth, religion, habits, education, family size);
- Hedonism (pleasure seeking).

For example, routine rebuy has low involvement because it is habitual and there are few differences between brands, while complex buying has high involvement because it is

⁷⁸ Aalaa Abdulelah Sembawa, pag 9, 2019.

information intensive and there are significant differences between brands. For example, sustainable fashion buying belongs to the latter category.

For consumer behavior it's important to talk about *impulse buying*. Every day, people find themselves or others behaving impulsively. According to the *Impulsive Buying theory*⁷⁹, consumers indulge in impulsive buying behaviors under the influence of external forces. The model suggests four kinds of impulse buying⁸⁰:

1. *Pure*: characterized by being a fresh or “gateway” purchase, which breaks the regular buying pattern;
2. *Reminder*: arises during a trip to the store when the shopper remembers to buy after seeing the item or recalls its advertisement;
3. *Suggestion*: despite not having any previous knowledge of the item, the will to buy it arises with the product quality being evaluated at the point of sale;
4. *Planned*: originated by. A previous intention of buying an item, but is dependent on purchase conditions, like for example, offer and discounts.

Muruganantham and Bhakat (2013) analyzed the factors that influences the impulse buying, like:

Internal factors: such as individual traits, this is due to the association of internal factors with an individual's personality traits. Farid and Ali (2018) studied the effects of personality on impulsive buying using the Big Five personality traits. The research reveals that higher openness, extraversion, and neuroticism lead to impulse buying. The people identified with these traits are either excited to try out new things or are easily dissuaded from their plans and therefore they quickly fall prey to marketing strategies that lure them to buying impulsively.

External factors: involve various features of the shopping environment, such as sales promotions, sales attendants, store characteristics, sensory stimulation, presence of peers or family, and retail merchandising⁸¹. These factors can be controlled by retailers or marketers to trigger impulse buying. Store features such as lighting, music, and layout play an influential role in promoting impulse buying, store likeability, and the amount of time and money spent. For example, creating a comfortable environment causes consumers to spend more time in the store, which consequently increases the likelihood of an unplanned purchase. The use of

⁷⁹ Hawkins Stern, (1962).

⁸⁰ Daniela Alves da Silva Ferreira Santos, (2019).

⁸¹ Muruganantham & Bhakat, (2013).

attractive lights and colors in lighting, for example, is undertaken to make the product on display visually appealing to consumers⁸².

Regarding to fashion, a woman may impulsively buy an item because it is currently trending, while a man would more likely purchase an item because of its use or from pure desire⁸³. Since women's fashion changes quickly, women are more likely to be frequent and impulsive buyers than men. When it comes to impulsive buying behavior, men tend to impulsively purchase instrumental items that are connected to their interests. Women tend to impulse buy self-expressive products which are associated with appearance.

Especially in this case, the rapid change of designs and trends, like in the case of the fast-fashion industry, could cause some impulse buying. This practice can be beneficial for retailers because it allows them to sell new products immediately and at a full price.

⁸² Karbasivar & Yarahmadi, 2011.

⁸³ Lakshmi et al., 2017.

2.2. HOW TO CHANGE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN WAYS THAT IMPROVE CLIMATE IMPACTS?

Since the fast fashion companies have strong impacts on the environment and consequently the phenomenon of climate change worsens, it is important to try to understand how consumer behavior can be more aware also from the climate change point of view⁸⁴.

In the last 200 years production and consumption had a major growth, this has led to substantial improvements in the lives of billions of people in terms of life expectancy and satisfaction. At the same time, some scientists said that human activity has already led to or is on the verge of crossing critical planetary boundaries, which can lead to disastrous consequences. One of them is a stable global temperature, which is threatened mostly by emissions of CO₂. For example, the fashion industry accounts itself for 10% of global carbon emissions.

Business and government are an important part of trying to solve the problem of climate change. But Sustainability in itself is not a new phenomenon, but rather has been investigated as early as the 1960s when consumers started to be more concerned about the impact their consumption patterns have on the natural environment⁸⁵. Such commitments from businesses and governments will only be successful if they come hand in hand with behavior change from consumers themselves. It has been estimated that through the realistic implementation of changes in consumer behavior, the European Union (EU) could reduce its carbon footprint by about 25%.

Individuals can do their part by engaging in climate-friendly consumer behavior, which can be defined as consumer choices and actions that result in the mitigation of greenhouse gasses being released into the atmosphere or the reduction in negative impacts of climate change. Organizations can make use of recent research that has sought to identify drivers of sustainable consumer behavior change to design products, services, and communication strategies that will be most effective in encouraging climate-friendly consumer behavior.

Rishad Habib, Katherine White, David J. Hardisty and Jiaying Zhao, on the “*Psychology of Climate Change*” organized a research called *SHIFT framework* to categorize behavior change strategies based on the five psychological factors that have been found to successfully improve pro-environmental consumer behavior.

⁸⁴ John Thøgersen, 2021.

⁸⁵ e.g. Peattie 1995; McCormick 2001; Sustainability 2011

	Stage of the Consumption Cycle		
	Choice	Usage	Disposal
S ocial influence	People follow advocates who themselves engage in non-normative behavior, such as putting up solar panels (Kraft-Todd et al., 2019).	Dynamic norms emphasizing how others are adopting new behaviors reduce water usage (Sparkman et al., 2020).	Mothers' waste avoidance and recycling behaviors tend to encourage their children (Evans et al., 2018).
H abit	New sustainable habits often involve new product choices (Perera et al., 2018).	Defaults help lower meat consumption, and feedback reduces energy use (Wynes et al., 2018).	People form new habits such as food redistribution to reduce food waste (Gollnhofer 2019).
I ndividual self	Consumers' desire to view themselves positively leads to forgetting unethical attributes more than ethical ones (Reczek et al., 2018)	Higher status is associated with lower energy conservation (Wang et al., 2019).	Reminders of the past identity of repurposed products make consumers feel special and increases demand (Kamleitner et al., 2019).
F eelings and cognition	People's intuition that ethical products are less strong reduces choice share (Mai et al., 2019).	Using green products leads to greater warm glow than using traditional products (Tezer & Bodur 2020).	Lower anticipated guilt increases demand for made-to-order products, made from recycled materials (Paharia 2020).
T angibility	Detailed, concrete information about sustainability can increase choice of eco-friendly products (Reczek et al., 2020).	Experiencing heatwaves can lead to perceptions of energy scarcity (Larcom et al., 2015).	Concrete representations of what products can become encourage recycling (Winterich et al., 2019).

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Table 2: Stage of Consumption Cycle (Shifting consumer behavior to address climate change), Science Direct 2021 (www.sciencedirect.com)

Social Influence can be the attitudes, expectations and actions of others that plays a large role in how consumers behave. A lot of actors, like, family, organizers or advocates, social media influencers, and others in a community can influence the behavior of individuals. A challenge with encouraging climate-friendly behaviors using social influence is that they are often not the norm. However, policymakers, marketers, and psychologists can harness the power of social influence, even when a behavior is non-normative. They have three main ways to do that:

1. Communicate how a behavior is becoming more prevalent over time, often referred to as dynamic norms. People tend to conform to what they expect future norms to be, so this method can be effective. dynamic norms allow people to believe that personal change is possible and that it is important to others and compatible with their identity.
2. Emphasize joining others to change the norm as people are motivated to work together toward common goals. As climate change is a collective action problem, learning that others are taking action can motivate consumers to do so as well.

3. Being involved advocates who themselves engage in the action in promoting it as they have a stronger influence on others. A large-scale field study of 1.4 million residents across 58 US towns found that community organizers who had installed solar panels themselves were able to recruit 62.8% more households than those who had not⁸⁶.

Habits are automatic, relatively uncontrolled behaviors that are easy for people to perform and building climate-friendly consumption habits can be instrumental in guiding people's actions. When existing habits are unsustainable, the goal for behavior change is to develop new, more climate-friendly habits. Creating a new sustainable practice usually involves acquiring information, procuring necessary items, and sometimes even producing such items oneself. New environmentalists may start with gaining knowledge about how products are produced, followed by nontraditional transactions to obtain items, such as swapping clothes or collecting unsold food, and later may knit one's own clothes or grow one's own food. Consumers can also work to create new, complementary consumption practices that align more clearly with their internal values, such as food redistribution to combat food waste.

People are motivated to maintain a positive view of themselves. This motivation to see oneself as a good, virtuous person can be partially fulfilled through consuming climate-friendly products, particularly when one plays a role in its production. Reading about the stories of repurchased products can help consumers feel unique and special when they purchase them, contributing positively to their self-concept. When consumers feel a sense of ownership over public goods such as parks and lakes, they are more likely to put in effort to take care of their surroundings. Moreover, consuming green products that are seen as virtuous can lead to positive spillover effects, wherein one climate-friendly product purchase leads to other prosocial behaviors, such as donations. This motivation for positive self-perceptions can lead consumers to remember positive ethical information about a product, but to conveniently forget unethical information that might cast the self in a negative light.

Individual differences are also important in climate-friendly decision-making. Those who have a communal orientation, such as those with a feminine gender identity, a greater other orientation, liberal political identity, or low power, are more likely to take climate-friendly

⁸⁶ Kraft-Todd GT, Bollinger B, Gillingham K, Lamp S, Rand DG: Credibility-enhancing displays promote the provision of non-normative public goods. *Nature* 2018, 563:245–248, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-018-0647-4>, (visited on October 21, 2021).

actions. One way to influence climate action is by including communally oriented members through conscious group formation.

Consumers are influenced by feeling, intuition and cognition, positive emotions such as elevation and hope have positive effects on climate-friendly consumer behavior. For instance, an image of solar panel installation led to feelings of hope and increased support for climate policies. Not only do positive emotions lead to greater purchase of climate-friendly products but also using such products results in greater positive emotions, such as warm glow and enjoyment. Moderate levels of negative emotions, such as shame, guilt, and fear, can also be highly effective in encouraging climate-friendly behaviors. Anticipated guilt is a particularly strong motivator and is part of the reason people prefer ethical production when they are directly involved. Negatively framed messages can be more effective than positively framed messages, partially because they activate anticipated shame. Similarly, climate messages that focus on negative impacts can lead to higher levels of fear and increased support for climate policies, especially among conservatives. However, in an effort to avoid negative emotions, consumers may inadvertently act in climate-unfriendly ways such as placing items that cannot be recycled in the recycling bin.

Consumers often rely on their cognitive system to make decisions about engaging in climate-friendly actions. In fact, few consumers do not purchase sustainable products because of their lack of understanding of climate impacts or because they are often wary of sustainability claims. For instance, they may interpret the presence of extrinsic appeals as an indication that a company lacks intrinsic motives to help the environment and is acting in an eco-friendly manner only to make money. Perceptions of greenwashing can lead to negative reactions, even if the discrepancy is on the supplier end. This is made worse if both the environmental claims and the disconfirming information are specific.

One way to correct consumers' erroneous perception of the climate impacts of different behaviors is to present accurate information. For example, information in the form of labels can be especially useful when people have incorrect impressions, such as when they underestimate carbon emissions from food choices.

A particularly striking feature of climate change is that it can feel abstract and psychologically distant socially, temporally, spatially, and hypothetically. Although it is looming closer as more people experience and observe adverse impacts.

There are two main ways to increase climate-friendly behavior:

1. Make the outcomes of actions more concrete and tangible. Concrete representations of what products will become after recycling can generate greater interest and advertisements and lead to increased recycling at outdoor events and residences.
2. Target consumers who already think abstractly or change consumer mindsets, by asking them to think more abstractly.

On a more practice point of view, in order to have a tangible change there are two main ways, firstly try to slow or stop climate change by mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. Then, trying to adapt to new conditions caused by climate change.

2.3.WHO DECIDED TO AVOID FAST FASHION

Society in general, but mainly young generation, are drastically calling for a more sustainable future. Nowadays, every individual should be considering a radical change in its lifestyle as a try to counteract the environmental destruction of the planet.

Consumers are changing behaviors towards more sustainability conscious buying behavior. People are increasingly looking for products and brands that are more sustainable and that support their personal values.

But what is a sustainable product? It can be defined by these six characteristics:

- 1) Customer satisfaction;
- 2) A focus on both ecological and social aspects;
- 3) Consideration of the whole life cycle of the product: from sourcing of raw materials to product disposal;
- 4) Provision of significant improvements to the particular ecological and/or social issue the product addresses;
- 5) Continuous improvement as the world changes and new technologies or environmental problems surface;
- 6) The product's ability to maintain its position against competitors' offerings.

An important method used to recognize that a product or brand is sustainable is, for example, the use of labelling. They can potentially provide credibility, reassurance, and information to consumers, enabling them to make an informed decision.

However, despite the growth in popularity of general sustainable goods, this consumer behavior hasn't extended to clothing to the same extent. The awareness of fast fashion environmental and social implications and sustainable clothing is increasing thanks to the rise in information access through international media. An example can be the previously mentioned Rana Plaza disaster, that prompted international public response and led to a general increase in awareness.

Although knowledge can be a catalyst for attitude and behavioral change, it's not 100% sure that people act upon the change required. This can be due to several reasons, like: costs, fewer options, aesthetic and functional disadvantages, lack of knowledge and a skepticism over the environmental benefit.

Some surveys predicted consumers' willingness to pay a premium for green products, but also that consumers were not prepared to sacrifice product quality or features for more socially product quality or features for more socially acceptable products. Other studies reported mixed findings in terms of generalizing this willingness across different groups of consumers. A new report from e-commerce personalization platform Nosto showed that of 2,000⁸⁷ U.S. and U.K.-based shoppers surveyed, sustainable practices and fair wages for workers were top consumer demands for modern fashion retailers. The report, also, revealed that while 52% of consumers do want the fashion industry to follow more sustainable practices, only 29% of consumers would pay more sustainable-made versions of the same items. But at the same time, 62% of consumers would also like to receive discounts on sustainable clothing items. This shows a disconnection between the idea of sustainable fashion and where consumers, especially of younger generations actually spend their money. Data from a report by ecological certification company Oeko-Tex illustrated that while 69% of Millennials say they look into claims of sustainability and eco-friendliness when researching clothing purchases, only 37% actually bought clothes from brands with that focus. Many studies debated a so-called attitude–behavior gap between positive attitudes towards ethical products and actual purchase behavior.

In contrast with that, most of the younger consumers are seriously concerned with social and environmental impacts of fashion. Young adults between 16-29 years old have increasingly adopted more conscious, sustainable shopping practices. In fact, Gen Zs showed a greater sense of social responsibility compared to past generations, morals and values shape their shopping habits. Gen Zs are also now looking for fashion companies with corporate social responsibility policies and projects. This is because they are aware of the true cost of fashion and want to combat it, embracing more sustainable consumption behaviors⁸⁸.

At business level, the clothing sector has begun to respond to negative publicity and consumer demand. In fact, companies like H&M and others decide to create “sustainable” lines, but what they are actually selling is “being sustainable”. Others have aimed to improve supply chain conditions by, for example committing to the Transparency Pledge⁸⁹. However, the

⁸⁷ McKinsey & Company, 2020.

⁸⁸ Fashion Takes Action (FTA), 2021.

⁸⁹ Transparency Pledge helps demonstrate apparel and footwear companies' commitment towards greater transparency in their manufacturing supply chain.

majority of fast fashion companies have not released factory details to the public, like Urban Outfitters and Forever 21.

Improving and implementing information sharing can be some positive steps towards accountability⁹⁰, but currently many companies engage in “greenwashing”, increasing sales by marketing as “green”, when they are not so. It’s through customers understating this reality that a mistrust of company claims has emerged as a barrier to consumption.

⁹⁰ Esben Rahbek Gjerdrum Pedersen and Kirsti Reitan Andersen, 2015.

2.3.1. SUSTAINABLE FASHION OPTIONS

Aware consumers can make important choices which can be helpful in order to reduce the environmental impact of fashion. In the past 20 years, studies show that consumers are more inclined to choose a brand over another if they believe that the brand is perceived to be sensitive to environmental concerns.

What are some actions that can help to reach this goal?

Buy less: As previously described, Patagonia suggest to avoid buying their new clothes, since even the greenest garment uses resources for production and transport, creating some environmental impact;

Buy clothes from sustainable brands: recently, more and more fashion brands consider the environmental and social impact of their production. Unfortunately, the offer is still limited but the demand is slowly increasing;

Buy better quality: since clothes have become so cheap, people do not care as much about quality. If consumers stop buying poor quality, it will push brands to improve the quality of their garment.

A good option can be choosing *slow fashion* companies. These focus on a more sustainable production model which stimulates the consumer to buy better quality clothing, produced ethically with sustainable fabrics⁹¹. In fact, slow fashion process challenges the apparel firms to make the effort to include sustainable, environmental, and ethical practices into their designs, to select production methods that emphasize quality, craftsmanship, and experienced labor, and to educate consumers so that they can play an active role in making informed decisions regarding their apparel's selections. Additionally, slow fashion is not only about purchasing garments that meet the ethical requirements but also participating in the process of reusing, recycling, and repurposing existing clothing. For example, this can be an opportunity of additional growth to the apparel industry as the slow fashion trend could support tailors and budding designers who would enable consumers to repurpose their garments.

⁹¹ Sanjukta Pookulangara, Arlesa Shephard, 2013.

Think twice before throwing out clothes: the clothes can't be thrown in the normal bins, this is because most of them are made of synthetic, non-biodegradable fiber and will just pile up in the land fill. Try to repair, donate or sell can be a more sustainable option of getting rid of the clothes we no longer want;

Buy second hand, swap and rent clothing: instead of buying new clothing, there are alternative options, like:

1. Second-hand shop: they can be physical stores, such as an antique shop, or new and comfortable apps such as Vinted or Depop. The prices are very competitive, and the choice is very wide. Given the convenience of these platforms it becomes very easy to sell and buy, even from various parts of the world. In fact, Depop, which is a peer-to-peer shopping app that allows shoppers to buy secondhand items from each other, had an intense growth, especially during the pandemic has seen a 90% increase in traffic;
2. Swap clothes: these are new initiatives that are became popular all over the world. Participants bring clothes that no longer wear and exchange them for clothes they will use. This is an economic and eco-friendly way to refill the wardrobe;
3. Rent clothes: this is another growing industry. This option is great especially for clothes that won't be wear for a long time or often, like baby or pregnancy clothes. Some companies also offer a monthly fee, allowing customers to constantly renew their wardrobe.

Pay attention to the laundry: washing the clothes has a significant environmental impact. The average household does almost 400 loads of laundry every year, consuming about 60.000 liters of water. It also takes a lot of energy to heat the washing water and run the drying cycle. Another problem related to this topic is clothes made synthetic fibers. For example, polyester is now used in about 60% of fast fashion clothes⁹². Washing these clothes means release in the water microplastics and they might reach beaches and oceans where they can remain for a lot of years, as previously described⁹³. The best solution is not buying synthetic clothes, some weak alternatives could be wash in colder water or use a specific filter.

⁹² Kirsten Brodde, 2017.

⁹³ Ocean Wise.

Sustainable options can be available in the fair-trade market⁹⁴. *Fairtrade* represents an alternative way to do business which is all about: “Better prices, decent working conditions, local sustainability, and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers in the developing world⁹⁵”. Fairtrade aims to empower producers in developing countries to build up their own business and community, and to reach audiences, via the development of international trade, without being exploited. Fairtrade on the other hand, specifically refers to the certifying and labelling organization Fairtrade International. Certification is the best way of ensuring that clothing is truly fair trade, making brands more accountable and assuring consumers that the extra cost associated with fair trade clothing is being used to ensure fair working conditions.

⁹⁴ Vertica Bhardwaj & Ann Fairhurst, 2010.

⁹⁵ Fairtrade Foundation.

2.3.2. A MODERN AND SUSTAINABLE FASHION COMPANY:

PATAGONIA

Patagonia is an outdoor clothing retailer founded by Yvon Chouinard in 1973 and based in Ventura, California. It started as a supplier of expedition and climbing gear, then shifted to the product apparel and fashion. Patagonia is currently one of the leading outdoor clothing and gear companies created to target and support 'silent sports' including climbing, surfing, and fly fishing. These activities are characterized by the fact that they don't require an engine, and simultaneously connect people to the natural environment.

"Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis" is Patagonia's vision which has been the same for the past 45 years⁹⁶. Even though Patagonia has changed its product focus, or added hundreds of employees, their core values always stayed the same. The founder decided to not reinvent his business, but he evolved it, to build a brand that consumers think is authentic.

Patagonia acts and displays thoughtfulness for environmental and social issues, the company has to be transparent with its customers. They have always been committed to protect the environment and since 1986, they have been a member in *"One Percent for the Planet"*⁹⁷ organization and they are committed to donate at least 1% of their revenue toward the environmental cause. Since 1985, the company donated \$90,000,000 to grassroots organizations around the world. In 2012, Patagonia became a *"Certified B Corporation"*⁹⁸ which is an achievement for non-profit companies showing extraordinary social and environmental performance. In addition to that, the company named themselves *"The Activist Company"*, since they created a digital platform to allow individuals committed to helping the environment take action and get connected by attending local events, signing petitions and volunteering their time. Patagonia, also, displays its activism for the environment through spearheading various environmental groups and work to defend the planet. Promoting its hashtag *#VoteOurPlanet*, the company encourages customers to take political action and elect leaders who support environmental groups and work to defend the planet.

⁹⁶ www.Tom-and-Jerry.medium.com, (2020).

⁹⁷ One Percent for the Planet is an international organization whose members contribute at least one percent of their annual sales to environmental causes. Their mission is to "build, support and activate an alliance of businesses financially committed to creating a healthy planet." One Percent for the Planet members assist nonprofit organizations that protect land, forests, rivers, oceans and also encourage sustainable methods of energy production.

⁹⁸ Reema Kamis Al-Kuwari, page 7, (2021).

This company is known to be truthful to their mission of using business to inspire, adapting to eco-friendly solutions that are sustainable, and causing no unnecessary harm. This shows their great sense of Corporate Social Responsibility, and ethicality is what made Patagonia and differentiated it from other rivals. Patagonia publish on their website “*The Footprint Chronicles*” which includes information regarding its sustainable supply chain practices, including creating Fair Trade Certified products⁹⁹. In addition, the document shows the sustainable sourcing Patagonia employs to create its product, since they have their own standard for ensuring that the farm its sources is down from is human and sustainable. Along with tracing its down, Patagonia also uses 100% recycled down in a number of its product lines.

As previously described, the fashion companies make a relevant impact on the environment, Patagonia is aware of its impact, and has made or is still making important steps in order to reduce their impact. Although Patagonia has long been using materials with a lower environmental impact, they are still unable to completely give up on the use of fossil fuels. By 2025, they will only use certain materials, including organic and regenerative cotton, recycled polyester, and recycled nylon. They are already doing this in 87% of their line. This effort will reduce their emissions by 15%. Through the growing *Worn Wear program*¹⁰⁰. Patagonia will continue to offer customers 60% lower emissions than new garments.

A tool that Patagonia is using is the *Environmental Profit and Loss (EP&L)* calculates the carbon emissions, water consumption and waste production of each item they sell. They use EP&L to guide their product choices, identify and prioritize significant improvements, stop modeling until their impact can be reduced, and decrease the quantities we produce. EP&L makes them accountable to our customers and the planet.

Since 90% of their CO₂ emissions is from their supply chain and materials production, Patagonia is funding energy and carbon emissions audits with partners working to improve energy efficiency, deploy off-site and on-site renewable energy, and reduce coal and other high-carbon fuels used in the production of their materials.

Regarding the work conditions in the factory where they produce, the company pays a premium for every Fair Trade Certified piece of clothing, and that money is used to provide workers with a cash bonus, to support their communities, or to fund necessary programs.

⁹⁹ Lauren J. Cohune, page 11, 2019.

¹⁰⁰ Worn Wear is a set of tools to help our customers partner with Patagonia to take mutual responsibility to extend the life of the products Patagonia makes and customers’ purchase. The program provides significant resources for responsible care, repair, reuse and resale, and recycling at the end of a garment’s life.

Chouinard was able to make risky choices and in 2011, they ran an ad in The New York Times on Black Friday telling people, “*Don’t Buy This Jacket*”¹⁰¹. The message was intended to encourage people to consider the effect of consumerism on the environment and purchase only what they need. In fact, Patagonia took this idea even further by highlighting the garment’s wasteful lifecycle, including the amount of water it took to make it, and the carbon dioxide emissions it produced in order to get it from the manufacturing plant to Patagonia’s distribution center in Reno, Nevada. Although this approach might seem risky, Patagonia’s sales went up about 30% in 2012 because of this campaign, and up another 6% the following year. European marketing director Jonathan Petty says it has helped to establish a strong community of people who appreciate the brand’s values and its products.

Patagonia looks to the future with the goal of producing in a sustainable way and exploiting its influence to try to cope with other companies to climate change by changing the system. In addition to this, Patagonia’s unconventional and successful marketing strategies aim to make a difference in the retail industry and encourages its customers to act alongside the company.

¹⁰¹ Patagonia website.

2.4.WHO IS STILL BUYING FAST FASHION

Fast fashion, as previously mentioned, is still a growing sector. It has been growing exponentially over the last 20 years and remains extremely successful today despite many critics related to its enormous social and environmental costs. It is estimated that in 2025 the fast fashion market will have a 40\$ billion forecast value.

Today's consumers trends relate to affordable and new trendy clothing inspired by runway shows. Many of them are influenced by commercials, celebrities, and social media personalities.

Consumer purchasing decisions are influenced by people who they interact with or are surrounded by especially young people. Social influence is also an important aspect, in fact, people buy certain products to be part of a specific group or social class. Consumers are often controlled by what they think others think. They want to maintain a specific reputation, and therefore they fall into social pressure. Consumers sometimes lose the notion of their own wills because they are focused on what they think is correct.

Like this, the fast fashion trend has revolutionized the clothing industry over the past decade and changed the consumer attitudes to apparel consumption that led to a culture of impulse buying. This phenomenon is particularly salient amongst young female consumers, who have little awareness of the social impact of their fashion consumption but exhibit the highest levels of demand for new fashion items. The generation Z, as previously described is becoming more and more aware of what they are buying, but since they are more used to using new technologies, it can be easier reach them via multiple channels. For the example, price is a determining factor for them, and some fast fashion companies create social campaigns for their brand often providing big discounts, so that young people will be more intrigued to buy more trendy clothes at low price.

In order to answer to the increase of demand, fast fashion brands and retailers keep pushing for lower labor and raw material costs. Most of the fast fashion production takes place in overseas countries. It employs more than 300 million people, from farmers to garment factory workers which lives in low-income countries, where labor is shockingly cheap. In fact, this sector has a tremendous impact on the economy and on the workers.

According with the *Theory of structural injustice*¹⁰², people contribute to creating injustices in society, even when they act within the accepted laws and moral norms. The societal

¹⁰² Tara Stringer and Alice Ruth Payne, Gary, 2021.

and global structures that exploit the supply chain innovations of fast fashion retailers may, in fact allow, the continual disadvantage of members of historically excluded groups due to the perceived social power assigned to influence the big companies. This social power may engender a sense of distance from others. Therefore, individuals who have power to see themselves as less similar to and thus more distant from individuals who have less power. The exploitation of this situation is due to an insatiable consumer demand for cheap clothing, so consumer purchase decisions can be viewed as key in perpetuating modern slavery.

A recent study explained one of the reasons why consumers could be careless. The participants of this study exhibited low levels of moral intensity and moral obligation towards those manufacturing the clothing largely due to the perceived distance between the manufacturer and consumer and an underlying social consensus towards exploitative practices. Due to the perceived distance, participants reported a lack of connection to the plight of garment workers and an overall inability to relate to their circumstances, particularly compared to environmental concerns occurring “closer to home” or “in our backyard”. Additionally, despite an underlying awareness of exploitative practices along the fashion supply chain, participants appeared to accept these occurrences were necessary to ensure accessible clothing, indicating an underlying social consensus that these practices are in fact acceptable or considered normal within the fashion industry. This acceptance can be applied to most of the impacts that fast fashion has.

In addition to the fact that part of the consumers is becoming nowadays more careless to who makes their clothing. Consumers do not seem to be as concerned about the fashion industry, as they are purchasing new items of clothing at a rapidly increasing rate. Consumers continue to support large firms that, as previously described, have clearly acted both unethically and non-environmentally friendly, despite the growing concern for the environment.

But, on the other hand the demand for green goods is intensifying. TerraChoice’s latest report shows that the number of “green” products increased 77 percent over a one-year period but found that 95 percent of these products used greenwashing-tactics in their marketing¹⁰³.

In order to respond to the demand of sustainable actions companies are put under a lot of pressure so, one of the most used techniques to wash their image with a greener than green sheen is to employ accounting tricks so creative they deserve their very own literature prize. One of them is *Greenwashing*.

¹⁰³ Lidia Alexa, Andreea Apetrei, Marius Pislaru, page 264, 2022.

2.4.1. HOW MARKETING AND GREENWASHING INFLUENCE THE CHOICES OF CONSUMERS IN THE FAST FASHION SECTOR

The rise of new technologies, communication innovations, and social media has pushed fast fashion in front of many indecisive customers. But some brands use exaggerated, deceptive, or unsubstantiated claims of environmental benefits in order to improve only their corporate image. In response to this, green advertising claims have become an important component of advertisements for many products. Products started to be labeled as “eco-friendly,” “organic,” or “sustainable”.

The necessity from the consumer of transparency and accountability has led to the establishment of, as previously described, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs and ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) criteria. The typical CSR programs usually communicate a company’s intentions to tackle environmental and social issues, but sometimes they merely express commitment only to boost their corporate legitimacy. Consequently, CSR claims are usually exaggerated, selective, or simply unrealizable. The phenomenon in which the deceptive marketing overstates a company's commitment to responsible social practices is called *Bluewashing*¹⁰⁴.

Starting from the late 1980s and early 1990s, *Green marketing*, which refers to the inclusion of environmental awareness in marketing management, has begun to be used more and more often¹⁰⁵. Companies that use it put more effort on designing, promotion, price and distribution of products or services that focus on reducing or avoiding the social and environmental impacts. For the companies adopting green marketing solutions help them find the balance between societal concerns and market opportunities by discovering and serving new market niches, increasing customers’ loyalty and attracting potential clients. Nevertheless, it is not easy to build green marketing credibility for an industry traditionally perceived as unsustainable.

So, companies are trying to be more and more sustainable, and consumers believe that by making ethical choices, they can encourage and support companies to be more sustainable, but due to limited product information, availability and fair-trade alternatives, it is difficult to support the right ethical brands. If a company has a bad reputation regarding fair trade, it is

¹⁰⁴ Sailer, A.; Wilfing, H.; Straus, E., 2022.

¹⁰⁵ Erik Olson, 2021.

possible that this will affect the likelihood of customers buying their products. Indeed, researchers pinpoint that in order to be perceived as green, fast-fashion companies must start by focusing on implementing sustainable business practices in all business operations, from product design and manufacturing to delivery and environmental contributions. Furthermore, due to the constant pressure from environmentalists and public opinion, companies began to emphasize and incorporate environmental concerns and subsequent corrective measures into their business operations.

This is where the concept of *Greenwashing* comes in.

In 1986 the *Greenwashing* concept was used for the first time by Jay Westerveld, a researcher of habitats associated with endangered species, when visiting a hotel that asked its guests to rescue their towels for water conservation, without actually doing any other environmental practices. Greenwashing can be defined as the intersect of two firms' behaviors: poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance¹⁰⁶.

The freelance writer Sharlene Gandhi describes it as a method that uses "Climate crisis as a means of marketing without any fundamental change to business¹⁰⁷". This method can give also a negatively influence in advertisement evaluation. So, customers will find difficult to identify true environmental claims and companies to trust. Companies underestimate the problem of trust, some of them are only interested in making profits and they won't inform consumers about its negative environmental effects, as this might result in the customer rethinking their consumption behavior. Instead, they think it's better to keep only a sustainable image of the brands, they won't start produce more sustainably than other companies, the difference is they make the customer believe they do. Companies tend to position themselves in a more sustainable way because they gain a better image from customers, and thus, make profit. The journalist Mehar Mehar claims that greenwashing is a deception of fast fashion, and customers must question if businesses care about sustainability. Another journalist, Elena Grinta, from BeIntelligent.eu, a digital magazine who discusses how companies deal with sustainable development, argues that many fast fashion companies misuse terms like 'eco-friendly' and greenwashing is unfortunately a by-product of companies who spend more time and money to advertise a 'green-ness' instead of reducing their environmental impact.

¹⁰⁶ Erik Olson, 2021.

¹⁰⁷ Sharlene Gandhi, 'How fast fashion is greenwashing', *Sense & Sustainability: fresh perspectives on sustainable development*, December 3rd, 2019 (accessed March 10th 2021)

There are multiple definitions of greenwashing, as mentioned before, “*The seven sins of Greenwashing*” in another one, from Strähle and Müller. This is a list of seven different types (7 are the main ones), of greenwashing claims that companies can be accused of¹⁰⁸. The fact that they choose the name “sin” highlights the significance of the immoral or illegal wrongdoing of brands who engage in greenwashing, causing a certain uneasy tension due to the severity of the world.

1. *The sin of the hidden trade-off*: a product is only perceived as being green because it is narrowly based on a defined set of attributes, like energy corporation who advertise about the pros of new energy sources while drilling into unexplored places to source oil, damaging the natural environment during this process.
2. *The sin of no proof*: a very common environmental claim. If a corporation adds unverified statistics or percentages without evidence, like a URL that leads to more information, the claim is seen as no proof.
3. *The sin of vagueness*: it happens when a product claims something that seems ambiguous. It could be too broad or unclear, something that could be misunderstood by the consumer by the products' lack of clarity. Examples of these are 'environmentally friendly', 'eco-conscious', 'non-toxic' (since everything can potentially become toxic in certain measurements), 'eco-friendly' and 'green' claims that are not elaborated enough.
4. *The sin of worshipping false labels*: when a company gives the impression of a third-party endorsement in an image, for example, despite its non-existence. Consumers will be misled and they will think that a product is legitimately “green” and has gone through an environmentally friendly process. In this case, some words like “eco-safe” or “eco-preferred” are commonly used.
5. *The sin of irrelevance*: when a product claims to be something that is already legally acquired to be. These claims are not necessary or helpful, but they occur when certain chemicals, for example, are illegal due to their toxicity.
6. *The sin of lesser of two evils*: this happens when the descriptions used for a product are green, even though the overall product is mostly polluting. The product could still exploit the environment but distracts the consumer by arguing it is less polluting than most products in its fitting category.

¹⁰⁸ Josephine Blesserholt, 2021.

7. *The sin of fibbing*: it relates to the use of stamps, symbols or labels that are not authorized and actually false on products. Consumers can't judge the legitimacy of many products due to these since they can be false or simply misunderstood. In some cases, the consumer may not even be aware of what sustainable fashion is, allowing companies to react with greenwashing, making it possible for companies to present themselves as sustainable, without actually producing their products sustainably. As said before, because of this lack of knowledge, it makes it easier for brands to keep a positive company image, rather than the necessary sustainable behavior.
8. *The sin of false hopes*
9. *The sin of profits over people and the environment*: which can be defined as the worst kind of greenwashing because the financial profits will be the main goals without taking into consideration the environment or the people.

The rest of the sins can be defined as “*the sin of fear mongering*” where the claims of companies are usually forged to create insecurity for not “buying in” on an organization’s practice¹⁰⁹.

10. *The sin of broken promises*: happens when companies promise communities in poverty with economic developments, despite evidence showing otherwise and these communities are left without financial assistance.
11. *The sin of injustice*: that occurs when environmental communication does not indicate to certain communities.
12. *The sin of hazardous consequences*: happens when customers are distracted from dangers others may experience, and the reality of inequality is concealed.

In order to understand better, other five kinds of green washing can be added to this list¹¹⁰. These are five firm-levels and they were produced by Contreras-Pacheco and Claasen (2017).

1. *First level “Dirty business”*: when a company is generally unsustainable even though they advertise for sustainable practices that are not good representatives for the business or society.
2. *Second level “Ad bluster”*: when advertisement is used to remove any attention about sustainable problems. These advertisements tend to overstate the actual achievements the company has to accomplished and provide programs that do not refer to the most serious environmental issues.

¹⁰⁹ Josephine Blesserholt, 2021.

¹¹⁰ Josephine Blesserholt, 2021.

3. *Third level “Fuzzy reporting”*: when sustainability reports are used as a means of customer communication for providing a positive impression in terms of CSR practices. The researchers, Contreras-Pacheco and Claasen explained that sustainability reports are part of a research trend in academia, since they are usually made to communicate and provide specific details surrounding the company’s incidents during a specific period. Not all of them can reveal these details, resulting in hiding the truth through different ways of deceit. Sustainability reports are supposed to be used as tools of transparency but argue to be interpreted as means of a company’s self-presentation and impression managements to make sure that different stakeholders approve the company’s public behaviors, as previous described. Unfortunately, these reports are often manipulated as will be described in the next paragraphs.
4. *Fourth level “the political spin”*: usually when companies influence governments to acquire certain benefits that still exploits the environment, but are more justifiable due to for example, paying large amounts of tax and employing lots of people.
5. *Fifth level relates to*: companies that have sustainability commitments that are legally required.

Despite the large focus on the negative impact greenwashing has on both brands reputations and consumers, many studies showed that greenwashing might have some potential positive impact. A study from Wu et al. (2020) looks at the impact of CSR investment related to greenwashing. Their game-theoretic model is used to test the impact of greenwashing and information transparency and find that greenwashing can hinder consumers in making conscious decisions, while motivating CSR investment. However, increased transparency diminishes greenwashing practices and increases motivation for a responsible firm to make additional sustainable investments.

Companies which use sustainable claims in their marketing communications are subject to regulation to guard against the possibility of misleading customers with greenwashing¹¹¹. An example is the European Union who introduced a law that forces asset managers, insurers and pension funds to disclose environmental risks in their investments. The law is specifically intended to encourage sustainable investment and to curb greenwashing, and means that financial managers have to disclose, for instance, investments in assets that could pollute water

¹¹¹ Erik Olson, 2021.

or damage biodiversity. As part of this regulation, EU states are also seeking to establish a unified EU classification system of sustainable economic activities which would identify the criteria for labelling investments as 'green'. In the UK, the government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs offers guidance to firms wishing to use sustainable claims in their marketing communications by suggesting that all claims need to be relevant to anyone buying or using the product, be clearly and accurately stated, and be justifiable.

However, some studies suggest that greenwashing remains prevalent and growing in advertising, driven by the growing demand for sustainable products. For companies, continuing to use greenwashing is an inadvisable strategy.

The biggest issue of greenwashing, and the reason why it still exists, is because for customers it is impossible to know the full implications of companies that fail to be transparent. The fast fashion industry has complexities in the business model due to the large distance of the different actors and the many steps between production and consumption. Even though the supply chain management ends with the consumption, the consumer will still use their new apparels, wash them, and perhaps even throw them away after few uses. This shows that this kind of fashion is made for mass-production in quick past, made affordable and accessible, and this is not sustainable in any way. Greenwashing adds another layer to the complexity of this industry.

2.4.1.1. AN EXAMPLE OF GREENWASHING STRATEGIES: H&M

H&M company can be a case study that will help understand how green washing and CSR can be manipulated.

H&M (Hennes and Mauritz AB), opened its first stores in Västerås, Sweden by the entrepreneur Erling Persson. Currently, H&M Group includes other companies, like, H&M, COS, Weekday, Monki, H&MHome, & Other stories, Arket and Afound.

H&M is now one of the most influential fast fashion brands partially due to their strategy based on a frequent change and renew of their products with trendy styles, catching attention from the media and mostly young women. Thanks to the satisfaction of the fast fashion business model the company is increasing the market share. H&M is thereby able to dictate how production should go and what prices their products should have. The reaction of the consumer is an increase of the demand by supporting this kind of company behavior.

Nevertheless, its business practices have been accused of greenwashing on numerous occasions, despite their claims of sustainability. Some fast fashion brands still get accused of greenwashing when engaging in eco-friendly programs while making profits, such as H&M.

Forbes in 2018, was suspicious of H&M's sustainability claims, paying attention to a Danish documentary accusing the company of burning 12 tones of unsold clothes. Bloomberg also accused H&M of burning clothes, but H&M defended themselves by explaining that burning clothes was their last option for clothes that could not be recycled or reused. Another critic came from the Swedish news site SVT Nyheter in 2017 they accuse them of throwing and burning lots of unsold clothes that could still be worn, despite their reports not mentioning this.

An example of greenwash practice was their recycling program and their more "sustainable" collection: *H&M Conscious*. This one was launched in February 2013 and focused on 7 commitments:

- 7) Provide fashion for conscious customers;
- 8) Choosing and rewarding responsible partners;
- 9) Being ethical and climate smart;
- 10) Reduce, reuse and recycle;
- 11) Usage of natural resources responsibly;
- 12) Strengthen communities.

They were included also on their CSR strategy, as they managed to combine their focus area of “educational and environment” with responsibility as a company and for H&M customers. H&M Conscious is advertised as being “*about making fashion and design accessible to everyone in a sustainable way*”¹¹². On their website Conscious is also described as:

“So, what do we count as Conscious? To qualify for a green hangtag, a product must contain at least 50% sustainable materials, such as organic cotton and recycled polyester — but many of our garments contain more than that. The only exception is recycled cotton, which can only make up 20% of a product due to quality restraints. We are, however, working with innovations to increase this share as soon as possible”¹¹³.

From the customer point of view having a collection that claims to be “environmentally sustainable” it’s easier for them to shop more sustainable. But still today, Conscious is only a small part of the large entirety of H&M’s collections and products. If H&M truly has the aim to produce all of their products from sustainable sources, it is suspicious that only a small entity of their sales is part of the H&M Conscious collection, and the majority of the apparels are not.

With this behavior H&M can be part of the “sins” previously described, especially the “*sin of vagueness*” since the Conscious collection deals with words like “eco-conscious” and green” and the font is written in a forestry green color. Its Conscious concept describes its products as being produced with “a little extra consideration of the planet” and made from material that is at least 50% sustainable. The only exception for them was recycled cotton that can only make up 20% of a product, arguing that more recycled cotton would damage the quality. Instead, they hope that technological innovations will improve this range and make it more sustainable. So, even though H&M describes this campaign as sustainable because it made out of recycled material or organic material, it is still a product aimed to sell and make profit. Considering the majority of H&M’s garments are made out of cotton, which cannot be recycled and reused completely, it seems like a vague concept. The requirement to make an item Conscious is if at least 50% of the product is made out of a more sustainable material. This also means that the other half of the product may not be sustainable, or whatever percentage that is made from sustainable materials.

¹¹² H&M Group (2020)

¹¹³ H&M Group, ‘Conscious products explained’, H&M, publishing date unknown (accessed May 27th 2021). The Swedish H&M website describes this as: “Så, vad menar vi med Conscious? För att ett plagg ska kvalificera sig för en grön märkning måste produkten innehålla minst 50% hållbara material, såsom ekologisk bomull och återvunnen polyester – men många av våra plagg innehåller mer än så. Det enda undantaget är återvunnen bomull, som endast kan utgöra 20% av en produkt på grund av kvalitetskraven. Vi arbetar dock med innovationer för att kunna öka andelen så snart som möjligt”.

The Conscious line also fits into the “*sin of hidden trade-off*” because the collection is considered sustainable because it is made with recycled or organic material, but it is still unclear how these clothes are recycled, what the company specifically means by organic materials, and the number of apparels that are not sustainable. As described in the previous chapters, the production and manufacturing for the fast fashion companies has some severe environmental impact, yet it is not explained in H&M sustainability reports how these supply chain steps are made differently with the introduction of the Conscious collection.

H&M claimed, especially in their 2019 report, their relationship with the United Nations’ (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). But in reality, the company does not have a professional relationship with UN, and this claim makes H&M suspiciously close to the “*sin of worshipping labels*” since they are not authorized for using the UN labels. The company however admits they were influenced by the SDGs and therefore use these labels.

Despite their focus on make fashion accessible and sustainable, H&M also fits into the “*sin of profits over people and the environment*” and as a company, it will always have as a main target making profits, and not necessary people or the environment. Since the trend for the customers is to choose sustainable products, companies would use this as an opportunity to invest in more sustainable advertising campaigns, as H&M did.

Their recycling program, instead, was launched in the same year, 2013, as one of their Conscious actions. In fact, that year they collected 3047 tons of garments and later in 2019 this increased to 29.005 tons. The program involved a large number of vouchers to buy new clothes on the store, for the customer who donated old clothes to H&M again.

The program is based on the concept that recycled fibers reduce raw materials consumption and lowers the use of chemicals, energy and water and is therefore, less environmentally exploitative. In fact, their main goal was to prevent textiles from being sent to landfills and save natural sources by choosing the loop of clothes that are no longer used or wanted and recycling them to new fashionable clothes.

H&M argued that “nothing goes to the landfill”, which seems contradictory, because even if the consumers are told that these recycled textile fibers make new clothes, only 0,7% are actually recycled according to the company’s own 2019 Sustainability report. It is not defined as unsold garments or clothes that cannot be used, however, it is an evidence that there is still waste, and that some garments actually do end up in landfills. Forbes claimed that 12 tons of H&M clothes had been burned.

An additional contradiction is the recycling material, as previously mentioned, the 2013 sustainability reports from H&M stated that only 15,8% of their cotton comes from a sustainable source and only 20% of the cotton fabric received from used clothes can be recycled. So, if the remaining 80% of cotton is not recycled, it would have to go to landfills if it can no longer be used. The sustainable cotton is supposedly made of organic material, but what makes it organic and different from other cotton is not clearly explained.

H&M recycling program seems to find the “*sin of no proof*” as they do not explain what happens to all the donated clothes, and their explanation to why 100% of the cotton cannot be recycled is because it will not be possible to maintain the same good quality, and what happens to the cotton that is not recycled.

Norway’s Consumer Authority, Forbrukertilsynet, a government-appointed consumer affairs advocate, who argued H&M was not clear enough of how this particular campaign is more sustainable compared to other clothes. The journalist Laura Robertson from Good on You, debates how ethical H&M actually is with these types of programs, by discussing its labour, environmental and animal welfare. She argues that even though it is a step forward that H&M has set a goal of reducing its greenhouse gas emissions and using 100% recycled or sustainable textiles by 2030 and raising awareness of the importance of sustainability; these are simply just targets. Also, because H&M is based on a fast fashion business model, the environmental impact will always be questionable. She also presents suspicion towards the voucher system in the recycling program, and H&M’s claim to using renewable energy for part of its supply chain and eco-friendly textiles. The clothing manufacturing process uses mostly materials that are not eco-friendly, and uses dangerous chemicals from dyes, solvents and pesticides. The sweatshops are also responsible for serious carbon emissions, and lots of land and water resources.

It is hard to believe, after all these environmentally exploiting practices, how much H&M attempts to be sustainable. The company tried to promote sustainable clothing and the importance of recycling, but in reality only 7% of their textiles are actually recycled, 60% are re-worn secondhand, and 5-10% of their clothes is recycled to fibers for the purpose of producing more clothes¹¹⁴.

Another example that confirms the theory that fast fashion is greenwashing is H&M’s sustainability innovation by producing clothes made out of fruit peeling that would otherwise have been thrown away.

¹¹⁴ Lidia Alexa, Andreea Apetrei, Marius Pislaru, page 266, 2022.

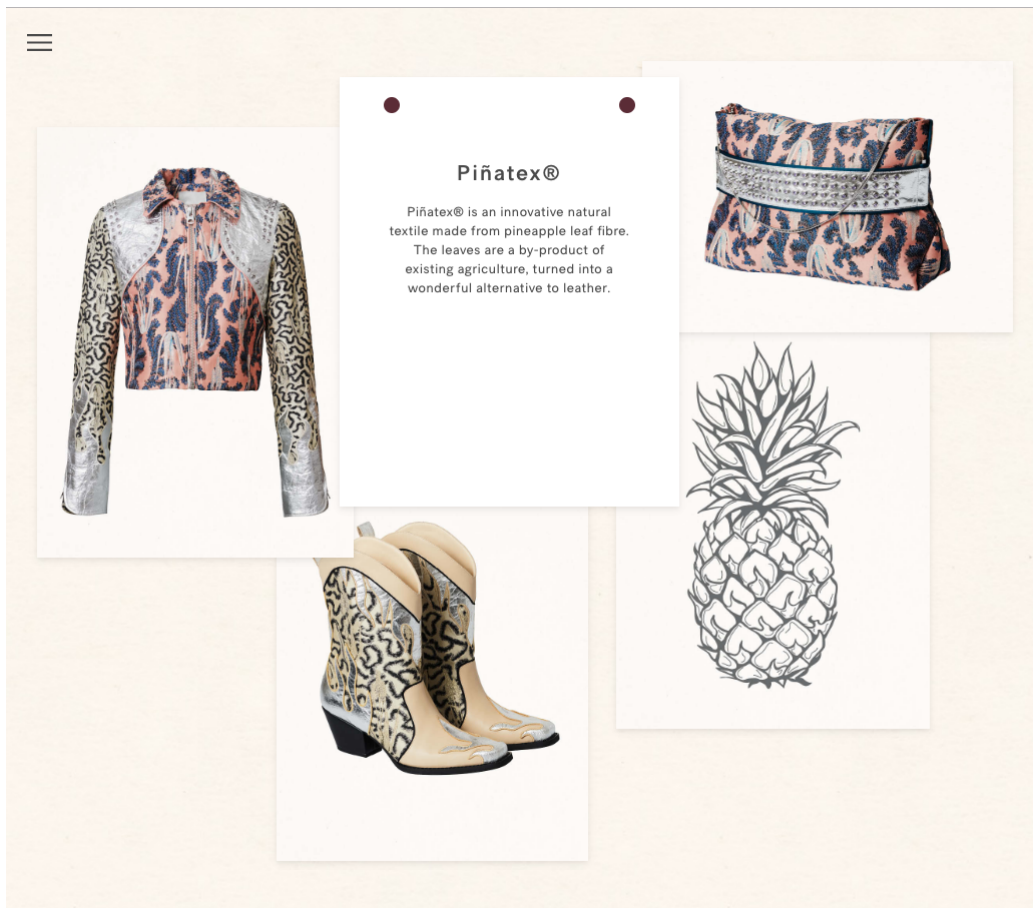


Figure 9: “H&M Conscious Exclusive 2019”, (Julia Retsinis), <http://www.juliaretsinis.com/hm-conscious-exclusive-2019;>

H&M Conscious in 2019 features products from *Pinatex*, as Figure 9 shows, which were made from pineapple leaves and orange peelings, but the collection included also products made by Orange Fiber, which is made from citrus peel, and Bloom Foam produced by algae biomass.

However, 480 pineapple leaves are needed to produce just one square meter of Pinatex clothes, which is about 16 pineapples, but only long leaf fibers are utilized, which means that not all of the pineapple leaves are used. In addition to this, because these clothes are joined by plastic, despite being recycled, plastics remove the chances of these clothes being biodegradable. Based on their sustainability reports, H&M is committed to reducing dangerous chemicals from their manufacturing process by changing the suppliers of dying and printing, but it is still unclear if their other steps in the supply chain that include the use of toxic chemicals. Their reports contain information about how they deal with chemicals, but none of them define the banned chemicals, or how their clothes are dyed instead, and this makes them part guilty of the “*sin of dirty business*”.

In addition to this, most fashion companies are generally unsustainable due to their business models encouraging mass-production, so it is difficult to know what exactly makes

H&M different, even though Conscious has been advertised surpassingly, many have still recognized the brand to be unsustainable.

So far, this dissertation has explored the negative reputation that comes with greenwashing, but some argue that it can be beneficial as well. In fact, some researchers think that greenwashing practices could be educational for present and future generations towards a new sustainable consumer trend that benefits the environment, while addressing economic and social issues, forcing large corporations to change, perhaps this could be also the case of H&M. Despite their greenwashing accusations, it has also been praised for awareness of sustainability.

In fact, in 2020, a study from the not-for-profit global movement Fashion Revolution that campaigns for better transparency in the fashion industry, reviewed 250 global fashion brands, and ranked them based on how much they disclose about their social and environmental policies, practices and impact, had H&M as the highest scoring company at 73% in 2020, 61% in 2019, 55% in 2018 and 48% in 2017. On the other side, this research was used as a marketing campaign, and gives H&M a positive impact on its image through Fashion Revolution and with an effective PR strategy, but it did not help with their transparency. In fact, the company should start focusing on how their plans towards sustainability should be about giving the consumers more, and not on how sustainability can improve the brand's reputation.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this thesis aimed to understand in the modern world what are the consumer trends in terms of fashion. After demonstrating and understanding that the fast fashion sector has significant consequences from an environmental and social point of view, I tried to understand whether, to prevent the situation from deteriorating, consumers will choose to change for a more sustainable lifestyle or if the habits will remain the same, also due to a well-organized marketing strategy.

Initially, I felt it was important to focus on the type of company at the center of the discussion. In fact, proving that fast fashion companies rely on a quick response to consumer demand allowed me to understand why fashion and sustainability seem to have little to do. Fast Fashion is by its very nature change and constant innovation. Sustainability is the protection of resources, the maintenance of a social and generational balance of wealth and well-being while respecting the needs of all individuals and all generations. The well-functioning of the fashion phenomenon is a true representation of the unsustainability of modern living. What gives value to fashion in itself is precisely the fact of being transient, not wearing or throwing a garment because it is now out of fashion but still perfectly capable of carrying out its material function of dressing the body is a clear expression of everything that is not sustainability. The fashion industry is facing immense social and environmental challenges and that the scale and scope of current approaches to sustainability are limited and fail to address more fundamental challenges linked to the dominant business models and consumption behaviors. Examples of how Fast Fashion can also be made a more sustainable business were presented during the analyzes carried out in this report, showing both possible company policies and specific tools and a series of principles to be adopted in a generic way in the implementation of sustainability at the " internal logic of the company (integrating the values of sustainability into business processes; bringing together creativity and sustainability in products; using innovation and technological progress to improve sustainable performance; producing positive impacts and reducing negative impacts; taking responsibility for own activities; measure performance in relation to sustainability; communicate the efforts made and the results obtained transparently; exploit consumer awareness; contribute to the construction of a sustainable environment). Despite, their effort on trying to actually being sustainable, for an industry that is the second most polluting sector in the world, feels like these changes cannot come soon enough.

However, some changes are happening, as described, the intensification of corporate social responsibility, on the companies' side, help them to be more transparent to the consumer,

and the usage of green certification and standards. In fact, the implementation of sustainability in the fashion industry affected the consumer choices in a positive way. The consumer, as long as he is interested in respecting the environment and in the ethical commitment promoted by the brands, acquires additional information from these indices for his purchasing decisions. However, despite the growing interest on the topic, it was possible to observe that consumers are divided in two main groups¹¹⁵. The ones that are already aware of sustainability in the fashion industry and consequently implement a variety of practices when making their buying choices. Meaning slowing down consumption, avoiding fast fashion, buying quality pieces that last a lifetime, being conscious about the production location and being the most informed possible about material composition and circularity concepts. On the other hand, there are still consumers which, although recognizing the relevance of sustainability, are still not implementing it in their daily lives when speaking about fashion consumption. Shopping ‘better’ means different things to different people, but everyone can take steps toward more sustainable purchase decisions that fit their lifestyle and wallet.

One was able to conclude that this is mainly due to a big lack of information, education and accessibility as well as the higher prices and social influence. It was also possible to conclude, that the aspects lacking in consumers which are not implementing sustainability in their purchasing choices in the fashion industry, are the barriers and challenges identified by consumers that are already trying to implement it. Furthermore, consumers in a general perspective revealed to be improving their behavior towards sustainability in the past years and are willing to continue improving it in the future. This revealed a strong tendency for a positive evolution. Consumers have the power and speak through their buying habits. That is why it is so important to change their mentality and consequently their way of acting. Observing the general paradigm of consumer behavior, it is crucial to focus on the ones that are not implementing sustainability in their buying choices yet. They are fundamental because they are the potential for further improvements to occur. The solution passes through educating consumers in a larger scale.

¹¹⁵ Pereira,L.;Carvalho,R.; Dias, Á.; Costa, R.; António, N., 2021.

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