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Fashion Industry Scandals – The Media Coverage Afterward

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Master in Business Administration

Supervisor:

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BUSINESS
SCHOOL

Department of Marketing, Operations and General Management

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"Do the best you can until you know better.

Then when you know better, do better."

Maya Angelou

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To my supervisor, for all the support and patience she had with me during these long months of work, especially during a pandemic. I know that surely, without her help, I would not have been able to reach the goal I intended to. I never doubted my choice and now, more than ever, I know I made the right one.

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A thank you will never be enough.

*“You are one person but when you move
an entire community walks through you.
You go nowhere alone” Rupi Kaur*

Abstract

Fast fashion is often described as cheap fashion, following the current trends that go rapidly from warehouses to the stores to our homes. The aim is to buy clothes that follow trends even if there is no need. Having the new collection of any brand that follows this concept becomes not only the step to popularity but also a step for the person to feel good in their skin. However, fast fashion has numerous negative consequences, among them, the pollution it causes. The goal of this dissertation is twofold. First, it aims to explore media coverage related to fast fashion events, namely media coverage and the tone attributed to media articles written about this topic, by using the agenda-setting theory to respond to the first research question. Second, it aims to understand if, after scandals, companies decide to change their corporate social responsibility (CSR) and if considered guilty by the press, how they act upon it, focusing on one specific case – approaching the signaling theory, answering to the second and third research questions. The results show that the information spread by the media around the world is not done uniformly. However, they also indicate that fast fashion has been a topic increasingly addressed, especially in neutral and negative events (signaling theory). This dissertation contributes to literature by qualitatively exploring the relationship between media attention and fast fashion scandals while following the post-scandal phase.

Keywords:

Sustainability; CSR; Fast Fashion; Agenda-Setting; Signaling Theory; Mass media.

JEL classification system:

- Q01: Sustainable Development
- M14: Corporate Culture, Diversity, Social Responsibility

Resumo

A fast fashion (moda rápida) é frequentemente descrita como moda barata, seguindo as tendências atuais que vão rapidamente dos armazéns para as lojas até às nossas casas. O objetivo é comprar roupa que siga as tendências, mesmo que não haja necessidade. Ter a nova coleção de qualquer marca que siga este conceito torna-se não só o passo para a popularidade, mas também um passo para que a pessoa se sintam bem na sua pele. No entanto, a fast fashion tem inúmeras consequências negativas, entre elas, a poluição que provoca. Esta dissertação tem como fim responder a três questões. Primeiro, visa explorar a cobertura mediática relacionada com eventos de fast fashion, nomeadamente a cobertura mediática e o tom atribuído aos artigos mediáticos escritos sobre este tópico, utilizando a teoria de agenda-setting para responder à primeira pergunta de investigação. Segundo, visa compreender se, após escândalos, as empresas decidem mudar a sua responsabilidade social corporativa (RSE) e se consideradas culpadas pela imprensa, como agem sobre ela, centrando-se num caso específico - abordando a signaling theory, respondendo à segunda e terceira perguntas de investigação. Os resultados mostram que a informação espalhada pelos meios de comunicação ao redor do mundo não é feita uniformemente. No entanto, indicam também que a fast fashion tem sido um tema cada vez mais abordado, especialmente em eventos neutros e negativos (signaling theory). Esta dissertação contribui para a literatura, explorando qualitativamente a relação entre a atenção dos meios de comunicação social e os escândalos de fast fashion, enquanto segue a fase pós-escândalo.

Palavras-chave:

Sustentabilidade; CSR; Fast Fashion; Agenda-Setting; Signaling Theory; Comunicação Social.

Sistema de Classificação JEL:

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1.Introduction

The fast fashion industry used to run their production on four seasons a year: winter, spring, summer, and winter. Clothes' designers used to work months ahead just to plan, design and produce their styles, to appeal to their costumers' taste in fashion. The target was the high society since rules were to be followed and it was not affordable to everyone (Stanton, n.d.). It was not until a few decades later, in the 1960's, that fast fashion started to reach the crowds. Back then, the average American adult purchased less than 25 items of clothing per year (DiLonardo, 2021). More than that, 95% of the clothes sold in the United States of America (USA) were made in the country. But it all changed in the 70's, when extensive factories and textile shops were founded in China and other countries in Asia and Latin America (DiLonardo, 2021). Clothes produced in these regions were significantly cheaper than the American ones, leaving only two choices: shutting down or importing, being the latter the chosen option (Cline, 2013).

Nowadays, Europe and the USA still benefit from decreasing prices due to the sourcing of their activities to Far East countries, on account of the low prices they offer. Concerning quality, capacity, speed, risk and price, the better option has been to cut the "middleman" and outsource in these developing countries (Berg, Hedrich, Kempf, & Tochtermann, 2011). Given the pace they need to go due to global demand (considerably higher than before), market saturation, the competitive price of the industry and an economic insecurity, the selling countries continue to put pressure on those that are still developing for production, finding a better junction of factors (Berg, Hedrich, Kempf, & Tochtermann, 2011). Labor costs in China have also been rising, leading brands to find better places for their production in places such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan or even Southeast Asia (Berg, Hedrich, Kempf, & Tochtermann, 2011).

China used to be the favorite destination for the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry. Although, the growing economy in China along with the industrialization have resulted in increased local wages, leading retailers in search of new cheaper locations. Bangladesh is one of the most sought-after countries for clothing production, due to competitive prices that are among the lowest in the world, production capacity and availability (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre). This explains why North American and European retailers have looked to Bangladesh, given their labor costs being among the lowest in the world. In the last two decades, Bangladesh has undergone enormous growth in RMG production industry while becoming one

of the top industry exporters (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre). Bangladesh, accounts now for 83% of total exportation in the industry, being one of the fastest industries changing their pace. In the last decades, RMG industry has been growing in Bangladesh while becoming one of the top RMG industry exporters, being their most important industry (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre).

On April 24, 2013, shortly after 9am, a building called Rana Plaza collapsed in Bangladesh. The building contained close to 5.000 workers and 5 RMG factories inside. Having been the deadliest accident in the industry, it killed 1.134 people and injured over 2.500 workers. The collapse was due to the building's foundation being unstable, as well as the addition of three illegal floors built on top of the five legal ones (Paul & Quadir, 2013). The poor quality of construction, the constant movement of people, the vibrations caused by the power generators on different floors, and the machines that were put to work at a fast pace caused the building to collapse (Paul & Quadir, 2013).

Even before the Rana Plaza collapse, Bangladesh had an association to prevent such accidents, without success. After creating The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) in 1983, the Bangladeshi industry had been taken care through policy advocacy to the government, ensuring workers' rights and social compliance in their factories. The association collaborated with local and international stakeholders, having around four thousand registered garment factories (Paul & Quadir, 2013). However, there are consequences aside from the social ones. Since fast fashion is a fast-paced business, it requires fast-paced production which leads to an increase in environmental damage by using toxic, water-wasting materials to produce textiles while ignoring safety protocols to those who work there – which makes it a cheap labor, along with the low wages (Smith, n.d.). It is believed that 90% of garments are made with cotton or polyester. While cotton requires large amount of water (a t-shirt needs 2.700 liters of water) polyester uses oil to produce, being a synthetic fiber. However, about 20% of the worlds' wastewater are due to the fabric dyeing and treatment, being strictly directed into our water system, bringing toxins and heavy metals. No need to say that this impacts the life of everyone who drinks this water, both humans and animals (Paul & Quadir, 2013).

Given the collapse, Rana Plaza event caused CSR initiatives to spring up to try to prevent similar events from happening. It was in this context that the Accord emerged. The Accord is an agreement in the Bangladeshi RMG industry, agreed for 5 years, where the goal was to create

a safe working environment by increasing inspections and transparency in factories. In addition, safety training, worker empowerment and health were addressed for the first time, as well as the remediation of health and safety risks for those who do not want to cooperate (Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, n.d.).

Formally signed not only by the international retail and global Bangladeshi labor unions on May 23, 2013, but also by the NGOs Clean Clothes Campaign, International Labor Rights Forum, Maquila Solidarity Network, and the Worker Rights Consortium as witnesses, this was the first initiative taken in a very long time (Clean Clothes Campaign, n.d.). This Accord has been created so that no other workers fear fires, building collapses or other accidents that could be prevented (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013).

As an alternative to the Accord, The Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety was formed with special attention to retailers in North America. A Walmart spokesperson recognized that the Accord did not include the USA's legal system hence the lack of adherence from this country (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013). Initiated on the 10th of July in 2013, the Alliance arose as an alternative to the Accord concerning North America retailers, with five-year compromise to improve RMG factories in Bangladesh. It aims to improve worker safety in the garment industry through education, upgrading factories, empowering workers, and building institutions that can force and maintain safe working conditions in the country (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013). The Alliance has partners such as American Apparel and Footwear Association, Canada Apparel Federation, National Retail Federation, Retail Council of Canada, Retail Industry Leaders Association and the United States Association of Importers of Textiles and Apparel – part of governments and trade unions (Palmer & Wohl, 2013).

Despite all the efforts, in 2018 thousands of workers decided to protest for increased wages. After the implementation of a wage revision that had significantly different impacts for some workers, others received amounts equivalent to cents. After realizing this, thousands of workers filled the street to protest (Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, n.d.). When the Dhaka police started using tear gas and firing rubber bullets, one protestor died, and others were injured. With this example, in 2018, it becomes clear that the industry, despite of The Accord and The Alliance, was not ready to make changes and pay their workers (Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, n.d.).

However, to diminish costs in transportation and producing faster than ever, some companies moved their factories closest to home (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2020). With this in

mind, in 2020, an investigation into sweatshops in Leicester, UK, uncovered another scandal. Boohoo, one of the most successful brands in UK, was using factories with sweatshop conditions to produce their clothes. Most clients believe it is made in countries such as Bangladesh and India, however, it was being produced right in the city (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2020). While relying on fast fashion, customers begin to understand how this industry relies on cheap labor to generate huge profits with low production costs. It is a fact that the industry depends on mass exploitation of their supply chain workers (Leach, 2020).

Whether social or environmental, the backstage of fast fashion is a dark and secret place for the buyers of these brands. From the use of water and chemicals for dyeing clothes to the poor working conditions to which some workers are exposed, there is much to talk about (Leach, 2020). There are more and more activists and organizations set up to shine a light on these issues - to try and bring change.

However, there are still too many factors in need of change. The industry started to gain more prominence after the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013, which killed hundreds of workers after the factory they were working in collapsed. There are more and more movements that aim to protect those who work in this industry, however, often without result. Some cases are discovered and made public, and pressure for change arises from those who read them (Leach, 2020). However, they are usually only reported when it is too late, when deaths or serious injuries occur. With this problem in mind and based on the literature review, three important research questions arose:

1. How are media covering fashion-related events?
2. How are companies dealing with scandals?
3. Do they change their behavior afterwards?

The main goals of this dissertation are to find out if there is a fair mediatic treatment to all companies, if the fast fashion industry is getting more attention than in the past and if companies are beginning to gain responsibility over their fast fashion scandals, being more responsible and concerned about their consequences. To answer our questions and to be able to verify our goals, this dissertation uses the agenda-setting and signaling theories, giving an insight into all possible subjects that relate to the research. It explores not only the legitimacy of one brand but also how exposed and addressed it is in the media, understanding how the CSR of one of these companies may change (or not) post-scandal. Corporate social responsibility will be the concept with the

most relevance, since we evaluate sustainability in a specific company, and it can only be evaluated through the responsibility it has for the social and environmental part.

We believe that this dissertation has an important role when it comes to the contribution to theory and practice of the subject. From here, it is possible to understand that not every publicity is good publicity and that fast fashion companies are now understood as a problem. It contributes to a better understanding of the industry in exposing social and environmental distress, what it causes and how it can change.

The structure of this dissertation is as follows: in the Literature Review chapter, we focus on the concept of sustainability and corporate social responsibility. An introduction is then given about the two concepts that will later be crucial to the analysis of the topic. We then move on to the sustainable and social challenges in fast fashion industry. We end the Literature Review by addressing the two theories used in the data analysis, agenda-setting and signaling theory. To sum up, dissertation has six chapters, beginning with the Introduction and Literature Review, followed by the Methodology, Findings, Discussion, Conclusion, Recommendations, Bibliography and Annexes.

2. Literature review

2.1 Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility

Sustainability development was described in the Brundtland report as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). It has been discussed and developed over the years, having recently gained more importance. The Brundtland Report focuses on two concerns that need to be reconciled: environment and development. These two terms are embodied in the United Nations’ Agenda for Development when giving the definition of sustainability: *“Development is a multidimensional undertaking to achieve a higher quality of life for all people. Economic development, social development and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development”* (Agenda for Development, 1997).

The term “triple bottom line” was first coined in 1994 by John Elkington (1994) using results concerning surveys on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Sustainable Development (SD) (Elkington, Enter the triple bottom line. The triple bottom line: Does it all add up?, 2004). The economic and social dimensions were highlighted throughout 1987’s Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) making this a simpler, yet sophisticated way to refer to the “social, environmental and economic value of an investment” (Hammer & Pivo, 2016). Triple bottom line intentions fall on assessment resources and leverage reserves, with the employment of capital done as efficiently as possible (Hammer & Pivo, 2016). The concept is also known as the 3Ps – People, Planet, Profit (Elkington, 1994). Years later, the author did a strategic recall to better define the concept. The author claims that the success of a company cannot be defined by its profit or loss, but for the well-being of the population and the health of our planet - all three parameters are not being applied correctly (Elkington, 2018). While companies following this theory have been able to secure economic successes, the health of the planet has taken a back seat. The author assumes that it is time to take a sustainable step forward (Elkington, 2018).

According to Bansal and Song (2017), the relationship between corporate responsibility and corporate sustainability is tackled between business and society. When first approached, the two were historically distinctive. However, they have emerged in different times, reacting

to different businesses. They both shared a common interest when concerning the relationship between society and business, which can be explained using the two words “sustainability” and “responsibility” consistently. Bansal and Song (2017) explained the uses for both words when they were first studied. Responsibility used to, in the early days, express concern for social issues while sustainability focused on environmental issues. Early definitions of responsibility in the 1950s focused on “shareholder value versus stakeholders rights”, while sustainability only emerged in the 1980s, concerning the harms of economic development on natural environment (Bansal & Song, 2017).

Over time, responsibility recognized social issues in natural environment, being society an extreme important element in environmental systems - although they have emerged from different paradigms, this led to a convergence of terms in the last 20 years. In 2000s, responsibility and sustainability scholars began discussing society and natural environment - resulting to both terms being seen as one and the same (Bansal & Song, 2017).

When it comes to sustainability and responsibility integrated into business, the most used term is Corporate Social Responsibility (Bansal & Song, 2017). Not easily defined, it is essential to understand that the concept of CSR has an extended history, being possible to trace formal writings on social responsibility back to the 20th century. Carroll (1999, p.269) presents literature from the 1950s to the 1990s, identifying the “evolution of the CSR definition”. It is hard to find a consensus about the definition of corporations’ responsibility towards different stakeholders (Carroll C. E., 2004). Suppliers, customers or governments pressure companies to adopt CSR strategies, leading to conflicting goals and demands from various groups - hence one single definition being so complicated to reach (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001).

However, one of the few consensuses about CSR is that it deals with how corporations meet their objectives of producing long-term profits with the integration of social demands, contributing to a sustainable society by doing what is ethically correct (Garriga & Melé, 2013). Garriga and Melé (2013, p.53) have presented several theories on how CSR can be described, stating that “CSR is seen only as a strategic tool to achieve economic objectives and, ultimately, wealth creation”.

Another important definition is offered by Mohr, Webb and Harris (2001, p.47) in which CSR is described as “a company’s commitment to minimizing or eliminating any harmful effects and maximizing its long-run beneficial impact on society” (Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001). We can assume, after these definitions, that a socially responsible company ponders the

effects of its actions on everyone, behaving ethically - treating employees fairly, minimizing their impact on the environment - whether directly related to the company or not. Chandler and Werther (2011, p.50) explain why this concept is imperative by enlightening that it has a strong “influence in all aspects of business. And businesses matter because they create much of the wealth and well-being in society. (...) CSR is increasingly crucial to both business and societal success”.

According to McWilliams and Siegel (2001, p.119), there are two main causes of CSR demand. The first one is due to consumers’ demand and the second one to stakeholders’ (investors, employees, community) demand. They continue by affirming that a consumer-oriented CSR can involve an immaterial attribute, for example, quality or reliability. Furthermore, strong evidence points to the fact that consumers, such as “baby boomer” or “generation x”, are strongly attracted and connected to these socially responsible companies (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). Heiser (2016) states that when CSR is embedded into the company’s business strategy, to create value for the company, companies can generate not only favorable stakeholder attitudes but also, in the long run, build a positive corporate image and strengthen their stakeholder relationships. Recent research has shown that, when linking CSR initiatives directly to corporate strategy, profit and competitiveness increase while a positive contribution is made to society, as a whole (Heiser, 2016).

Due to the abundant scandals involving not only corporate greed but also mismanagement and an overzealous pursuit of profit, businesses have been called to play a more active role in socially relevant activities (Pless, Maak, & Stahl, 2011). Problems such as poverty, environmental degradation, human rights protection and pandemic diseases are among some of the most pressing in the world. Stakeholders’ expectations fall into these new demands, which call for responsible and capable corporations and their leaders who can cope with these emerging difficulties (Pless, Maak, & Stahl, 2011)

Carroll (1999, p.292) writes that “the CSR concept will remain as an essential part of business language and practice, because it is a vital underpinning to many of the other theories and is continually consistent with what the public expects of the business community”, justifying that even though this has been a very approached subject in the past, it remains being spoken due to its increasing importance.

2.2 Sustainability Challenges in Fast Fashion Industry

2.2.1 What are the environmental challenges?

Bick, Halsey & Ekenga (2018, p.1) describe fast fashion as the “readily available, inexpensively made fashion of today”. It characterizes how promptly designs are moved from production stages to stores, answering the requested demand for different styles (Bick, Halsey, & Ekenga, 2018).

Supply chains have been transformed into international ones, changing the pace of manufacturing textiles, shifting fibers’ growth and constructing garments in areas with cheap labors and poor conditions as a result of the global economic growth and the increment of globalization. Therefore, low and middle-income countries (LMICs) are the source of production for inexpensive clothing on the account of the increasing consumption and production that is demanded (Bick, Halsey, & Ekenga, 2018). The global fashion industry made 1.2\$ trillion annually, equivalent to 80 billion pieces of new clothing purchased every year. Furthermore, China and Bangladesh are the most common countries where these products are manufactured whereas the United States of America wins the podium for the nation that consumes more clothes worldwide (Bick, Halsey, & Ekenga, 2018). The uprising's environmental impact shall be attributed to the increase in clothing consumption, leading to an increase in textile production (Niinimäki, et al., 2020).

The industry is also responsible for 8-10% of global CO₂ emissions (4-5 billion tons annually), delivers approximately 35% (190.000 tones per year) of primary microplastic into the ocean while also producing vast quantities of textile waste (less than 92 million tons per year), which often end up in landfills or incinerated, unsold products included (Niinimäki *et al.*, 2020, p.189). As the author reinforces:

Global per-capita textile production ... has increased from 5.9 kg to 13 kg per year over the period 1975–2018. Similarly, global consumption has risen to an estimated 62 million tones of apparel per year and is projected to reach 102 million tones by 2030. As a result, fashion brands are ... producing almost twice the amount of clothing today compared with before the year 2000 (Niinimäki *et al.*, 2020, p.189).

The textile dyeing and finishing industry are the most chemically intensive industries on earth and the second most polluter of clean water (after agriculture). More than 8000 chemicals are used in this industry every day, in several processes such as dyeing and printing. These poisonous chemicals (as acetic acid or oxalic acid) are known to endanger human health (Kant, 2012). Moreover, a large amount of poisonous chemicals become non-biodegradable and carcinogenic liquid waste, which can be a crucial threat to human health and to the environment, if not duly treated (Ghaly, Ananthashankar, Alhattab, & Ramakrishnan, 2014).

However, in recent years, some signs suggested that the industry was making some improvements and was coming to terms with its human and environmental impacts (Brydges, Retamal, & Hanlon, 2020). Brydges et al., (2020, p.299) event pointed that:

On the heels of the 2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Kingdom's Modern Slavery Act (2015), we saw the Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action presented at COP24 in Poland in 2018. This initiative was followed in 2019 with the United Nations Alliance for Sustainable Fashion (2019) – alongside a social media hashtag #UNfashion – and The Fashion Pact presented to G7 world leaders by Emmanuel Macron. Many of these initiatives were supported by some of the world's largest fashion brands, such as H&M, Inditex, Gap, Stella McCartney, and Kering Group (Brydges *et al.*, 2020, p.299).

Uddin (2020), however, described the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic had on fashion's global production as a "perfect storm". When the pandemic hit, all the stores were closed leaving workers on a furlough and unsold inventory piling up. Fashion weeks were canceled, and the fashion industry fell into financial distress (Uddin, 2020).

Brydges et al., (2020) assumed that it was not clear if COVID-19 had a significant impact concerning sustainability and remains to be seen if this pandemic was, in fact, the reset that the industry needed to change. The authors claim that there is a highly uneven sustainability-related development among the supply chain and that some stages receive more attention than others (for example, the end-of-life of said clothing). Brydges et al., (2020, p. 304) write that "with ever-changing cycles of media coverage, it remains to be seen whether the pandemic will have

a lasting effect, or whether the industry will move on to the next crisis, leaving behind the lessons learned here so far” (Brydges, Retamal, & Hanlon, 2020).

2.2.2 What are the social challenges?

In a world where most production happens in underdeveloped countries that have underdeveloped institutions, institutional inadequacy dictates the law on regulation and compliance (Anguelov, 2015). Furthermore, the different cultural context of what a sweatshop working condition should be gets lost in interpretation (Anguelov, 2015). The Western understanding of the term agrees that it constitutes labor abuse, while the non-Westerners consider these normal conditions. There is a clear lack of agreement with the proposed standards given the fact that their interpretation is handed to determination makers in developing nations (Anguelov, 2015, p.184). The US Department of Labor (DOL)¹ describes sweatshops as “any factory that violates two or more labor laws, such as those pertaining to wages and benefits, working hours, and child labor”. Sweatshops have become more common not only in underdeveloped countries but also in rich countries such as the USA (Dickinson, 1999).

The garment industry in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region and worldwide is mainly made by women (Satrya, Wulandari, Pramesti, Wahyuni, & Zuhdi, 2017), whereas management roles are predominantly male (Ashraf, 2017). These workplaces are commonly referred to by having harsh working conditions in unsafe locations. One of the examples of these unsafe locations go back to the Pakistan accident in 2012, where 300 to 400 workers lost their lives when a boiler exploded, and the flames ignited stored chemicals used for production. All the exit doors were locked, and windows were covered with iron bars. Most of the workers died due to suffocation - identifying the victims was not possible due to the lack of contract. However, the factory had passed an international safety test just few weeks before the whole disaster (Hobson, 2013). According to Hobson (2013) the factory was also suspected of child labor along with locked places that look like prison cells.

The well-being of these women is jeopardized not only at work but also at home, ultimately affecting the other members of the community in which they live (Satrya, Wulandari, Pramesti, Wahyuni, & Zuhdi, 2017). Some of the characteristics that describe the fast fashion industry

¹ <https://www.greenamerica.org/fair-labor-home/does-made-usa-mean-not-sweatshop>, 12/08/2021

are the excessive and intense hours of work that these women are subjected to, as well as the low wages - which makes them often unable to support their family or themselves. Some female workers' accounts mentioned exhaustion, excessive stress and hunger as part of their daily lives - due to the labor under a globalized production regime (Ashraf, 2017).

Women working in this industry feel that to improve their well-being, they would need to be paid enough to have three meals a day and live a proper life with their families. With the known salaries received is not possible. In 2010, the minimum wage was increased from \$21 to \$38 monthly in Bangladesh (Ashraf, 2017). Low wages result in malnourished workers who cannot buy healthy food for them and their dependents (Prentice, De Neve, Mezzadri, & Ruwanpura, 2018). This increase came because of huge labor protests, yet a "living wage" continues to be denied (Ashraf, 2017, p.257). Reflecting deeply patriarchal traditions, there is a general undervaluation of the girl child - working in the garment industry is most of the times seen as preferable by the children and their parents (Nielsen, 2005).

The health, welfare and safety of these women are called into question - encompassing a range of issues beyond warehouse construction and their safety, gender-sensitive, calling into question their roles in and out of the workplace. Often, these female workers are vulnerable to male colleagues and managers, experiencing sexual harassment (Ashraf, 2017).

The workers' health in this industry is heavily affected, due to the working environment they are in - high temperatures, heavy air and the fabric dust they end up breathing in are just some of the factors. Besides the physical pressures, workers live every day thinking about the pressure they are under, feeling scared since they cannot easily leave one job and get another (Ashraf, 2017). Working days can go up to 14 hours, without breaks and late payment or no payment at all, in crowded and locked workplaces (Nielsen, 2005) leaving the workers feeling trapped and confined in the same cycle (Ashraf, 2017). The management uses and applies different fears, from salary cuts, non-payment of overtime or even sexual harassment by superiors. Any sewing mistakes, such as accidentally making a hole or mixing sizes, leads to punishment, which makes workers afraid to make these mistakes (Ashraf, 2017). By applying disciplining techniques, the factory staff can ensure that production is accelerated. One way to ensure profit not only for factory owners but also for Western brands is to extract more labor, extend working hours, increase the pace of production and lower wages. This allows the factories in Bangladesh to continue to exist (Ashraf, 2017).

Bangladesh has over 5000 factories employing approximately 4 million, mainly female workers, producing primarily for the developed world, being the second largest textile producing economy. It is only surpassed by China (Reinecke and Donaghey, 2015, p. 724). Despite China and Bangladesh (6.4% of the global market in the apparel industry on the latter), the podium continues with India (producing half of Bangladesh's value, 3.5%), Sri Lanka and Pakistan, both with similar values (1.2%) (Lopez-Acevedo and Robertson, 2016, p.44). As the country with the lowest minimum wage set at \$43 per month, the Bangladeshi sector provides cheap products from predominantly Bangladeshi-owned factories - removing western brands in the process, to thus exonerate any legal concerns regarding labor abuses (Reinecke and Donaghey, 2015, p. 724).

Incidents such as the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, which killed 1134 garment workers (Prentice, De Neve, Mezzadri, & Ruwanpura, 2018) and injured another 2500 workers brought to life these rough conditions, becoming an important topic around the world. The building was meant to be a shopping and office space and not a factory holding. Therefore, four floors were added without any permission. It hosted over 3000, mostly female workers and machines (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015). However, before the Rana Plaza collapse, concerns about the safety of the factory were already a reality due to the cracks that appeared on the walls. Factory owners had already been asked to close the factory. The building had three floors built without any permit, being higher than it was supposed to. After the collapse, the Bangladeshi government admitted that 90% of Dhaka's high buildings do not assemble construction standards or international rules (Hobson, 2013).

Adding up, in 2016, the death of 13 workers in a suburb of Delhi, regarding a leather factory blaze or even the 2012 factory fire in Pakistan, that took 250 lives are some of the incidents that caught the public's attention putting pressure to focus on the health and safety of garment workers all over the world (Prentice, De Neve, Mezzadri, & Ruwanpura, 2018).

While the situation in this industry was already not ideal, COVID-19 came to worsen everything. The pandemic led to "a devastating impact on global garment supply chains" and it is expected to get worse (Anner, 2020, p.1). Anner (2020, p.1) continued to explain that "as clothing outlets have been shut by lockdowns in developed market economies, sinking demand for apparel, brands and retailers have moved quickly to cancel or postpone production orders – refusing (...) to pay for clothing their supplier factories have already produced" (Anner, 2020).

This has resulted into partial or complete shutdown of thousands of factories, meaning that millions of factory workers were living without legally mandated pay or severance, putting already vulnerable workers in more precarious situations ((Brydges & Hanlon, 2020).

2.2.3 Industry Progress

To prevent future disasters, some countries have been trying to improve physical infrastructures in the garment industry. Bangladesh is the country with the most intensive efforts due to the Accord on Fire and Building Safety – a five-year program (2013-2018) reflecting the mobilization of the consumption power at the end of buyer-led supply-chains, since brands have been pressured to protect their image due to the consumers’ scrutiny (Prentice et al., 2018). This pressure was made by a Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) such as The Clean Clothes Campaign, who educated their consumers on which brands were endangering their workers (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015). An Accord was made, concerning an *“unprecedented, legally binding agreement between the global union federations, industriALL, and the UNI Global Union, Bangladesh trade unions and over 190 ready-made garment retailers and brands from 20 countries in Europe, North America, Asia and Australia”* (Reinecke and Donaghey, 2015, p. 725). The Accord concerns three types of examination - fire, electrical and structural – in which specialist engineers are contracted to evaluate crucial safety aspects (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015)

The Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, signed in June 2013, was created as a second multi-stakeholder initiative by global fashion brands that choose to stay out of the Accord. It was drafted without any legal commitment from the brands that signed to ensure decent labor standards in factories. It was developed by seventeen brands, mostly from North America. The Accord and the Alliance were developed alongside other national and international initiatives (Ashraf, 2017).

Although the Accord has had many positive repercussions, wages were not one of them. They are considered matters that only concern the government and factory owners in Bangladesh (Ashraf, 2017). (Ashraf, 2017) concluded that the Accord covers almost 1.600 factories, two million workers and over 200 brands. Furthermore, the Alliance covers 652 factories, 1.2 million workers, and twenty-six brands. However, 3.348 factories and more than 1.2 million workers are still not covered (Ashraf, 2017).

More than that, the term ethical fashion has gained relevance, being described by Joergens (2006, p. 361) as: “*as fashionable clothes that incorporate fair trade principles with sweatshop-free labor conditions while not harming the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton*”. Following this line, the slow fashion movement increased in opposition to fast fashion (Cline, 2013). Clark (2008) offered an explanation on slow fashion, being it more sustainable and ethical than the traditional fashion. It does not hold on to greedy consumption, labor exploitation or bargain prices – instead, quality and long-term thinking are the terms used to describe (Clark, 2008). Slow fashion produces clothes with durable, recycled or organic materials while using timeless designs, so that it never goes out of fashion – the goal is to use these clothes for longer than one season hence their sustainable and caring production. The only disadvantage associated with slow or ethical fashion are the higher prices, which normally makes consumers lean on fast fashion due to cheapness (Kuusk, Oscar, Geert, & Stephan, 2012).

2.3 Agenda-Setting Theories and Impact on Fashion Scandals

The agenda-setting theory has been studied throughout the years and explains why some matters are more relevant than others and why some stay in our minds, and some do not. This theory concerns media topics or objects that are covered in the daily mass media news (Carroll C. E., 2004). According to Shaw (1979, p.97):

“Media effects ... are seen as the principal result of the day-to-day work of the press in informing its audiences of the opportunities and warning them of the dangers, real or imagined, in their environment and in ... the world” (Shaw, 1979).

Mostly associated with the political realm, it can also shape someone’s mind in other subjects such as healthcare, education, or sports (Carroll, 2004). This theory is explained on two levels (Wu & Coleman, 2009). The first level emphasizes the coverage of a certain issue and the number of times that is published. This suggests that the media has the decision on what will be known to the public (Wu & Coleman, 2009). The objects chosen to describe these topics can raise a considerable awareness, leading to a discussion and consequently to a more concerned public. It is appropriate to assume that the media can, in some way, not only control what is the main topic being spoken (by choosing the bigger topics of the day) but also what the public feels about it (in how it is described) (Carroll, 2004). After all, mass media is the one

spreading the word and deciding on what to sell, introducing us to the second level of agenda-setting.

Wanta et al. (2004, p.364) describe the second level as new challenges and opportunities for the mass media. This level implies further processing of information - while the first level focuses only on the transmission of relevant issues, the second level considers the attributes of these issue (Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004). Therefore, as described by Carroll (2004, p.15), the second level of this theory regards the way mass media classifies objects, how it gives them attributes, leading to a generalized opinion on facts - on how the public groups describe these topics and how they perceive them. The attributes given by the media can be sorted into two dimensions: the affective, expressed in the tone used in an object's approach, measuring its emotional proposition; and the cognitive which focuses on the concentration of specific aspects (Carroll, 2004) such as personality or ideology of the person being talked about in the issue (Wu & Coleman, 2009). The cognitive dimension concerns the subdivision of information in groups through common themes. For example, in studies about presidential elections data, it is possible to see several categories such as ideology views, image and personality, qualifications and integrity (Carroll). In the affective dimension, feelings and tone are recognized in news stories and survey responses, showing a clear sentiment about the object described. Therefore, the object being described is being portrayed in a positive, negative or neutral manner to the public (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Lennon, 1997)) such as "good leader" or "poor attitude" (Wanta et al., 2004, p.368).

Considering the media's effect on the public, it is important to talk about priming and framing. According to McCombs (2002, p.12), priming's psychological foundation is the public's selective attention, meaning that the individuals can not notice everything around them (McCombs, 2002). Instead, they draw conclusions on specific content, more memorable or notable – the information is shaped by the mass media to a considerable degree. When it comes to framing, Entman (1993, p.52) describes the process as "selection and salience" – selecting and highlighting part of the information, using the underlined objects to theorize about a problem and what caused it, since framing happens on the macro and micro levels (Entman, 1993). Priming refers to how journalists present information, conscious or unconsciously, fitting it into the already existing frames in the public. Journalists do not create stories, instead, they follow this tool to efficiently reduce the complexity of their piece, making it more

understandable. Framing indicates how the audience uses the information to create impressions (positive, negative or neutral) (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

News selection is at the heart of the agenda-setting process. Dozens of news are cut off the air since news directors must select only a minority of stories, limited by the time and space available. The issues that fail to pass through news' gatekeepers end up not having salience cues, meaning that they are not important enough when compared to others (Wanta et al., 2004, p.365). Also, Hollender (2004) underlined that the media tends to publicize the bad and generally ignore the good. Usually, a company is known for the negative things, while the positive things, such as achievements on the environmental front, end up forgotten (Hollender, 2004).

We can conclude that the agenda-setting theory and all its extents recognize not only according to Shaw (1979, p.97) "the media, by describing and detailing what is out there, present people with a list of what to think about and talk about", but also according to Rill and Davis (2008, p.610) "how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences" (Rill & Davis, 2008).

One of the best examples of mass media influence are scandals. A scandal happens when damage is made to a property, people or even to the environment (Kepplinger, *Hidden Traps: An Essay on Scandals*, 2018). However, in the fashion industry, a scandal occurs when a certain company performs an action, statement or event that causes a strong response from the audience (Vänskä & Gurova, 2021). While some scandals perish when other scandals occur, some scandals do not vanish and end up creating a systemic change among the company. Kepplinger (2018) suggests that scandals are generated through people and organizations' decisions, caused by selfish reasons, violating important rules or values which vary in every country. Furthermore, scandals can be avoided if wanted – usually end up reported in the media in an intense and consistent way (Kepplinger, *Hidden Traps: An Essay on Scandals*, 2018).

Normally, scandals addressed in the media undermine institutions or a public figure in the public mind, leading to government regulation on these specific activities (Tumber, 2004). Newspapers and tabloids end up exploring these scandals, generating big sales on their behalf (Tumber, 2004). The relation between events and scandals features three points: how does the public perceive it, what has triggered it and how and in what way does the media cover these same topics. Kepplinger (2018) introduces an example with the 2,015 violations made in Germany in 1998. The author states that 80% were reported in the media with special relevance

given to violations in church (90%) whereas 38% corresponded to underreported media violations (Kepplinger, *Hidden Traps: An Essay on Scandals*, 2018). Normally, when addressing a scandal, mass media finds consensus among causes and events, leaving only one question: when is the guilty getting punished and how (Kepplinger, *Hidden Traps: An Essay on Scandals*, 2018). For example, in politics, Tumber (2004) writes that mass media can be seen to achieve free publicity. Nevertheless, it is the same mass media that have the power to discredit these same politicians, making them vulnerable (Tumber, 2004).

According to Kepplinger and Lemke (2016) the type of coverage is important when it comes to setting minds (Kepplinger & Lemke, 2016). The results of the public grow stronger as more topics are covered as well as the mediaticism behind it. The effects on public knowledge and governments in various countries become more noticeable depending on the number of times a certain topic is covered (Kepplinger & Lemke, 2016). The more times it is addressed, the more crucial information regarding the industry reaches the public. Since all countries are different and approach the same subject differently (even if only slightly), everyone draws his or her own conclusion when reading it. Kepplinger and Lemke (2016) argue that each individual draws their opinion from what they read in the media, establishing different realities of the same fact. People fall victim to the illusion of making their own judgment when it is made through what they read and what they can perceive through the media. Therefore, the public's perception and the consequences for those involved in the scandal can vary in every country (Kepplinger & Lemke, 2016, p.16). Once again, mass media get to decide if the coverage is negative or positive or even if the topic passes through the gatekeepers deciding, on some level, how to transmit information and what we learn from it (Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004).

When discussing fast fashion companies and according to Knight and Greenberg (2002) Nike CEO Phil Knight announced, in a press club, his new initiatives to improve factory working conditions worldwide, after the significant drop in its share price in the Asian continent, along with public relations problems they were facing regarding third countries labor practices (Knight & Greenberg, 2002). NGOs, labor unions and religious groups were applying pressure concerning sweatshop practices such as forced overtime, long working hours, hazardous and stressful conditions, or even abusive and violent management (Knight & Greenberg, 2002).

The more advanced a society or country is, the more opportunities arise to highlight issues that would not be raised in third-world countries. Discussing labor abuses or questioning those

who govern us becomes commonplace in rich countries, increasing scandals. This is due not only to the perception of scandals but also to the number of violations that have increased in recent years (or just known ones) (Kepplinger, 2018).

After the Rana Plaza collapse, Auke and Simaens (2019) analyzed the impact of corporate responsibility in the fast fashion industry. The authors have concluded that although H&M and Walmart were the companies with the highest disclosure rating, Walmart was also the one with more negative reviews, concerning the lack of CSR measures in action. Primark was one of the four companies analyzed and Auke and Simaens (2019) were able to associate its amount of media time with the involvement in the Rana Plaza collapse, since their clothes were manufactured there. Primark admitted its involvement, which according to the agenda-setting theory would develop a negative relation with the audience. After the collapse, Primark did the effort to improve their disclosure and transparency in their CSR activities (Auke & Simaens, 2019).

Even companies like Patagonia, which have already achieved improvements in sustainability and labor, have dealt with liability issues in the past. Since customers know that every company has positive and negative factors, the question is "how good is good enough?" or "do I want to support this company?". The values of each company become important as the product they sell takes a back seat. This is a constant challenge not only for the business world but also for public knowledge (Hollender, 2004).

Despite the internet having effect on communication, newspapers and television, known as traditional media, remain the main source of information to those who sympathize with the anti-sweatshop campaign. Being a complicated issue, the anti-sweatshop movement has already attracted a lot of attention on several topics being one of the most common salary – used, for example, to compare Nike’s workers’ salaries to well-known athletes (Knight & Greenberg, 2002).

Levels of expectation have changed the commerce operation guidelines. This did not necessarily translate into every business becoming a good business, instead brought the bar higher than it ever was, forcing some positive changes on companies. Informed citizens stated making pressure to see these different approaches by making the public opinion, public relations and public pressure a reality nowadays. (Hollender, 2004).

Furthermore, environmentalists have been selecting companies that for some reason show distress along the supply chain (Elkington, 1994). Reports on corporate environmental

measures disclosing information concerning environmental goals and performance become a reality to these companies, giving the pressure applied. Usually, by reading these reports one can understand how poorly qualified these companies are when dealing with lenders, accountants, lawyers and many others on sustainable issues. Many CEOs have shown concerns relating to the pressure applied on environmental topics and its impacts - industry, firing line or international recession (Elkington, 1994).

2.3 Signaling Theory and Sustainability Reporting

Organizations have been changing their daily operations to comply with the triple bottom line principles (Elkington, 2004). With this change, global CSR norms become relevant to both within and beyond organization boundaries, which involves partners, suppliers and stakeholders (Simaens & Koster, 2013).

With its origin in the early work by Spence (1973), the signaling theory came to life focusing on the existence of three main elements in the signaling process – the signaler, the signal itself and the receiver of the signal (Spence, 1973). Usually, the signaler, the person or company sending the message, must choose if the message is sent and how to communicate the information to the external party, while the receiver chooses how to interpret the message. This theory is concerned with the reduction of information asymmetry between the two parties (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011). Connelly et al. (2011) continues by saying that the decision-making process done by clients, stakeholders, and governments is done according to the information they have. Since individuals make decisions based on public information, that is freely available, and private information, that is only accessible to some, Stiglitz (2002) states that distinct people end up knowing different things, leading to this asymmetry (Stiglitz, 2002). The author focuses on two types of information where there is asymmetry – information on quality and intent. When it comes to quality, this asymmetry becomes important when the first party knows more than the second. When concerning quality, one party might be concerned about the other party's behavior, which will end up affecting decision-making (Elitzur & Gavious, 2003).

This theory is used to describe the quality being referred, depending on the context of the research. Connelly and colleagues (2011, p.43) noted that quality “refers to the underlying, unobservable ability of the signaler to fulfill the needs or demand of an outsider observing the signal”. In this particular case, we will see the signals in fast fashion companies' reports, similarly to other studies (e.g. Auke and Simaens). As Connelly and colleagues (2011) and

Spence (1973) put it, Third Sector Organizations (TSOs) can decide to “signal” their behavior to the external world due to the information asymmetry, usually through sustainability reporting. Literature on sustainability accounting and reporting has been following different theoretical paths as the years go by (Burritt & Schaltegger, 2010).

One question given by Kirmani and Rao (2000) is that when a manufacturer of a consumer product offers low prices, is this the evidence of a low-quality product? What is communicated to the outsiders is called the signal itself. These can include marketing variables, price information acquisition or signals on reports (Kirmani & Rao, 2000). The authors assume the premise that one of the parties has always more information than the information it gives (the signaler) while the other party ends up lacking information, interpreting what it gets (receiver) (Kirmani & Rao, 2000).

Management scholars have used the signaling theory to explain the influence of information asymmetry in various contexts (Connelly et al., 2011). One study made by Zhang and Wiersema (2009, p.40) shows how CEOs “signal the unobservable quality of their firms to potential investors via the observable quality of their financial statements”.

However, Kirmani and Rao (2000) contribute by giving a general example: the authors distinguish high-quality and low-quality firms, stating that each firm knows their true quality. Each of these firms chooses to signal or not their true quality to the outside world. If not signaled, the information asymmetry happens given that one part knows more than the other (Kirmani & Rao, 2000). They continue to explain that if a high-quality firm decides to signal, it gets Payoff A, while not signaling corresponds to Payoff B. When explaining low-quality, signaling matches a Payoff C and not signaling a Payoff D. This creates a viable strategy for high-quality firms, given that A is better than B and D is better than C. It is easily explained by the fact that if both decide to signal, outsiders can perfectly distinguish them, choosing the high-quality firm. High-quality companies win by signaling their quality, while low-quality firms do not. The authors sum up that in this case, high-firms should signal, and low-firms should not, resulting in a separating equilibrium (Kirmani & Rao, 2000).

It is through concepts such as sustainability, environmental and social challenges that the initial approach is made, thus creating the necessary questions for the development of the dissertation. This is followed by concepts such as agenda-setting, signaling theory and corporate social responsibility, which are used to analyze the collected news and reports of the fast fashion company in question.

None of these analyses would be possible without the concepts presented above and the theories developed by the mentioned authors - which brings us to the methodology, where we begin to answer the three questions posed.

3. Methodology

This dissertation addresses different issues related to fast fashion industry's scandals in the media. The focus is to perceive how the media wrote and portrayed the most mentioned brands in newspapers. The final goal is to understand what is constant in the news and what stands out more by choosing the most mentioned brand in which we performed an in-depth analysis.

The research is based on scandalous fast fashion news through the years of 2006 and 2021, analyzing the media coverage in different countries and English newspapers. One company, boohoo, was distinguished in the process. After analyzing the data on the MAXQDA® Analytics Pro 2020 software, the goal is to be able to understand not only how the coverage of scandals associated with these brands was, but also how one specific brand acted post-coverage in a social media, news media and reports analysis. That is to say, the three important research questions explored in this research are: 1) How are media covering fashion-related events?; 2) How are companies dealing with scandals?; and 3) How do they change their behavior afterwards?.

3.1 Research Design

The research is divided into two parts. The first part concerned news analysis in which the objective was to understand which events were most reported and how they were described, integrating the agenda-setting theory. The sample of news were taken from Lexis Nexis® platform, concerning only English newspapers. By analyzing the agenda-setting concept, the goal was to assign codes that in the end could be compared. Concerning the framing process, they were divided into "negative", "neutral" and "positive". This first part explored the first question "how are the media covering fast fashion related events?", ensuring that there is a fair mediatic treatment to all fast fashion companies and that fast fashion industry is getting more attention than in the past.

The second part focused on a case study of the most distinguished brand post-analysis. The goal was to deepen the understanding about the company by analyzing its reports, their transparency, CSR initiatives in place and their presence on social and traditional media. This helped establish a timeline that tracked and contextualized the entire history and achievements of the respective company, addressing the second and third questions that arose "how do companies deal with scandals?" and "do they change their behavior afterwards?". In this part, we hope to be able to confirm our last goal - that companies are beginning to gain responsibility

over their fast fashion scandals, being more responsible and concerned about their consequences

The main goals of this dissertation are to find out if there is a fair mediatic treatment to all companies, if the fast fashion industry is getting more attention than in the past and if companies are beginning to gain responsibility over their fast fashion scandals, being more responsible and concerned about their consequences. To answer our questions and to be able to verify our goals, this paper uses the agenda-setting and Signaling theories, giving an insight into all possible subjects that relate to the research. It explores not only the legitimacy of certain brands but also how they are exposed and addressed in the media, understanding how the CSR of one of these companies may change (or not) post-scandal.

3.2 Data collection and coding

The first part began with research on a news platform called Lexis Nexis®, performed on the 09.04.2021. Articles mentioning “fast fashion” and “scandal” were searched in this platform, all in English language. The first result showed 923 news. However, when defining a timeline, we are able to see that the first result goes back to 1987 and that since the 2000s the frequency of these news was extremely higher than in the past. Hence, 918 out of 923 news items have been written since 2006 - showing a big change in alertness for related topics. Therefore, when narrowing all information, besides English filter, we added “fashion & apparel” to the search string, resulting in 670 news. After this, we chose the publication type – newspapers – leading us to 377 news. After a careful analysis of the 377 news, only 244 concerned sustainable and social scandals, mentions or changes among companies. The exclusion factors were due to three main scandals that are not part of the analysis: financial scandals, vehicle industry scandals and modeling scandals of certain brands. Finally, news associated with quizzes related to the fashion culture were also removed from the sample to be analyzed, leaving us with 244 items in the sample.

News taken from the Lexis Nexis® platform came from newspapers written in English and sold in several countries, as listed below:

- United Kingdom (UK)- The Independent, The Sunday Times, The Daily Telegraph, The International Herald Tribune, Independent Extra, The Times, South Wales Evening Post, The Guardian, The Observer, Financial Times, The Evening Standard, The Herald, Yorkshire Post, Daily Mail, Scottish Daily Mail, Irish Daily Mail, Telegraph, London Free Press, Daily Mirror,

Leicester Mercury and The Sun.

- United States of America (USA) – USA Today, Chicago Daily Herald, The Tartan: Carnegie Mellon University and The New York Times.

- Australia – The Herald Sun, The Australian, The Sydney Morning Herald and Illawarra Mercury.

- South Africa – Sunday Times, The Sunday Independent, The Mercury and Argus Weekend.

- Canada – The Toronto Star, Owen Sound Sun Times, Kingston Whig-Standard, Belleville Intelligencer and North Bay Nugget.

- Korea – Korea Times.

- China – South China Morning Post and Global Times.

- India – Delhi News-Record.

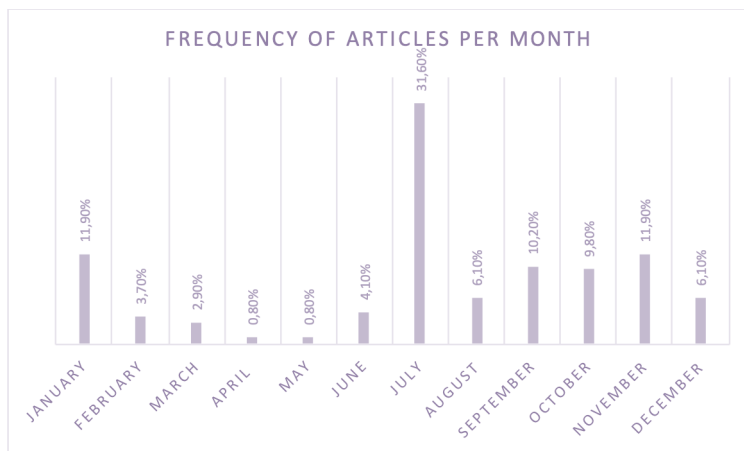
The initial focus was on the agenda-setting level. In order to find how media gives attention to different companies and if this attention can be sorted geographically, the gathered information was divided. Some of the variables used were the brands' mentions, the year in which they were published as well as the location from where they were being written. These items were imported into a word document, where they were selected. Once selected, they were analyzed using a CAQDA (Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software) called MAXQDA® Analytics Pro 2020.

To determine the second level agenda-setting, codes were attributed based on the tone used to write each sentence. The coding was done per paragraph or sentence instead of per article, giving the fact that there were different tones and perceptions in the same article, which could bias the research. The news were sorted into three codes: “positive”, “negative” and “neutral”. Negative events are related with bad judgements from the company, negative behaviors concerning sustainability and responsibility. Words such as “struggle”, “lack of transparency”, “allegations”, “exploitation”, “low wage” or “unsafe working conditions” are mentioned several times when the negative factor is identified. Positive events relate to the brand's accountability, their willingness and the openness need to improve their behavior. “Improvements”, “responsibility”, “compromise” or “sustainability” were some of the words mentioned in these paragraphs. Neutral framing concerns the simple mention of a brand without any negative or positive tone towards it, reporting factual descriptions, for example how the brand was created and how their sale numbers are. There were also codes that relate to each brand to be able to understand where the most frequent event is, in the end.

The most mentioned brands, in ascending order, were “Missguided”, “H&M”, “Asos”, “Topshop” and “boohoo”, having the last one a big discrepancy when compared to the others. Based on this information, important data such as “location”, “month” and “year” were also important to understand the frequency of the events. After this first analysis, the coded data was transformed into tables and graphs for further analysis.

On a second analysis, the most mentioned brand – boohoo - was selected and meticulously analyzed. The analysis was done through its reports from 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 - the goal was to see what had changed in terms of sustainability reporting and engagement for shareholders and the brand itself. A timeline of events was drawn, from the emergence of the scandal until it eased and ceased to be covered in the mass media.

Table 1 - Frequency of Articles coded per Month during our time frame.



Looking at table 2, we can conclude that 2020 was the year with more articles written, for the exact same reason. However, one of the scandals addressed throughout this dissertation has been the collapse of a building in Bangladesh, called Rana Plaza, used as a factory for clothing production, in 2013. Looking at Table 2 and observing our sample, in 2013 the case was not covered as much as the most recent one by the media – at least in the sample newspapers covered by this research.

Table 2 - Articles per year during our time frame

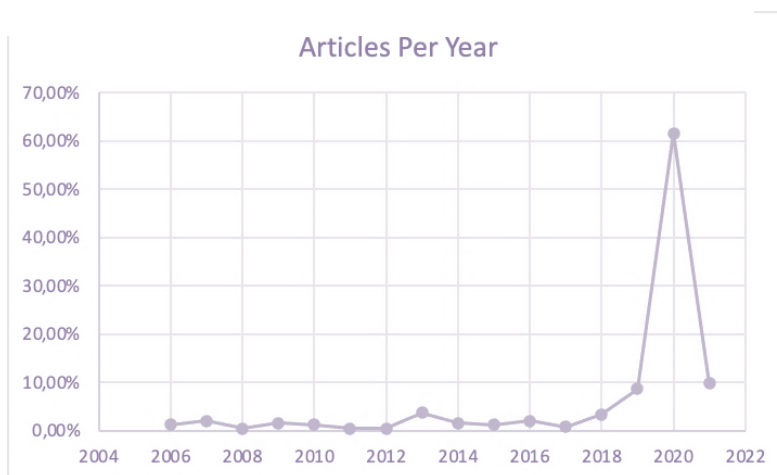


Table 3 displays how framing is divided per country. The UK is the region with most negative, positive, and neutral tones therefore, with more media coverage. Due to proximity, UK becomes the place that has the most articles written concerning this scandal and all the other

brands' mention. South Africa comes in second place, with a larger difference, on the negative tone used. In total, there have been 1942 mentions to these brands, having 1857 only in the UK.

Table 3 - Framing coded per country

Framing	Canada	USA	S.Africa	Korea	China	Australia	India	UK	SUM
Negative	9	1	36	0	0	1	2	611	660
Positive	0	0	4	0	0	6	0	329	339
Neutral	1	11	11	1	2	0	0	917	943
SUM	10	12	51	1	2	7	2	1857	1942

Furthermore, it is also possible to understand why the most common location is the UK, by looking at table 4. According to the agenda-setting theory, the fact that boohoo is a British company may explain that it is more approached in its own country (UK with 88.90%) than in other countries. In this case, this sample reflects that the biggest news stories are about the boohoo scandal (which will be approached on the second part), so they were more reported in the UK. It is interesting that in Europe the event was not approached, at least in our sample. This could happen due to two factors: the official language in each country being different or due to the low interest in these matters.

Table 4 - Location on the frequency of written articles

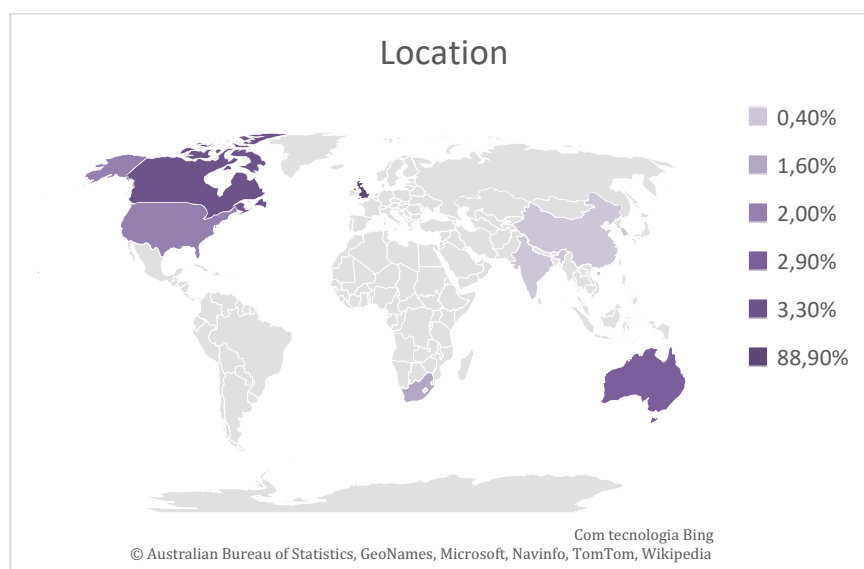


Table 5 - Frequency of brand mention per country

	Topshop	Asos	Booho	Primark	H&M	Missguided	SUM
Canada	1	0	0	1	8	0	10
USA	1	0	0	1	3	0	14
South Africa	0	0	1	0	50	0	51
Korea	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
China	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Australia	0	0	0	1	6	0	7
India	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
UK	168	200	1305	150	58	98	1979
SUM	177	201	1307	153	130	98	2066

We can conclude, based on Table 5, again, that the country that published the most articles about sustainability or the lack of it in fast fashion, in the sample collected, was the United Kingdom (UK). None of the other countries came close to the amount reported, however, when only thinking about boohoo, this has to do with the fact that the boohoo scandal (being the most reported brand as well) is from a company based in the UK. It is also possible to state that the second most covered brand by the media was Asos, followed by Topshop. These last two were possibly more covered since Topshop was bought by The Arcadia Group (of which Asos is a part of, being these companies British). Of the countries in the sample, South Africa takes second place with news from H&M (50). In the remaining countries, the sample is evenly divided, having between 0 to 8 news about these brands – (Table 5).

When noticing the media attention given to each brand, boohoo received both negative and positive attention towards their actions in the 244 news selected. Given the company scandal, it was also the one who had more to improve, therefore, the positive reaction after the breakthrough. Other than that, Asos got the best attention for their CSR commitment while H&M got more negative attention than good. The least mentioned brand was Missguided.

Table 6 shows the frequency of tone mentioned in each company. Overall, the tone was negative for boohoo and positive for Asos. The most mentioned brand was boohoo, followed, with a large difference, by Asos. In the sample collected, few were the paragraphs that passed positive tones in large numbers, other than boohoo, given the post-scandal and all the attitudes

Table 6 - Frequency of paragraphs mentioning a company per tone

	Topshop	Asos	Boohoo	Primark	H&M	Missguided	SUM
Negative	17	14	535	29	62	21	678
Positive	1	57	230	17	22	18	345
Neutral	159	134	536	107	46	59	1041
SUM	177	205	1301	153	130	98	2064

they have taken at this stage. The neutral tone is the most common justified by the acquisitions between groups or simply by the value of sales in the middle of the pandemic, above expected.

All six companies above used to be constantly linked to unsustainable phenomena, as they are fast fashion companies – it is in the concept itself. However, most of the times they are not addressed publicly due to not only their giant presence in the world but also because of their lack of transparency about where they produce their clothes. One of the examples is The Rana Plaza incident, where Primark was producing their items. After the enormous blowup, in 2013, the production of this brand's products was never again heard in the media. However, it is possible to see that in our sample, in 2013, there is not much to tell. Our data suggest that The Rana Plaza incident was not seriously approached back in the day.

Usually, when scandals happen, newspapers are used to write articles for months - until they cease to be. In addition to this, the boohoo case, that was less serious than Rana Plaza, happened very recently and was covered for months, is now closed. When searching for news, we still do not know where their clothes are produced and if they are produced ethically and with sustainable practices.

4.1 Disclosure before the event

The results of the second part of this research describe how the signaling theory is applied on boohoo's reports, considering that it is the worst fashion brand analyzed. The reports analyzed are from 2018, 2019 and 2020, the years before the scandal.

In the report from 2018, boohoo explained how they ran the business. The signal was being sent essentially to their customers by writing “we are entirely focused on our customers and every element of our model begins and ends with them” (boohoo, 2018, p.8). This sentence explains that the customers were the top priority of the company, making it easy for them to understand that they were the priority. It is also pointed out by the chairman Peter Williams that the company had a successful year, while thanking the management team and every employee who had helped achieve success (boohoo, 2018). In this report, boohoo's board signaled how thankful it was when it came to the team who made the company what it was.

Another signal being sent was that they were socially responsible. They described themselves as “guided by our values of passion, agility, creativity and teamwork. We pride ourselves on our inclusive culture and team spirit and we believe in operation in a fair and

sustainable manner” (boohoo, 2018, p.25). Boohoo had, in 2018, an animal welfare policy where real fur was not used and was part of the Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI), setting standards of labor practice. Living wages payment, diversity, no discrimination at work, safe working conditions and suppliers that comply with local laws were some of the points described that were being followed by boohoo at the time. They also described themselves as a zero-tolerance policy when it came to modern slavery while acting responsibly to reduce energy, using it more efficiently. All these points were highlighted by Mahmud Kamani, Carol Kane and Neil Catto, the board of the company (boohoo, 2018).

In the 2019 report, their vision and mission had not changed. However, the statement in this year comes from Mahmud Kamani, the executive Chairman. Profits and gross margins were highlighted along the report with the care for socially responsible initiatives, such as supporting several charities through the year. When explaining their key characteristics, besides successful, inspired, global, connected and fast, boohoo mentioned that they operate with responsibility towards customers, employees and partners while reducing their environmental impact. With a lot of care for their work ethics, further sustainability initiatives were considered by planning the year. The executive chairman, Mahmud Kamani, also took the chance to thank all boohoo’s employees (just like the previous year) and partners for all their efforts for the company, sending the same signal as the year before (boohoo, 2019).

It was yet shown in the report their commitment to be more sustainable by promising to appoint a board sponsor for the Social Responsibility agenda, a new Group Head of Sustainability, both of which groups would work together to increase employee engagement while aligning the business into a more sustainable way (boohoo, 2019). One of their affirmations for the future was that “boohoo has a zero-tolerance approach to modern slavery” and continued with the goal to “build on the great progress made to date in the transparency of our supply chain across the group. Through strengthening supplier partnerships we can build trust to gain further transparency lower down the supplier chain” (boohoo, 2019, p.26).

In the 2020 report, once again, their vision and mission had not changed. Since the reports were made in April and the scandal only happened in July, it is important to understand what signals were being sent by the brand. This was also the first year of Covid-19. Therefore, in this year’s statement by Mahmud Kamani, the executive chairman, there was a specific statement concerning Covid-19, where safety measures were being approached, such as defending work from home when possible or distancing and masks when work must be done on site (boohoo,

2020). The executive chairman continued his statement by affirming that all work practices given by the government were being followed. A Director of Sustainability and Social Responsibility was hired, as mentioned in the previous year, given greater importance to creating a sustainable business, minimizing the environmental impact by promoting recycling of clothes and pushing the message to customers (thus, sending a signal to the audience of all the environmental improvements made). At the end of the statement, Mahmud Kamani thanked and appreciated the brand's employees and partners for their success by saying "as always, my thanks and appreciation go to our employees and partners who make the group the success that it has been again this year", sending them the same message as the previous years, showing gratitude towards them (boohoo, 2020, p.11).

When comparing the three reports (2018, 2019, 2020) boohoo as a company sent out similar signals each year. Signals that were addressed to those who were part of it, by thanking each constituent member of the company, each employee, and each client. In essence, it showed itself to be a company grateful for the path it had already made, wanting to achieve much more. In terms of sustainability, the 2018 parameters were maintained, adding specific positions in the area so that they could always improve this aspect. Boohoo showed that sustainability and concern for employees and clients came at the forefront of its work, wanting to create a sustainable business that can minimize the environmental impact it had.

4.2 The event

On July 5th, 2020, the British newspaper The Sunday Times published an undercover investigation concerning boohoo. It said that there were workers in a factory in Leicester that were being paid as little as 3.50£ per hour. It is important to remember that in the UK, the national living wage for ages such as 25 is above 8.72£. The investigation also claimed that Covid-19 protections were not enough since proper equipment for protection was not being used (Paton, 2020).

Leicester was the first place in the UK to receive local restrictions due to a coronavirus outbreak and since it has been the center to manufacture clothing, authorities believe it may have been related to unsafe working conditions workers were exposed to (Paton, 2020).

The article written on The Sunday Times came after a published report by Labour Behind the Label, an NGO that stands for garment workers and does campaigns groups, stating that "emerging evidence indicates that conditions in Leicester's factories, primarily producing for

boohoo, are putting workers at risk of covid-19 infections and fatalities” and that “workers have been told to come into work – even when they showed symptoms of covid-19” (Labour Behind the Label, 2020). Multiple factories in Leicester were being used and exposed due to unsafe working conditions on account of no social distancing or personal protective equipment, along with the low pay (in general, but also during lockdown) (Labour Behind the Label, 2020).

For years, several reports have been issued denouncing illegal practices in garment production factories in Leicester. As a result, several brands decided to start producing elsewhere. Of the few that remained, there is boohoo and the sister brands, with the company accounting for around 75-80% of the production in Leicester. Before the pandemic, there had already been allegations of mistreatment and low payment in these factories (Paton, 2020). According to the Labour Behind the Label, in Leicester “it is estimated that most garment workers are from minority ethnic groups. Around 33.6% were born outside the UK (e.g. from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh)”. Being more vulnerable to abuse due to their immigration status, the numerous allegations for modern slavery and trafficking have been increasing (Paton, 2020).

When the scandal came out, the company told The Sunday Times that “as a board, we are shocked and appalled by the recent allegations that have been made and we are committed to doing everything in our power to rebuild the reputation of the textile manufacturing industry in Leicester”¹⁹. The board also said that claims were being investigated and that the factory did not represent a direct supplier. Boohoo expressed that any suppliers found with the same condition would be terminated, due to a breach of its code of conduct (Young, 2022).

Three days later, boohoo published a statement on their website, claiming that an independent review of its British supply chains would start, investing 12.5£ million to eradicate malpractice in any suppliers by stepping up the use of third-party auditors (Young, 2022). Promising to report on its supply chain in September, boohoo did not give any additional information and instead, lead a reporter to their new statement on the website. A new report in 2021 would be published, where this modern slavery case would be exposed and commented on by the boohoo chairman (Labour Behind the Label, 2020).

On the 25th of September 2020, boohoo issued a response to the scandal, announcing the group would undertake an Independent Review of its UK supply chain conducted by Alison Levitt QC. Levitt admitted that the company did not commit any criminal offences (Ferrer & Katanich, 2020). The Independent Review was delivered on 24th September 2020. In this review, Levitt identified many failings in the Leicester supply chain and recommended some

improvements related to corporate governance, compliance and monitoring processes. There is also proof that the steps to fix the problems in the Leicester supply chain were already implemented one year before the scandal. However, in the boohoo's report, they admitted that the processes did not advance quickly enough (Fashion Revolution, 2020).

Looking at the social media, customers have called boohoo to play a more active and responsible role when it comes to social and sustainable matters (annex 2). It is possible to see in different posts comments that demand changes among the company manufacturing system. Nowadays, some comments still arise, however, it seems to have fallen in the oblivion by the mass media (Leach, 2020).

4.3 Disclosure after the event

In the 2021 boohoo's report, the concern for the environment exists, as it did in the previous years. In the first pages of the report, it says "growth for a sustainable future" (boohoo, 2021, p.2), something that is not so prominent in the previous ones. They also talked about higher standards so that they can strengthen their corporate governance, sustainable concern and social impact. They also refer to the changes they expect to obtain to benefit the whole organization and stakeholders, addressing each of them on how they generate value to the company. Thus, the slogan chosen is "delivering value for all our stakeholders" (boohoo, 2021, p.2), addressing them individually.

After admitting the scandal in the 2021 report, Mahmud Kamani, the executive chairman, sent a signal to all the stakeholders mentioned (customers, suppliers, community, employees) in the section "chairman's statement" to ensure that they have eliminated the abusive practices and that the plan is to ensure that "Leicester becomes one of the centers of excellence for British garment manufacturing by supporting British jobs" (boohoo, 2021, p.18). Kamani continued by saying that the board is acting on every recommendation from Alison Levitt QC in her review and that the process is being monitored by Sir Brian Leveson PC, KPMG and other third parties. When approaching covid-19, the executive chairman added that "we have kept to our promise of paying UK suppliers on 14-day terms; we have paid self-isolating colleagues their full pay; and we have not drawn on any government support" (boohoo, 2021, p.18).

Finally, the executive chairman leaves a message of appreciation to all the workers and colleagues during the pandemic for their adaptability to this new reality. We can conclude that

the signal in this report was more positive, referring all the involved stakeholders and assuming the scandal that happened in July, 2020 (boohoo, 2021, p.18).

John Lyttle, who joined the group as CEO in 2018, added that he was proud to “lead a business that, instead of choosing to walk away from the allegations, took the immediate decision to do everything within its power to address them and play its part in rebuilding a thriving garment sector in the UK” (boohoo, 2021, p.18). Lyttle also presented the Agenda for Change, which aims to address the problems identified by the audit carried out after the scandal, accepting the 17 recommendations made by Levitt in her report, while affirming that “boohoo has enthusiastically embarked upon and pursued a review of its supply chain and has initiated improvements by way of learning and development in relation to responsible purchasing practices” (boohoo, 2021, p.20).

To improve standards in the supply chain, the group continued to explore and audit the companies where the clothes were produced. To increase the speed at which audit was carried out, Verisio, the group’s external supply-chain auditors, increased the audit teams and their presence in the field. The group added that “a new Head of Ethical Compliance, Head of Product Compliance and a Senior UK Ethical Sourcing Manager were appointed to strengthen the UK in-house team, and Sir Brian Leveson PC has appointed a team of investigators” (boohoo, 2021, p.22). In March 2021, the group had audited most of UK suppliers twice. Audits were unannounced and had visits in the evening and weekends to investigate claims of illegal working hours. Corporate structures and directors were identified and interviewed. Furthermore, every supplier was given the chance to remedy issues during their audit process while implementing additional measures. boohoo’s group was encouraged by many suppliers who supported the approach chosen to improve the UK garment sector (boohoo, 2021, p.22).

The first boohoo group sustainability plan was also published in 2021. In this report, the group admits it is working to make the biggest impact possible, joining groups such as Sustainable Apparel Coalition, Textiles 2030 and the Microfibre Consortium. The plan designed aims to address all the issues highlighted by everyone connected to their business. As such, the group explored the impacts of fashion and asked colleagues and customers what future they aspire to, setting targets to achieve best practice. They also committed to communicating honestly about all the goals achieved, so that it is clear what has been achieved and what remains to be achieved (boohoo, 2021).

The working agenda is divided into three areas: “smarter clothes”, “suppliers on better terms” and “our business. taking action”. The first area – smarter clothes - is divided into four sub-sectors explained in the report as “materials, design, waste, packaging - finding ways to keep our clothes in use for longer” (boohoo sustainability report, 2021). In materials, the aim is to use more sustainable materials with a focus on polyester and cotton. In terms of packaging, the group says that the packaging used already contains more than 80% recycled plastic, and they intend to explore more sustainable and recyclable packaging. In addressing textile waste, the group aims to develop different ways to recycle clothing and look at resale platforms for clothing so that it can be worn for longer. Focusing on the future, boohoo wants to develop goals around water, chemicals, biodiversity and microfibers by working with experts to understand what role they can play in these issues. The threshold for these goals has been set to 2030 (boohoo sustainability report, 2021)

Focusing on the second area - suppliers on better terms - the group started with standards in order to achieve a more rigorous supplier management programme, improving the systems they use and monitoring and tracking their products. Transparency is also addressed, admitting they have published Alison Levitt QC's report on the supply chain, talking about their supplier lists and giving details of Sir Brian Leveson's updates. In terms of programmes, the group has developed a Garment Workers Trust in Leicester to ensure workers' rights and offer support to more vulnerable workers in the area. They have also bought a warehouse in Leicester to ensure good practice in production. This area has a timeline to fulfill until 2025 (boohoo sustainability report, 2021).

The last area – our business. taking action - is divided into five parts. The first, Governance, the group admits to having established a Supply Chain Compliance Committee, which reports to the Risk Committee and group management. The focus was on supplier standards and sustainable issues. In People, the company is committed to listening to employees and colleagues so that together they can achieve their full potential. In Climate Change, the goal was to develop a dedicated programme on carbon emissions with a focus on the supply chain and logistics. In Marketing, the group admitted that it is working to give more sustainable choices to its customers, ensuring the best prices. In Community, boohoo wanted to launch a group-wide social impact strategy to reach more people, measuring the impact made on their lives. The boohoo group aspires to achieve all its goals by 2030, promising to make every metric public (boohoo sustainability report, 2021).

5. Discussion

This research aims to explore not only media coverage related to fast fashion events but also how a company acts after a scandal. The research was conducted in two parts. First, we analyzed media coverage and the tone attributed to media articles written on fast fashion, by using the agenda-setting theory. The research focused on the analysis of 244 news, to study how the mass media addressed fast-fashion news to respond to the first research question.

Secondly, we tried to understand if, after a scandal, the most mentioned company decided to change their corporate social responsibility (CSR) and if considered guilty by the press, how they acted upon it, focusing on one specific case. The case chosen to answer the second research question was boohoo's sweatshop scandal on the 5th of June 2020. Here we analyzed the public exposure before, during and after the main event. To capture the media attention and discussion on CSR followed, articles from the scandal were collected and analyzed. Therefore, the reports from years prior the scandals and the following year were examined, according to the Signaling Theory, to see the difference in everything that was reported in terms of sustainability, responding to the second research question. This paper is based on exploratory research, aiming to explore the relations between fast fashion companies, mass media and pressure applied due to the scandal. The point is not to confirm a hypothesis but to analyze the relations between factors.

To answer the first research question - how are media covering fashion-related events? - theories and ideas from authors that have been covered before were used, however, this time we ended up responding using not only the data collected but also the comparison with some of the theories. Hollender (2004) underlined that the media tends to publicize the bad and generally ignore the good. Usually, a company is known for the negative things, while the positive things, such as achievements on the environmental front, end up forgotten (Hollender, 2004). July 2020 was the month of the year when the most news were written and published. This can be associated with the boohoo scandal, highlighting that the press addresses the fast fashion topic more when there are scandals, forgetting about the positive changes among companies.

According to the agenda-setting theory, the media has the decision on what will be known to the public (Wu & Coleman, 2009). The objects chosen to describe these topics can raise a considerable awareness, leading to a discussion and consequently to a more concerned public. It is appropriate to assume that the media can, in some way, not only control what is the main

topic being spoken (by choosing the bigger topics of the day) but also what the public feels about it (in how it is described) (Carroll, 2004). Considering the frequency on fast fashion news, we can understand that the subject is not widely covered when watching the frequency of news per year/month (except in the year and month of the scandal).

Rill and Davis (2008) add that the way news were written influence the way they are read and analyzed by audiences. In this case, we cannot say that the audience was influenced in a positive or negative way since we did not analyze the audience's reaction. However, we can conclude that the tones attributed (positive, negative or neutral) also pass to those who read the news, leaving an impression of how to evaluate the subject. McCombs (2002) wrote that audience attention depends on what and how is written. Usually, readers do not focus overall but on specific content, drawing conclusions from the most memorable or notable part – which can be the negative tone associated with boohoo, for example.

According to Kepplinger and Lemke (2016) the more advanced a country is, the more opportunities arise in highlighting issues that would not be addressed in third world-countries. In this example, the scandal was most addressed in the UK, a developed country, where one may say that it did not expect such scandal. Kepplinger and Lemke (2016) defended this theory and added that the closest one is to the problem, the more addressed it will be. Since boohoo is a British company, it only makes sense to approach the matter in a different way than other countries. It can be seen from our results that the UK was the country where there was the most news written, especially associated with the scandal of a British company. Kepplinger (2018) added that discussing labor abuses or even questioning the government usually happens in rich countries, since the issues would not be so highlighted in poor countries.

To answer the second question - how are companies dealing with scandals and do they change their behavior afterwards? - we started with the authors Knight and Greenberg. Knight and Greenberg (2002) state that NGOs, labor unions and religious groups were applying pressure concerning sweatshop practices such as forced overtime, long working hours, hazardous and stressful conditions, or even abusive and violent management. Labour Behind the Label was the NGO that informed The Sunday Times of the sweatshop scandal that was happening on the boohoo's supply chain. Kirmani and Rao (2000) continue by saying that there is a premise concerning imbalance in information. It is common for one of the parties to have more information than the information it gives (the signaler), while the other party ends up lacking information, interpreting what it gets (receiver). The signaling theory (Spencer, 1973)

came to life focusing on the existence of three main elements in the signaling process – the signaler, the signal itself and the receiver of the signal. Usually, the signaler, the person or company sending the message, must choose if the message is sent and how to communicate the information to the external party, while the receiver chooses how to interpret the message. This theory is concerned with the reduction of information asymmetry between the two parties (Connelly et al., 2011). It can be said that the case of the boohoo scandal ultimately confirms this theory. In this specific case, clients and stakeholders did not know about the situation that was happening in the group's supply chain. The Board even stated that they were unaware of the situation and that all the recommendations given by Alison Levitt QC after the scandal were already being applied pre-scandal, albeit slowly. When the sweatshop was revealed, the information became accessible to all parties, existing an information symmetry. However, it is possible to conclude that boohoo will always have more information than it makes known, considering that it is a company and that everyone outside its sphere (e.g. customers) will not know everything.

Due to the abundant scandals involving not only corporate greed but also mismanagement and an overzealous pursuit of profit, businesses have been called to play a more active role in socially relevant activities (Pless and Maak, 2011). Stakeholders' expectations fall into these new demands, which call for responsible and capable corporations and their leaders who can cope with these emerging difficulties (Pless, Maak and Stahl, 2011, p.238). In the wake of the scandal, concerned to rectify the situation and improve the business, boohoo's board began to develop an annual sustainability report in which they set environmental and social targets to be achieved, informing all clients of how they intended to achieve them. They also committed to providing updates on their efforts so that they could monitor them along the way.

Boohoo ended up admitting their own fault in the matter and changed their report to a more transparent one – they have created a sustainability report separate from the annual report. When analyzing these reports, it is possible to understand that boohoo is interested in doing better, which comes in the same line as Auke and Simaens (2019) where Primark is addressed.

Heiser (2016) states that when CSR is embedded into the company's business strategy, to create value for the company. Companies can generate not only favorable stakeholder attitudes but also, in the long run, build a positive corporate image and strengthen their stakeholder relationships. Recent research has shown that, when linking CSR initiatives directly to corporate strategy, profit and competitiveness increase while a positive contribution is made to

society, as a whole (Heiser, 2016). Although they have always dealt with responsibly sustainable attitudes and points in their reports, the group has started to give more relevance to this part of management. Boohoo aims to become a more sustainable company and wishes to improve the conditions now known to workers in the industry in Leicester. Although there were already some remnants of CSR in pre-scandal reports, it can be assumed that post-scandal boohoo's CSR has become more developed and different measures have been put in place to achieve different targets by 2030. From a situation where the company's image was not positive, boohoo took responsibility and started to change.

6. Conclusion

In an ever-changing world, fast fashion has become one of the most prominent issues. Due to the fast pace at which everything happens and the demand that is increasing every day, it is urgent to expose and put pressure on companies that continue to enslave and pollute. It is necessary to make fashion a circular model instead of a linear one more than ever. It is becoming increasingly urgent to ask what methods are used, whether they are sustainable or not and to what extent they interfere with the health of the people who make them.

This research focused on the media and how industry news are addressed, using agenda-setting theory. Firstly, fast fashion articles were collected and analyzed. Secondly, codes were created to analyze the selected news stories. After this analysis, tables were created to draw conclusions from the selected stories. Thirdly, a background on the chosen scandal was written to contextualize the readers in the dissertation. The company reports were evaluated - those from before the scandal and those from after as well.

This dissertation reveals that the theories of agenda-setting and signaling are still in force, despite being talked about many years ago. It also reveals that the topic of fast fashion is not covered much in the media and that despite being an important topic, it is not given due importance. It was possible to answer the three research questions, while realizing that the coverage given to the theme is not high. Furthermore, most of the coverage is negative and after the peak of the scandal, little else is written.

Regarding the second and third questions, the boohoo case was able to show that the group has always shown some concern for sustainable and social issues but was eventually caught up in a sweatshop scandal. After the scandal, the company claimed to have changed its way of acting, having sought to establish goals to be achieved by 2030, not only on the sustainable side but also on the social one. It was then possible to confirm that, after a scandal, the company's CSR has changed, it has been rescripted.

7. Recommendations

The subject of fast fashion, despite starting to be increasingly addressed, is still not addressed enough. In this dissertation it is possible to find some limitations, this being one of them. The information is not very accessible, being sometimes spread in different media or social networks, in which we do not know if they tell the truth. It is very difficult to understand to what extent boohoo has applied the changes it promised, since despite showing some concern for sustainable and social aspects, it continues to launch new collections frequently. Moreover, before the scandal and reading the reports, one could already see a clear concern for workers' conditions. However, clothing brands end up having several suppliers due to the speed at which they sell, making it complicated to follow and check the conditions of all. However, when one reads the labels of the clothes one buys, one can always read that it is produced in a third world country such as Bangladesh. Knowing that the conditions of factories in Bangladesh are not the best, does this mean that all brands producing in Bangladesh have secret sweatshops?

Most authors who have written about the environmental impacts of fast fashion end up addressing the countries where the clothes are made. However, on the social impacts there is some lack of information. Considering that the manufacturing of these clothes is done in third world countries, it becomes difficult to keep up with the changes that many brands promise to make. However, as they are sold worldwide, scandals should be addressed globally and not just in the country of origin. In addition, clothing brands end up having little transparency when it comes to suppliers and how and under what conditions garments are made. Thus, the lack of transparency becomes another limitation.

In the news we were able to obtain through Lexis Nexis®, it is noticeable that the scandal was more addressed in the country of origin of the brand. We thus have one of the difficulties explained, in that as the issue is kept close to where it happened, there may be many more scandals happening to which we do not have access - since we are far away. Also, there are lots of newspapers scattered around the world, and it is difficult to collect news from all of them - which may have ended up biasing the sample collected. It ends up being a limitation, as we were able to answer the questions with our sample. And if it were possible to collect all the news from all the media outlets in the world that address fast fashion, what would be the conclusion?

For future research, it would be interesting to understand to what extent boohoo has changed its CSR, not only on paper but also in action. It would also be interesting to do this

analysis on more than one brand, to understand which scandals are most common and how they are most handled. Another idea, for example in Portugal, could be to investigate the most common brands and understand where the clothes are made. This research has helped to create more information when it comes to fast fashion and its problems, contributing with relevant information to the academia.

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9. Annexes

Figure 1 – Frequency of Articles coded per Month during our time frame on MAXQDA.

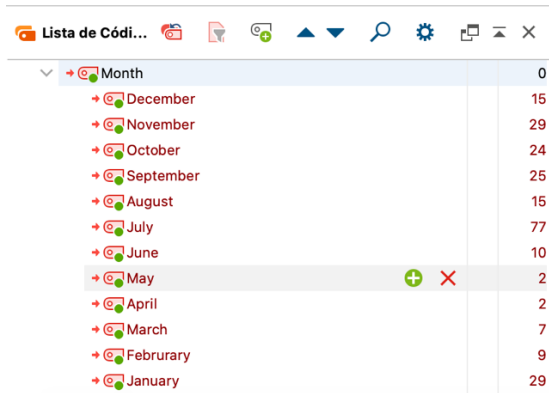


Figure 2 - Frequency of Articles coded per Year during our time frame on MAXQDA.

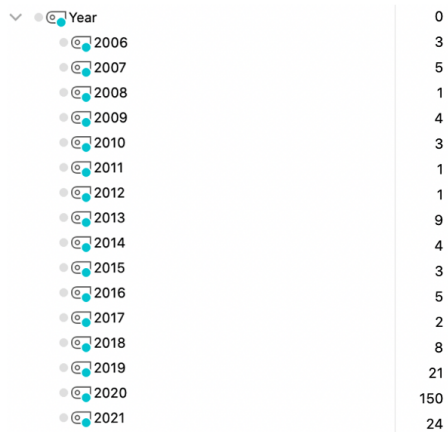


Figure 3 - Frequency of Articles coded per Month and Year during our time frame on MAXQDA.

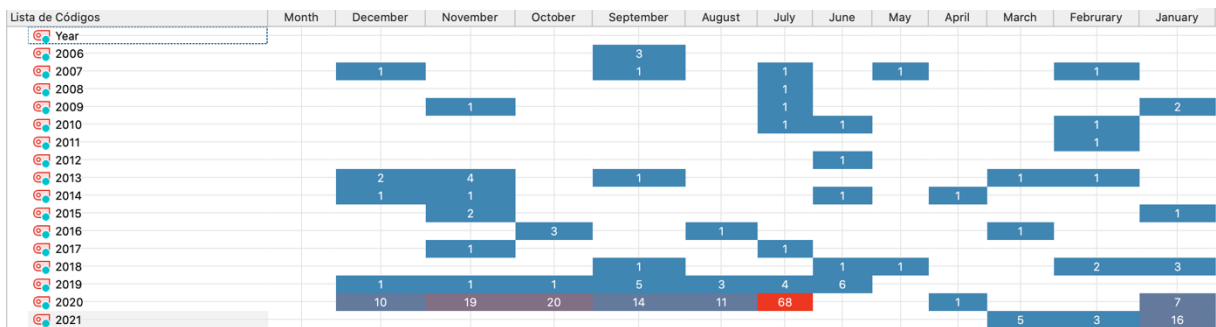


Figure 4 - Frequency of Articles coded per Country during our time frame on MAXQDA.

Location	Count
Month	244
Location	0
CANADA	8
USA	5
SOUTH AFRICA	4
KOREA	1
CHINA	1
AUSTRALIA	7
INDIA	1
UK	217

Figure 5 - Frequency of Articles coded per Brand per Country during our time frame on MAXQDA.

Lista de Códigos	Brand	Topshop	ASOS	Boohoo	Primark	H&M	Missguided/Misguided	SOMA
Location								0
CANADA		1			1	8		10
USA		8	1	1	1	3		14
SOUTH AFRICA				1		50		51
KOREA						1		1
CHINA						2		2
AUSTRALIA					1	6		7
INDIA						2		2
UK		168	200	1305	150	58	98	1979
SOMA	0	177	201	1307	153	130	98	2066

Figure 6 - Frequency of Articles coded per Tone per Country during our time frame on MAXQDA.

Lista de Códigos	Framing	Negative	Positive	Neutral	SOMA
Location					0
CANADA		9		1	10
USA		1		11	12
SOUTH AFRICA		36	4	11	51
KOREA				1	1
CHINA				2	2
AUSTRALIA		1	6		7
INDIA		2			2
UK		611	329	917	1857
SOMA	0	660	339	943	1942

Figure 7 - Frequency of Articles coded per Tone and Brand during our time frame on MAXQDA.

Lista de Códigos	Brand	Topshop	ASOS	Boohoo	Primark	H&M	Missguided/Misguided	SOMA
Framing								0
Negative		17	14	535	29	62	21	678
Positive		1	57	230	17	22	18	345
Neutral		159	134	536	107	46	59	1041
SOMA	0	177	205	1301	153	130	98	2064