

Using Video Storytelling to Transform the Consumer Narrative of Fashion into One of Caretaking: A First Step towards a Sustainable Fashion Industry.

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Abstract:

This study speaks about today's apparel industry run by the consumption based "consumer narrative" and will introduce a sustainable alternative of "caretaker narrative," a consumer oriented way of being to combat toxic practices in the apparel industry. Meanwhile on the other hand in today's day and age video storytelling is getting extremely popular in the media we daily consume. This study examines how to effectively use video storytelling to popularize the sustainable practice of the "caretaker narrative" in society.

Keywords:

Video storytelling, Narratives in fashion, Sustainability in fashion, Caretaker narrative, Consumer narrative, Fashion consumption

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Introduction

When I was a child, I noticed my parents had a different way of being because their life was centered and connected with nature in a way I didn't see anywhere else. I see it as a different way of being because and most importantly they did not see nature as an opponent but their partner for living in peace. My parents who decided to live in a certain way, a different way, made my childhood self often curious and questioning my parents. I lived in a house my father built. Me being the only child lived in a house surrounded by a paddy field and a forest with two rice hounds. My roots of coming from a tropical island where I remember the pleasing green paddy fields harmoniously merging with mist when I left for school. My father was an interesting man who loved farming vegetables after work, feeding squirrels, and treating injured animals. I truly felt his and my mother's connectedness to the non-human surroundings. I observed they lived on their own shelf away from the outside commercial world while being a caretaker of me, their only child and nature. I remember my relatives, including from the urban capital of the island and in other countries, visited our home and were delightful and appreciative of the surroundings and the peace it brought. I didn't understand why they were excited and what is it there for excitement about my home that was the only way I knew of existing.

When I left the house for education at 19, it gave me wings to think about the way the larger society's psychology operates. At that point, ways of being in society were different from what I knew by living closer to nature.

In my early twenties I observed the human senses of accumulating. My wandering self recognized the joys fellow humans get by accumulating. Accumulating good grades, human connections, clothing, the latest tech gadgets, concert tickets . . . the list goes on and on. Consumption is vital to day to day existence. I felt sometimes people own things just because they want to own social status, power and success. I realized the way owning certain branded clothing and latest models of phones represented assumptions of certain social statuses and family wealth among my colleagues in university.

It shows me that humans are eager to accumulate self-esteem, a feeling of competence, validation, material happiness, escape from reality, sense of attainment, respect by others and is that too much? But I realized that's who we are and the way we have built ourselves. This continuous search for accumulating an arrangement in the world, in society is what humans do, but not my parents. It made me question what made people run behind the "things"? What does "accumulation" or "owning" mean to humans? Thinking about owning and working towards to own more and running behind the constant upgrade means

While thinking about the things mentioned in the previous paragraph, my idling self, the hopeless self, did what my mother asked me to do, which was to accumulate education to open up myself for promising opportunities in life. This experience made me question beyond the education I receive. It made me question the rules. As a design student, I've often heard phrases like "there is no right or wrong in design" or "there are no rules in design." But at the same time in day to day life I noticed so many unwritten rules in society. Who made these rules? These rules have already been made. Everything is already set. I remember it felt difficult, scary and deranged to follow another path and it felt like disobeying the rules. Having said that, I desperately tried the given techniques and methods to seek my recipe in life. My younger self who did not fit into these unwritten rules by the society which looked like group membership and the trauma of seeking an escape molded my thinking about consumption and accumulating significantly. It pushed me to be mindful of what I really want in life, what I should buy, what I should do despite the rules created and things widely accepted. In my opinion my parents purposely tried to keep me away from this world full of false narratives.

Later in life after the university undergraduate education I started gaining industrial experience in the apparel industry. My role in working in a commercial fashion design team in an apparel sample manufacturing company gave me the experience of going in detail about consumer profiles and consumer needs season to season. This company is a famous lingerie fast fashion brand. While working here, I had a paradoxical moment of designing for constantly changing consumerist needs from season to season while my deep resistance for the economic patterns in

society which leads to unnecessary overconsumption. This experience made me wonder why consumers should endlessly change from one style to another for the same functionality of an underwear? I worked as a design intern for brief manufacturing. Interestingly, a brief has a limited functionality compared to other types of garments. The change of colors, patterns, styles, trims from season to season made me question “Is this necessary?” We have thousands of briefs with various colors, patterns, styles, trims a year, but what is it for? The clothing we made (briefs) were unaffected by seasonal weather transitions, but this constant rapid change of embellishments, styles, patterns, trims, textiles, colors from a season to season just justified as “it’s the new trend for the upcoming season” made me ask the question “who made these rules?”

There is a huge conversation of saving the environment while having a hype to wear the latest, therefore high consumption for fast fashion. It sounds contradictory because on one hand the need is visible to fight against climate change but on the other hand the actions helping fight against climate change are not visible in our daily activities. The paradoxical consumer behavior seemed confusing. Why? Consumer need for extreme fast and constant change of embellishments, styles, patterns, trims, textiles, colors required a lot of business operations involved with logistics, transportation, dying, fabric treatments etc. which causes a huge carbon footprint. It’s interesting for me to think “do consumers really want this”?

In this case especially in the fashion industry. I came to graduate school to research and understand the fashion industry and the way it operates right now. Therefore I might find solutions in improving more sustainable practices in the fashion industry and how the business of fashion can be a part of it.

This whole experience along with my upbringing informed my approach and understanding of “consumption narratives” embedded in society. I will be focusing specifically on the fashion industry as my fashion design practice is based in the commercial mass manufacturing apparel industry. Apart from working at the apparel industry, television series like *Mr. Robot* and videos of apparel stakeholders post-Rana-Plaza disaster—*True Cost* documentary by Andrew Morgan—deeply influenced me to develop my thinking in the narratives imposed upon

ourselves (which are not even true) by fashion corporations and media which has an immense influence on human lifestyle and behaviors therefore purchasing decisions. To further explain, these current narratives shape feelings, values, beliefs, personal qualities, and ways of behaving which influences the act of consumption, and the way we use consumption for us and also for others.

The consumption behavior is heavily influenced by constructed narratives in the economical and political systems. These seem to be widely accepted as an unwritten rule because when you question heavy consumption behavior in a consumption economy you feel the resistance people have towards it. Who is the mastermind imposing these rules in societies? Can we change these imposed narrations by the use of storytelling as it inspired me to see what's unseen in the fashion industry because time based visual mediums are extremely powerful? This personal discovery was pushed as a result of video mediums that helped me to make sense of the problems I saw in the fashion industry where my practice is based. This pushed me to investigate on "Using Video Storytelling to Transform the Consumer Narrative of Fashion into one of Caretaking: A First Step towards a Sustainable Fashion Industry."

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Introduction of the Research Question

Twenty years ago, my parents did not buy new clothing each month of the year. My memory of that time was that my family and economically diverse relatives held onto their clothing, treating it with care, mending, stitching and repairing when needed. At that time people were able to use clothing in a full life cycle, sometimes till it goes to the ground without a guilt. People bought high quality clothing that was meant to last.

There wasn't a culture of throwing clothing away after a short usage. One didn't throw away clothing that could still be worn. I remember my parents treated clothing as they did their cars, washing machines and ovens. These were expensive purchases that were maintained, repaired, and valued. But in recent times, globalization and the exploitation of cheap labor and lax workplace and environmental regulations have allowed prices to drop and the fashion industry an opportunity to feed consumers' growing addiction to newness and the latest trends. Today, clothing has become a pure consumption sport rather than a thoughtfully considered investment. As such, it has become a victim of the developed world's throw-away culture, and a lifestyle built on the exploitation of others.

I can see a high motivation to buy cheap fast fashion items on an unnaturally frequent basis without thinking of the actual need, quality or clothing durability. In the world of fast fashion there are many factors affecting the current frequent consumption. Consumer attitudes, values, consumption economies, current media and advertising, profit margin being the top priority, resistance towards mindful purchases, lack of awareness about the ecological and social footprint caused by fast fashion are some of the reasons for the popularity of fast fashion.

The current world of fashion is not sufficiently sustainable even though we see some fashion brands are advertising their sustainable attempts of having clothing lines which are made of ethically sourced materials or responsibly made by paying a fair wage for apparel workers. Fashion industry still has a long way to go if we want to see an increase of sustainable practices in the apparel supply chain. While governments, fashion businesses, international and domestic

laws have a great responsibility in decision making and implementation for attaining sustainable futures in the fashion industry, we have to discuss as a collective group of buyers how we can change the current processes of toxic ways of fast fashion.

My argument is that in order to create impactful decisions to shift the fashion industry to a more sustainable industry than it is right now, the behavior of consumers. It can influence the corporate and state level power to make necessary policy changes and arrangements at the governmental and operational level. Therefore, the first step of thinking of a sustainable future is attempting a behavioral change because there is a clear interrelation between consumer behavior and corporate, state power.

It's high time for us to think about what we really gain from the current world of fast fashion. It's time for us to think as a society. Are we really benefiting from the ways that fast fashion operates? A key weapon of fast fashion is the current "consumer narrative" embedded into the way fast fashion operates. **Changing individual behavior to respond to the world of fast fashion is the first step towards sustainability in the fashion industry.** One can argue that demanding more sustainable practices in fashion supply chain and industrial business operations is what brings sustainability. While I agree with that, I believe society's awareness on the ecological and social footprint of fast fashion as the primary step has the power to demand more sustainable practices in the fashion industry.

This study seeks a deeper understanding of consumer behavior—"the narrative of consumer behavior" in fast fashion, the forces behind it and how this special tool of "storytelling" can provide pathways to involve in the "caretaker narrative" when thinking of sustainable futures. First step in transforming current lifestyles to a more sustainable lifestyle is the message of sustainable ways of being. Storytelling would be the ideal instrument for that purpose. This "first step" is important as it helps masses to think about and seek more awareness on the subject of sustainable fashion. We really can't think of a sustainable future without ignoring the mass audiences. This important first step of creating awareness for the general public informatically and emotionally will lead to a big change. The impact on policy decisions,

regulations, organizational influence and governmental interference which can happen in future. In this study a detailed model to promote the “caretaker narrative” by using video storytelling will be discussed.

1. Explanation of the problem of fast fashion

1.1 Where did fast fashion come from?

The idea of “fast fashion” is a result of technological, industrial, political, economic and social developments that have happened during the 20th century. When thinking of where the current existing fast fashion comes from, the history goes far back to the industrial revolution. It is important to understand the baby steps which led to the fast fashion system we see today.

People should care about fast fashion because of the harmful effects fast fashion makes to the people and the planet as a whole which is directly affecting climate change. The issue here is even though there is so much harm done as a society people are not aware about the repercussions and the violence fast fashion generates on communities and sensitive ecosystems. Because of the harm fast fashion causes there is a conversation about the environmental and social issues caused by the fashion industry and people started speaking about this more than before but still fast fashion brands keep profiting and expanding their businesses which is contradictory to the booming awareness of harmful impacts of fast fashion. We should understand this problem and this situation needs changing. Concentrating on the history of fast fashion helps us comprehend the issues by looking at how the past incidents have molded and keeps on forming a worldwide approach to the way fast fashion operates right now.

Fashion is a strong social and cultural power that empowers expression and change. Social, economic and political factors always change fashion in every aspect from style, pattern, accessories...to even the purchasing decisions. In a paper on the history of clothing consumption, fashion historians Sara Idacavage and Ewon Lyu establish that “the four specific periods examined in [their] study (1922, 1937, 1949, and 1968) reflect significant socio-cultural changes in United States history, including the impacts of world wars, economic booms and depressions, advancements in clothing production and textiles, and numerous changes in women’s roles and American consumer culture at large” (Idacavage and Lyu 2022).

Sara Idacavage further describes how “consumption patterns in the nineteenth century were shaped by the Industrial Revolution, which introduced new machines, factories, and ready-made clothing—clothing that is made in bulk in a range of sizes rather than being made to order” (Idacavage 2022). Before the industrial revolution in the apparel making process, an average person had to take care of many aspects of the garment making process. It was labor intensive and a time-consuming work process with manual labor involvement and dedication. “First patented in 1846, the sewing machine had become a ubiquitous part of the Western garment industry by the start of the 1870s and contributed to an extremely rapid fall in the price of clothing and an enormous increase in the scale of commercial clothing manufacturing” (McDonald, n.d.). When thinking of textile and apparel making, the complete process of growing cotton, making yarns, weaving the textile and sewing a garment was done without a complicated supply chain or technologically advanced machines. Later on, with the invention of the advanced machinery to create textiles, the production became easier. Specifically, the “invention of the sewing machine caused a sharp fall in the cost of dress, which thus helped its production” (Jonas 2021). Ready-made clothing industry developed from handmade clothing to industrialized, machine-stitched clothing with the improvements of industrial sewing machines. The drastic reduction of time and energy in garment production helped easier and simpler clothing manufacturing than ever before.

The innovation of the sewing machine marked the beginning of dressmaking workshops in Europe which later on led to the “sweatshop culture” in the apparel industry that exists till today. To further explain, Valerie Steele, the director of the Fashion Institute of Technology who edited the Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion, mentions that “local dressmaking houses in North American and European countries would typically include a team of workroom employees, although some aspects were outsourced to “sweaters,” or people who worked from home for very low wages and were paid by volume instead of time and quality” (Steele 2005). In that time “through the spread of magazines, fashion plates, and paper patterns ready to wear became popular among masses” (Heller et al. 2017, 35-41). Mail-order catalogs and department stores also made it possible for “average” consumers to buy mass-produced clothing, furthering the need for quicker and more cost-effective production during the late 1800s” (Merlo and

Belfanti 2019). Those mail order catalogs must have helped to spread the message of mass-produced clothing and accessibility to make purchasing decisions to masses. In the pre-industrial revolution era, dress making was not heavily outsourced but later on, the middle-class consumers went to dressmaking workshops to stitch their garments. With the popularization of the media like newspapers and magazines a demand was developed for ready-made garments.

World War II was a major turning point in the developments we see today in fast fashion because it shaped the world we live in now politically and economically. People lived through World War II and the global depression which devastated Europe, one of the biggest consumer markets in the world. World War II was a period of scarcity.

In the book *Put Your Best Face Forward : The Impact of the Second World War on British Dress*, Peter McNeil mentions “The number of buttons, seams, and pleats, and the amount of ruching and gauging [were] strictly limited; no braid, embroidery or lace is to be used” (McNeil 1993). As women started playing a significant role in the economy, clothing had to be avoided getting caught in the machinery. Therefore intricate details and decoration were significantly reduced from clothing.

Also, fabrics were hard to come by in war times. The increased costs of transportation and rationing regulations during the World War led to the price of fabrics drastically high. The war supply chain struggles for fabrics contributed to simplistic silhouettes which can be called as functional clothing gained popularity within masses instead of the previously popular decorative sartorial fashion. According to McNeil, “the war was extremely costly in more ways than one. In 1941, clothing prices increased on average 175 per cent compared to pre-war” (“Impact of the World War 2 Utility Scheme on British Fashion,” 2019).

The war led to the result of minimal commodities and at the point when the war was over it took some time for the western society to slowly look for a world of abundance and luxury after most of Europe was in a serious deprivation for long after World War II. “A woman’s social class was made more obvious by what she wore postwar- the more luxurious, the richer” (“Impact of the World War 2 Utility Scheme on British Fashion,” 2019). According to fashion historian Gerda Buxbaum, “the long years of deprivation during World War II brought forth a yearning for

luxury and fashionable things, and women made a special effort to dress appropriately for every occasion; it was considered imperative that one's accessories matched perfectly" Certainly this represented women in upper class of the society, but it can be market as another transformation of clothing after World War II. This was an era where people could recognize who is wealthy and who is not visually, simply by the way they dress. Perhaps as a method for getting away from the trauma of the post war depression era, consumers wanted to buy more items than ever before.

Politics and economy impacts the behaviors and lifestyles of society. When considering the way political and economic conditions shaped clothing in the World War II era, fashion historian Christopher Breward mentions,

middle-class consumers became more accustomed to the standardization of their clothing and were thus more receptive to the value represented by mass-produced garments after the war. Because of this shift, more fashion brands were able to sell mass-produced clothing in the late 1940s to consumers who were willing to buy changing styles almost as quickly as they could be produced. This affected traditional couture houses, which began to diversify and find success in the manufacturing of ready-to-wear or prêt-à-porter lines in the 1950s and beyond. (Breward 2003)

The war inspired practical dressing which is focused more on functionality in clothing and most importantly we can see the baby steps of popularization and standardization of mass-produced clothing; ready to wear. I believe this is the point where the middle class at that time started getting used to the idea of consistency and regularity of clothing styles rather than one of a kind garments which did not have a standard conformity much in terms of accessories, materials and styles. Middle-class consumers sought for functionality to involve in daily activities. They looked for a change in clothing which was adherence to needs of the post-World War II era as this period led women to contribute to their families economically and they had to take jobs. Therefore this lifestyle of working women needed practical clothing rather than classic, timeless garments made with a high level of craftsmanship.

The period after World War II is placed as the start of rapid consumption across the industrialized world because the 20th century's new wave of globalization began as the aftermath of World War II. Even though there were recessions the quality of life was improving. Author Lisa Reynolds Wolfe mentions that "The end of World War II marked a new beginning for the global economy. Under the leadership of a new hegemon, the United States of America, and aided by the technologies of the Second Industrial Revolution, like the car and the plane, global trade started to rise once again" (Wolfe 2022). Trade, supply chain and technology start making the world into a more associated and interconnected place regardless of borders and geographies like never before. The infrastructure for complex supply chains were set for international trade with the advancement of transportation which resulted in fast globalization.

After the post-World War II era, the 1960's was the turning point of the global northern countries for the beginning of dispensable fast fashion that would arise in decades later. For the whole discussion I'm building on to understand today's "consumer narrative" in fashion, it's important to look back at the 1960s and see the direction fashion went. The economic upsurge of the largest consumer markets helped transform societies therefore the mindsets of the youth. 1950-60s are the birth of the idea of "Youth culture" as a distinct social phenomenon in the west. The youth in the 1960s needed something absolutely new. Sarah Idacavage mentions "Fashion trends began to accelerate at unprecedented speeds throughout the 1960s, and young consumers embraced cheaply made clothing in order to follow these trends and break away from the sartorial practices of the older generations" (Idacavage 2016). The young people embraced economically made clothing to seek modernity and reject the customs set by previous generations. Their need for economically made fashion was fresh, not in the level that existed before.

Peter Doeringer and Sarah Crean explain how "increased liberalization of trade regimes allowed American retailers to use developing countries for manufacturing. The mid-1980s marked the starting point to the current supply chain—the American system of mass production apparel manufacturing had largely moved offshore" (Doeringer and Crean 2005). In light of the rising demands of young purchasers, corporations needed to track down new ways of manufacturing to keep pace, which were made more straightforward by the development of large factories in

developing nations. These new globalized supply chains made possible for US and European corporations to save a huge amount of money and it increased profit margins by relocating their manufacturing factories in the global south. “Supply chains started being more complicated by corporations continuing to open up for global markets, especially to developing countries. Lisa Reynolds states, “ In 1991, as the Cold War ended, 56.2 percent of all clothes purchased in the United States were American-made. By 2012, that percentage had declined to 2.5 percent” (Wolfe 2022).

The production of items started moving to different parts of the world due to the rise of demand for consumer goods. The authors of the paper “Fashion, Sustainability, and the Anthropocene” mention “during this period there were many other transformations in the fashion industry, including the global shift in production away from the West to East Asia, the proliferation of manufactured obsolescence, the declining quality of garment construction, an acceleration in cycles of clothing consumption and a breakdown in the spring-summer and autumn-winter seasons” (Brooks et al. 2018).

Achieving desirability and newness by clothing with new marketing waves happened and fast fashion brands started to pop up. This process of globalization and international trade policies helped the rapid growth of fast fashion. Further in the book *The Fashion Revolution*, author Elizabeth Castaldo Lundén states, “the consolidation of fashion conglomerates brought about a new perception of fashion, led by a branding mania towards the end of the 1980s” (Castaldo Lundén 2022). Branded clothing which were expensive and wasn't affordable to the middle class previously started catering to the masses by opening up their chains to the middle class in the late 80's and early 90's. In an interview, Aja Barber, author of *Consumed*, describes her experience seeing this transformation of fashion brands as a great example of this “new look” of fashion brands: “. . . For those of you that don't remember like Gap used to be a brand that was like super good quality and it also was not very cheap when the first Gap opened in my um in my town I remember all of the little like rich kids had like all their Gap clothing and I felt woefully left out . . .” (“The History of Fast Fashion: How Did This System Take Over?” 2022)

In the context of a conversation on free trade, Aja Barber, author of the book *Consumed*, Aja Barber in a conversation with the *YouTube* channel “Slow Factory,” mentions the impact of trade agreements on the globalized production and supply chain. She mentions, “we’re talking about the 1990s NAFTA, which stands for the North American Free Trade Agreement, and it was established as a free trade zone in North America. It was signed in 1992 by Canada, Mexico and the United States which took effect January first 1994. NAFTA immediately lifted tariffs on the majority of goods produced by signatory nations basically in conclusion NAFTA made it easier for corporations in the US to exploit labor overseas” (The History of Fast Fashion: How Did This System Take Over? 2022).

Coming to a conclusion with what scholars mention, in the nineties high fashion stores started replicating the high fashion runways and bringing out new styles once a couple of weeks. The idea of fast fashion begins from the essential thought of selling a clothing item that was simultaneously trendy and inexpensive. Therefore the fast fashion model is created by duplicating a similar version of the seasonal high fashion trends seen on the high fashion runways. In this case fast fashion garments are sold at much lower costs selling varieties of similar styles picked from those high fashion shows for the season. In this model, the significance is the high speed of clothing trends coming to the market and many styles coming to the market simultaneously. Therefore it creates a complicated, at the same time, fast supply chain that starts from raw material production to clothing shops which demands fast production capability, short lead time, responsiveness, flexibility and adaptation to real time consumer demand for a diverse style range full of variety.

Fast fashion is beneficial in some ways. Fast fashion made fashion way more accessible to the majority rather than a limited handful. Working class could approach and accomplish the taste of high end which most of them wish for. The visibility factor of class division no longer exists because of the fast fashion. Fashionable clothing was a communicator of a social class at some point in history but fast fashion equalized people visually in the public eye at a glance. Because of the fast fashion society might not be able to make judgment on one’s social economic status with the access for fashionable clothing with fast fashion phenomenon.

A few reasons have prompted the further advancement of this fast fashion model. Fast fashion corporations shifted their manufacturing to the developing nations purely because of easy accessibility to cheap and low skilled labor which will benefit these fashion corporations to achieve low selling prices therefore achieving high profit margins. Globalization paved the way for fast fashion corporations to place their production in developing countries like China and Bangladesh.

Fast fashion models have risen as a reaction to intensive transformation of the needs and wants of the new age shopper's lifestyle. Speaking of the consumer shift in the fast fashion model, consumers expect less consistency and less regularity in clothing than ever before. Consumers want many styles in a short period of time, in other words they want a high variety of styles in the market consistently. For fast fashion companies making sure the continuous arrival of clothing to the market with a high variety of styles paved the way for a constant lucrative business.

1.2 What drives fast fashion—the culture of trends.

Fast fashion corporations make people fall into the trends. But how? It's by the use of advertising and marketing, portraying that purchasing the latest is the way to be. The current fashion ecosystem is created to make huge profit margins by making buyers have the constant need to accumulate the latest trend.

A trend is that a new look rises in popularity. Fast fashion is based on fast trends. The lifespan of a trend is short which is one of the key factors fueling unhealthy overconsumption and throwaway culture.

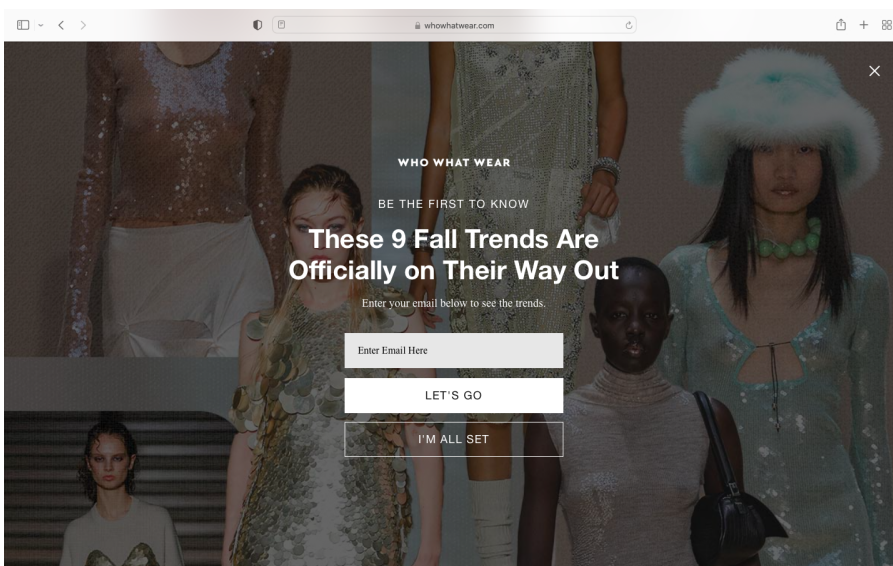


Image 1: A fashion website advertising the trends for fall 2023 (Fox-Suliaman 2021).

“Trends can be vicious and it can be a weapon of the mass consumer culture” (Trufelman 2022). Trends are addictive. Fashion trends are made to alter an individual’s beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, or perceptions towards what one should wear. Trends are used as a weapon to create and encourage the continuous demand to seek new styles of clothing within a short period.

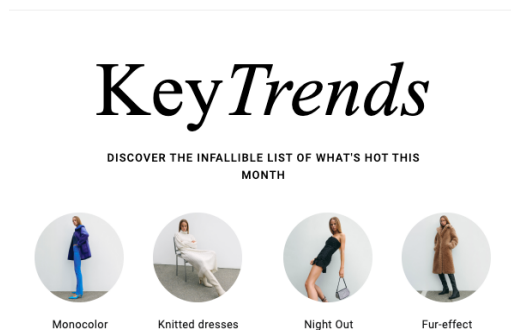


Image 2: Promotional email by a leading fast fashion brand on trends for the month of October 2022 (Author’s email inbox).

A pioneer in the field of public relations, Edward Louis Bernays writes in his 1928 book, *Propaganda*, that “Mass production is profitable only if its rhythm can be maintained.” He further argued that “business cannot afford to wait until the public asks for its product; it must

maintain constant touch, through advertising and propaganda . . . to assure itself the continuous demand which alone will make its costly plant profitable” (qtd. in Higgs 2021). This quote can be applied to the current fashion industry run by trends. Trends come and go. They are difficult to move away from and they are highly visible. This situation works in a way of encouraging the process of emotionally outdated current clothes worn by buyers. It distributes the idea that if the current clothes are no longer useful to be “fashionable” or “trendy.” Trends are associated with consumerism because you have to consume what’s trending right now in order to be fashionable.

The way the fast fashion corporations feed the frenzy of consumption is by making audiences think that accumulating new trends is directly affiliated with desirability and positive visibility in society. The advertising in the fashion industry uses various subtle tactics to promote “trends,” but the main point is always clear: You will be stylish, just like everyone else, but only if you wear this. Then the audiences purchase and wear what every other person is wearing hoping to achieve the current “stylish, fashionable and trendy” status.

Fast fashion trends appear in streets, pop culture and media we consume. Obedience to the fast fashion trends is what covers the majority of the content in popular fashion magazines and fashion websites. It might be difficult for someone to see what’s wrong with fast fashion because of how normalized fast fashion is in the worldwide economy. Even though fast fashion problem did not exist 100 years back, it is interesting when Charles Kettering, head of research at General Motors from 1920 to 1947, stated in a 1929 (almost 100 years back) article called “Keep the Consumer Dissatisfied,” that “there is no place anyone can sit and rest in an industrial situation. It is a question of change, change all the time – and it is always going to be that way because the world only goes along one road, the road of progress” (Kettering 1929). That means Kettering claims change and newness as “progress.” According to Kettering, things are meant to change in the consumerist economies and accumulating the latest is considered the ultimate growth model. Marketing and advertising positions masses in a reward seeking loop by desiring or purchasing the latest. Rachel Tashjian, Fashion News Director at *Harper’s Bazaar*, mentions about the trend forecasting companies which forecast the fashion trends in this way. “It’s funny, a lot of what is

happening now is not forecasting. It's really like saying, "Something is already happening." And a lot of it is because so much of this is manufactured by social media. Like, by its nature, social media encourages trends and encourages many people to act in a similar way. They're all sort of meaningless because there are so many of them. It's like grains of sand or something. I would say probably the only real trend right now is, like, trendiness itself" (qtd. in Trufelman 2022). As writer Brooke Jurewicz comments, "Everyone just wants to do what everyone else is doing; they want to be accepted. Consumers will do anything it takes to stay alive in this dog eat dog fashion world" (Jurewicz, n.d.). The narrative portrayed around this model is that constant consumption makes humans better economically, financially and spiritually by stimulating the human desire that has always existed in human beings, the ultimate goal of being liked and accepted in the society. The constant movement in fast fashion with ever changing styles combined with the human psychology and behavior makes the vicious cycle going strong.

With intense advertising new needs are being constructed. It would form in a way to propel continuous creation of artificial needs and desire to fulfill those. Advertising and marketing provoke the desire to consume and fuels the "consumer narrative" which I will discuss later in this thesis. Production and consumption are interconnected and they need one another. The narratives created with advertising and marketing are directly and constantly making patterns with the present "consumer narrative" of irresponsible consumption.

The atmosphere of fast fashion led to overconsumption, I wonder if it is entirely caused by advertising and marketing. The forces of marketing and advertising enable the thinking formulation within us. In the wake of purchasing a new item, we are hanging tight in anticipation of "what will be the next new edition one can buy?" which I think is interesting how we as humans seek newness in life. In his article, "Why We're So Obsessed with Newness," Joey Willis states that "newness keeps us from commitment because there is always something fresh coming along. And it doesn't feel like quitting. It feels like upgrading. It feels like something unforeseen has arrived and now we must go in that direction" (Willis 2018). This quote can relate to how "caring" operates in the world as the thesis explores a caretaking model in fashion. Also it gives a glimpse to understand why the act of care is not mainstream in the

current consumption economy when specially the fast fashion companies push lack of commitment to care for the garment by creating a system of continuous upgrading of clothing. Speaking of fashion, this vicious cycle of trends which encourages upgrading one with the newest fashion trends keeps the majority of the consumers away from the commitment, care and authority for their own clothing. Not only that creates a problem, but the majority of the consumers don't or haven't chosen to think about why being a caretaker for clothing is important. This cycle keeps the masses away from putting a thought in mind about the damaging repercussions of fast fashion to us and to the planet, which will be discussed in the next topic.

1.3 What's wrong with fast fashion? Seeing the problem of the current way fast fashion operates, the situation needs to change.

Fast fashion corporations want to sell their garments at a cheaper price in the market therefore they demand manufacturers to produce the garments for an extremely low cost. Consumer preferences for clothing at lower prices have made the situation even worse. Fast fashion companies compete with one another to have the most attractive price tag, which is the most reduced price for a garment that leads to consumer attraction. As a result of that, they expanded their business to the global south, where the countries in the global south needed an apparel manufacturing industry to industrialize their low skilled workforce and to develop their economies.

Producing the garments in the cheapest way possible becomes the key goal in the fast fashion production while the competitive and fast processes creates an environment where the parties ignore and forget about everything else other than meeting with the strict timelines of logistics, production and transportation. The authors of *The Value of Design in Retail and Branding* offer the following analysis of the connection between how low prices and the pressure it puts on the supply chain: "In an effort to offer lower prices and be more time-efficient, fashion brands have placed unnecessary pressures on the supply chain, which have subsequently had a negative impact on some communities and the environment" (Quartier et al. 2021). When it comes to the fast fashion driven by ever changing trends, the supply chain is pressurized not only from the

need to offer low price but also the extreme speed the manufacturing stakeholders has to maintain in order to deliver styles from production to shipment for the demand of the consumer's side. This pressure creates less commitment, ignorance and negligence for many aspects of sustainability. Fast fashion system is entangled with toxic processes and it exploits the environment and the people. This environment is unhealthy and problematic for the planet and its people therefore this needs to change.

Author Mark C. Taylor, in his book "Speed Limits: Where Time Went and Why We Have So Little Left," mentions "the fast-fashion and fast-phone industries serve as metaphors for all kinds of waste that plague the world today, ranging from human to atomic, economic, financial, and environmental" (Taylor 2014). Water wastage and poisonous dyes contaminate water sources is a key environmental problem. To explain further, the production of both natural and synthetic fibers is the first step in the global supply chain for textiles. Cotton or polyester, both of which have been linked to significant adverse effects on health resulting from the manufacturing and production processes, make up approximately 90% of the clothing that is sold in the United States (Khan and Malik 2013, 51–55). Cotton grows best with a lot of water and pesticides, whereas polyester, a synthetic textile, comes from oil. There are additional dangers associated with textile dyeing because dye wastewater that has not been treated is frequently dumped into the water systems of the area, releasing heavy metals and other toxicants that can harm animals' health as well as the health of nearby residents (Khan and Malik 2013, 51–55). The disposal of the chemicals harms some of the most vulnerable communities and the ecosystems in the world. It affects the waterways of the areas factories dump toxic chemicals into therefore the food system of the vulnerable communities. Water is a key important element in a healthy ecosystem. Fast fashion led water related issues fuels global warming, spill degradation and erosion too (Khan and Malik 2013, 51–55). Apart from the water consumption the fast fashion industry creates, high carbon emissions is another issue from cotton production which the estimated amount is around 220 million metric tons yearly (Organic Trade Association 2018). The impact to the water systems in the planet by fast fashion is alarming because the microfibers released to the sea by washing the cheaply made textiles and they are consumed by fish. By eating fish those microfibers will go into the human eventually.

According to the author's experience working in a fast fashion sample manufacturing factory, factories such as inadequate organizational management lead to unhealthy working environments for the workers in apparel manufacturing factories. It is a deep issue and goes as far as neglecting safety measures of the workers. The safety standards required to sustain a factory environment by the developed countries aren't visible in the majority of the apparel manufacturing places in developing nations even though the manufacturing caters to brands located and owned by business tycoons in developed countries, which is interesting. For example, in a factory located in the global north the workers might wear headphones to avoid the high noise of machinery for hearing health but in an apparel manufacturing factory in a developed nation hearing health of workers is not seen as a concern. Low-wage workers, often underage, work in dangerous environments and lack basic human rights. They work with microfibers and dyes which will result long term health conditions. Fashion is an art of expression and most importantly it should not cost planet and the lives in it.

Fast fashion exploitation does not limit to apparel worker exploitation but cruelty on animals too. Fast fashion can go to cruel lengths as selling fake fur to customers who care about animals is often the real fur of cats and dogs (Humane Society International 2017). Lack of regulations in fast fashion open avenues not only to exploit but also to harm creatures.

1.4 What is the dilemma? Paradox?

Some consumers who love fashion want to be mindful, conscious and take care of the environment. There is attention on climate discourse and taking action to fight against climate action. Yet consumerism backed harmful fast fashion is still making extraordinary sales. In this thesis it is central for me to understand that there is a clear contradiction between the mindset of people who have caring attitudes for the planet and its people, and their patterns of consumption-based behavior.

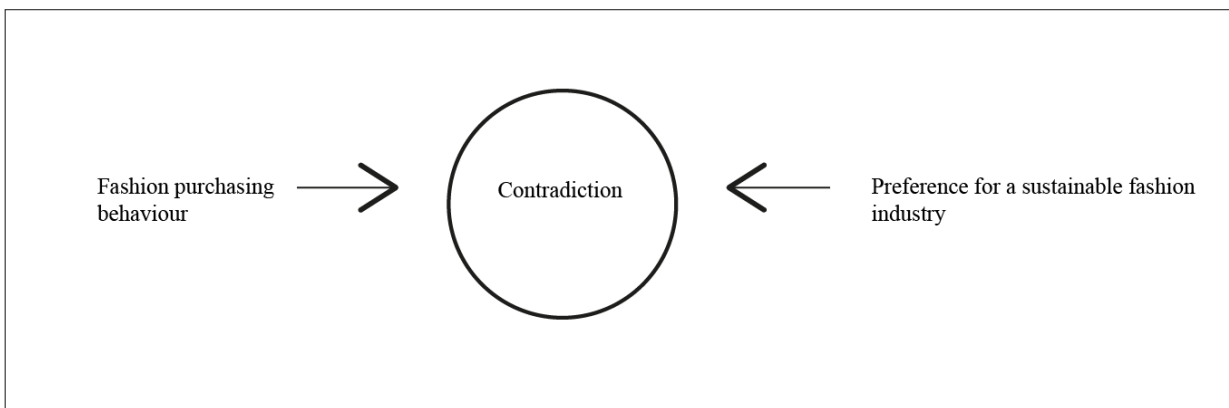


Image 3: The paradox of mindset vs. attitudes regarding the wellbeing of the planet.

Considering some specific groups, their attitudes of fashion are in favor of environmentalism and sustainability but their actions stand toward the hyper consumerist ways which are not sustainable and harmful for the planet.

For example, Generation Z is the population most invested in a sustainable future and yet they are the largest consumer base for the global fashion industry. These two situations are directly opposed, pushing against each other because a group of people who are most impacted by the climate change like no other generation before proves to love consuming fast fashion, which is a major reason for the climate problem. Gen Z is more conscious but their fast fashion friendly behavior shows the contradiction between the mindset and behavior.

NEWSLETTERS • GREEN, INC.

Why can't Gen Z—the world's most eco-conscious generation—quit fast fashion?

BY YVONNE LAU
May 4, 2022 11:06 AM EDT



Singer Belinda Pegregh performing alongside fashion models during a Shein concert and fashion show in Mexico City, Mexico, on November 16, 2021.
MEDIOS Y MEDIA—GETTY IMAGES



Related Articles

SUCCESS

It's not just Gen Z. A tiny generation of young workers is especially miserable at work.

April 20, 2022

BY CHLOE BERGER

TECH

Image 4: An article about the paradox between sustainability conscious Generation Z and their purchasing habits (Lau 2022).

It appears that Generation Z's attitudes on self, environment, behavior, economy and society are alienated from one another, which means the attitude on the environment is sustainable, but the behavior for the environment is not.

1.5 Why does fast fashion persist?

Fast fashion persists because of its economic feasibility, easy accessibility and its strongly projected visual appeal. Media, especially social media appeal with the intense visual storytelling power tool makes fast fashion more popular among mass audiences (apart from the cost factor). This is the weapon of fast fashion. Amidst the violence and harm done by fast fashion, to understand the persistence of fast fashion, it's important to comprehend the intense storytelling weapons of fast fashion. Why can't we use this weapon to counterpart sustainability in fashion? One of the intense storytelling weapons used to increase the popularity of fast fashion is video storytelling. In next chapters I will be explaining the current "consumer" model in fashion, a sustainable model of providing intentional "care" to clothing and how to use video storytelling to make the shift from the current "consumer narrative" to a sustainable "caretaker narrative" to popularize the act of care to our clothing.

2. Consumer and caretaker narratives in fashion

In the following chapters, I will introduce the term “consumer narrative” and explain the factors influencing the current consumer behavior embedded in the “consumer narrative,” including apparel supply chains, corporate decisions, social influence and cultural choices.

2.1 Consumer narrative: the definition in fashion

Before defining the concept of consumer narrative, I will extract the meanings of “consumer” and “narrative.”

Consuming is not only owning. By making purchases in everyday life to fulfill our needs and wants, consumption becomes a central part of all of our lives. **Consumption can be defined as a routine way of buying, using, or throwing away fashion items.** Disposability is an element of the consumer narrative, and acts of consumption can be addictive. In today’s world, a consumerist mindset is prevalent, i.e., a knowing or unknowing obedience to the systematic influence of corporations leading us to make impulsive purchasing decisions.

Cambridge English Dictionary’s definition of a narrative is “a story or a description of a series of events” (“narrative”), but it also refers to the techniques used to tell the story. It is the information used to promote or publicize a specific cause or viewpoint.

What is the correlation between a narrative and someone purchasing clothing? To synthesize the definitions above with my own understanding of “consumer narrative,” it is **the work of a story that has been created to promote the continuous act of owning by purchasing.** In the context of fast fashion, the consumer narrative created by corporations influences customers to buy, use, and throwaway fashion items. Fast fashion corporations promote the consumer narrative to continue to increase and follow up with profits while knowingly engaging in environmental and social damage. This set of stories has been created to benefit corporate economic interests by increasing sales and maintaining high profit margins. At the same time, it

is unethical and disregards the planet and its people. Fast fashion operates by choosing limitless generation of profit over the exploitation of our planet's resources. The consumer narrative's major focus is encouraging mindless consumption by sacrificing the well-being of the environment, society and self.

Consumer narratives operate like a set of unwritten rules shaping the behaviors of everyday people. With the help of intense and persuasive advertising the narrative becomes widely accepted, encouraged, normalized and oftentimes validated in the economic system by corporate stakeholders and the mass audiences. The consumer narrative cycle promotes impulsive purchasing decisions and instant gratification for consumers.

The consumption narrative in fashion is deranged and caused disordered manufacturing. In the face of the current climate crisis, the well-being of the environment, society and self are endangered by the current consumer narrative.

2.2 The consumer narrative outlook

According to the consumer psychologist Dr. Cathrine Jansson-Boyd, products can also allow people to compare themselves to others in order to determine if they are inferior or superior. One of the outcomes of consuming certain products is that they can make others see the owners under a more favorable light and, consequently, behave differently towards them (Jansson-Boyd 2019, 84-94). This relates to how human psychology goes hand in hand with the consumer narrative. Factors such as the desires for belonging, conformity, gratification and achieving desirability internally influence individual purchasers to stick with the consumer narrative, and shape the mainstream cultures of entire nations, as in the case of American consumerism. The necessity of acceptance and social recognition lies behind the consumer narrative. Goods and services are frequently bought because people believe that their consumption somehow represents who they are.

Today's consumer narrative portrays how corporations would like consumers to behave: The ideal consumer obsessively keeps up with the latest fashion trend popping up every week and throws away functional, 'outdated' clothing to make space for the latest styles. The results are shortened product life cycles and neglect of the environmental consequences and social footprints of such purchasing choices.

Economist Victor Lebow stated in 1955, "Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption. . . . We need things consumed, burned up, replaced and discarded at an ever-accelerating rate" (qtd. in Higgs 2021). The consumer narrative, which tells the story of an ongoing movement of one act of consumption followed by another, demands mindless consumption without accountability.

2.3 Consumer narrative criticism

The social scientist Gerda Reith draws lines between consumption and addiction, pointing out that the "disorders of consumption such as kleptomania, gambling, drug taking, compulsive spending and over-eating – [are] seen to lie in the raising of the esteem of the sufferer" (Reith 2004, 317). With the influence of advertising across different forms of media, people are almost trained that they can not have individual style without keeping up with fashion trends. Raising self-esteem and defining a self-image by instant gratification makes mass audiences addicted to the consumer narrative.

The consumer narrative in fast fashion has also taught that clothing consists of a low price tag and a look and nothing further. We never come across advertisements from fast fashion brands that advocate that consumers should provide care for their clothing. The way a consumerist society responds to clothing, once purchased, with lack of care or commitment to its longevity, paves the way for continued repercussions on the planet's health.

However, fashion is a form of positive change and care. Fashion should not do harm. And the current operations of the fashion consumer narrative can change. As sustainability writer Aja Barber mentions to her readers, “You should care about these systems because you care about people, and how you consume affects a lot of people” (Barber 2022, 102). The harmful consumer narrative I have outlined above should be transformed to a narrative of care. In this way, the fashion ecosystem can become a healthier place that stands with the planet and its people. Every vision of a sustainably better future for humankind demands care for the planet. Care reduces the ecological and social footprint on the planet. Because the fashion industry is a major environmental polluter, each of our interactions with fashion, including buying decisions and aftercare, impact the future. Because the agency of mass consumers in their purchasing decisions is so important. I propose a caretaker narrative as an alternative to the consumerist narrative to combat the environmental, social, ethical and psychological toxicities it causes. The caretaker narrative in fashion will be discussed in next chapters.

2.4 Caretaker narrative: the definition in fashion

The caretaker narrative tells a story of joyful participation in stewardship. Just as we take care of homes and pets, we should adopt a caretaker attitude for our clothing. It’s about guardianship and trust and not only ownership. We have to take care of all our parts as a healthy haul. A caretaker narrative in fashion involves implementing acts of care to your clothes and accessories. It’s about taking the agency to care for your clothes. The caretaker narrative is associated with taking agency and being mindful instead of impulsive, and being responsible instead of irresponsible regarding human and nonhuman existence. In fashion, the caretaker narrative advocates for a commitment of care for the clothing and accessories you own.

Being a caretaker requires acting as a steward in all of one’s interactions with clothing and accessories. Caretaking begins with the decision to purchase a piece of clothing and continues with sustaining its longer life cycle through acts of mending, stitching and recycling. It requires a high level of participation and commitment. This narrative of the caretaker is directly opposed to the fast fashion consumer narrative discussed in the previous chapter.

2.5 Caretaker narrative overview

The caretaker narrative in fashion means taking care of clothing as one takes care of a garden, pet, or family. We don't throw away our gardens, pets, or families. We take care of them when they age. We accept the change and aging and we grow with them. Being a caretaker is a part of our story.

There's a psychological need in humans for acts of caretaking. The caretaker narrative is a different response to the fashion amidst the promoted throwaway culture and false advertising related to "growth." Philosopher Yuriko Saito mentions in her contribution to the critical anthology, *Repair: Sustainable Design Futures*, that "our relationship with material objects has become compromised because we lose the opportunity to nurture an enduring and engaging relationship through maintenance, care, and repair" (Saito 2022, 59-62). If humans impose a kind of guardianship, not a right of ownership, it gives the right to use the power for good.

In the context of fashion, recognizing the meaning in clothes and valuing them requires that we will love them, care for them, and wear them for a long time. The caretaker narrative promotes sustainable production and purchasing practices by nurturing in caretakers an awareness of supply chains in apparel production and by encouraging them to incorporate that information in purchasing decisions and be mindful of all stages of the lifecycle of apparel (e.g., wearing clothes with care to extend usage, recycling or upcycling after damages) to embody a sustainable relation with the clothing one owns. Caretakers will value the many hands that worked hard to craft the clothing and honor their work by not viewing the clothing as disposable. Whether the garment is fast fashion, sustainably-made or a cherished family heirloom, we will choose to extend its life as long as possible and find purpose for it, not giving into the cultural attitude that devalues wearing the old garment. It means that we prioritize our personal style and how clothes can be an expression for us rather than blindly following the culture of trends to keep up with it.

We live in a narrative of disposability and superfluity— one that prioritizes profit, speed, status and appearance. When audiences get caught up in the consumer narrative, they risk losing sight of our values as human beings and the true meaning of the things we have. By contrast, the

caretaking narrative offers its audiences the opportunity to see the inherent value of things and recognize their meanings. Caretaking allows us to recognize the abundance already around us rather than the gaps of discontent that the consumer narrative exploits in order to sell more stuff.

Obedience to fast fashion's narratives of consumption is prominent in today's society. This model assigns us with no accountability for what belongs to us (clothes) or where we belong (our planet). The pleasures and persuasion portrayed in fast fashion advertising draw audiences down the consumer narrative path without any mindfulness for the need of care for ourselves, the planet and our society. To counteract against the constraints imposed by consumer narratives on mass audiences, which have a strong visual presence, a visual medium like video storytelling would be a necessary first step. How different would the fashion world be if it adopted a caretaker narrative? What if the caretaker narrative were to gain a stronghold in society and replace ideologies of being consumption, waste and destruction? I request that my readers imagine fashion free from consumerism and damage to the planet and its people. One should be careful enough to draw a line between being fashionable and being consumerist because even now the two are not the same, even if the narratives we've absorbed have made us think so. One can be perfectly fashionable and dress ourselves as an art without overconsuming. Being aware of the true meaning of the clothing we own would exert an immense change on the planet and also within ourselves.

3. Use of effective video storytelling social media to change the narrative—from consumer to caretaker

Storytelling means the delivery of a series of events. Most importantly storytelling is a change-making device. Storytelling is capable of creating a deep genuine interest for a subject and has the power and capacity to make a change in a highly visually interactive industry such as the global fashion industry. Storytelling can influence perceptions therefore can change the preferences of large audiences. This chapter will speak about using effective video storytelling to change the narrative of the consumer to a caretaker.

3.1 What is video storytelling?

Storytelling is something done in every culture in the world. Cultures pass vital information from one generation to another through stories. I define video storytelling as passing information using time-based visual media.

3.2 Advancement of video storytelling and climate change

In today's world of social media, video stories have the tendency to be more engaging than images, text, or audio alone. Spending in the US on short-form video advertising is expected to rise 10.4% in 2023 (Konstantinovic 2023). This is a clear indication that time-based media are rapidly expanding. Considering the growth of videos and the benefits of video storytelling, this medium has great potential for improving the caring perceptions of the masses and therefore for transforming the current fashion business by changing the consumer narrative to a caretaker narrative.

Today we live in an attention economy, which is based on the human ability to draw from numerous components in the environment that require energy for concentration. One of the most common questions I encounter in conversations regarding the climate and media, is, “Do humans really have time and energy to concentrate on how to combat the climate problem?” Considering the attention economy we live in, this is a real and valid question because in reality climate problems can be complicated for those without specialized knowledge in climate-related

fields to understand. It can also be confusing to come across the simple duties an individual can carry out towards the betterment of the environment, society and self. Some may be motivated by insights supported by abstract statistics, but a large part of the society clearly isn't given that existing access to such data on the internet has failed to impact existing consumption decisions that are objectively detrimental for the planet.

Storytelling can clarify a phenomenon as challenging and overwhelming as climate change by introducing awareness of the issue into people's lives. I see video storytelling as one piece of a larger puzzle involved in mitigating climate change. Storytelling can lead the way in raising awareness among everyday people as well as holding industries contributing to the problem accountable. But, most importantly, it will lead people to recognize themselves as both part of the problem and the solution to climate change.

For many of us, a situation like climate change and how it affects living beings can be a complicated reality to understand. The news articles we see every day mention the most recent and noteworthy information of climate change, such as rising temperatures, severe storms and droughts, rising sea levels, loss of species, displacement and health risks. Yet the problem is that we don't have frames to view what the world would look like with climate change, how people will inhabit that transformed environment or what can still be done to improve the situation.

For example, we might see information such as, "the sea level has risen by 6.5 inches since 1950, nearly half of it (3 inches) has occurred in just the last 20 years. This small increase in sea level has caused on average a 233% increase in tidal flooding across the United States" (Sealevelrise.org 2023), but storytelling is necessary to imagine what can be done better right now to ensure a better future for the planet. Storytelling helps audiences to imagine doing things that have not yet been done yet and to engage our society productively in the climate discourse. When it comes to fashion, storytelling must help consumers to collectively challenge, rethink and situate themselves with behaviors and lifestyles that benefit the planet and society. Storytelling is a strong tool to introduce ways to deal with the impacts of our behaviors on the environment, change them and adapt to the outcomes that are here to stay.

The goal of storytelling in this context is to present the same information in such a way that has popular appeal. It has the capability of reaching mass audiences about the problem of fast fashion in a way that relates to diverse demographics. However, what's special about video storytelling is that it distributes more than statistics and straightforward information. It attracts more attention, more understanding and more engagement to the core problem it communicates. Video storytelling has the ability to move people emotionally because moving visual media can beautifully portray emotions of care, love, enchantment, magic, mystery, danger, etc. In response to the question, "Why do people think in stories?" posed to her in the *Tim Ferriss Show* podcast, novelist Margaret Atwood answered that "once we have a language that includes a past, present and the future, once we could think about what had happened, then we can transfer the information about what might be there to happen in future . . . That's when we started telling stories" (qtd. in Ferriss 2022). That statement supplements the fact that stories inform us, educate us and widen the horizons of human thinking. With video storytelling audiences start believing in things that might not be visible in their day-to-day life but that nonetheless do exist and affect us, like climate change. Video storytelling creates more human sensitivity to see the way human behavioral patterns affect oneself, planet and people. It empowers audiences to think for themselves about carrying out acts of care.

3.3 Has video storytelling the power to change the consumer narrative?

"Humans are incredibly visual and powerful, moving images help us find meaning . . . [and] video helps capture and contextualize the world around us." (Dan Patterson qtd. in Mojabi 2019)

An article on *Social Media Today* remarks, "no form of content is more effective for storytelling than video, and digital savvy brands are quick to understand this. Video . . . remains the best performing digital content type" (Ahmad 2019). The article further mentions a release of hormones when listening to stories: "According to neurobiologist Paul Zak, stories actually influence brain chemistry. In various studies, Dr. Zak's research has shown that stories of a

particular structure can trigger the release of the hormone ‘oxytocin’, which is associated with connectedness, and by some empathy. Certain narratives also were found to be linked to the release of the stress hormone, ‘cortisol’, in listeners” (Zak 2015). Humans are visual creatures, and if narratives are to be found engaging, interesting, appealing and impactful by humans, the invisible should be made visible for them. That’s where “visual storytelling” comes into importance. Advertisers come up with “buy now!” messaging, but these words alone are not an effective way to achieve an impactful reach. Visual storytelling is where we can communicate situations and make an impact because it has the great power to convey an opportunity to begin to understand what life may resemble from another person’s perspective, or even another world’s perspective. Video narratives meant to instill a caretaking way of life and thinking must assert a turning point in their audiences’ mindsets. A tipping point is a trigger giving sentimental impact to rethink and change existing patterned behavior. To confront audiences with a story that leads to larger change in their lives, a tipping point must bring about changes in attitude and action in a highly encouraging situation that places the current “consumer narrative” mindset under scrutiny.

I find moving media so powerful because of its own interactive quality. When I watch a video, I find myself in an ongoing relationship with the narrative. It is the best medium for anyone to have a tipping point in their thinking and behaviors that will pave the way to sustainable and healthy values and attitudes. The demands of the masses can change industrial supply. As Pauliina Isokangas asserts, “business can be changed” (Isokangas 2020). To elaborate, changing attitudes towards the clothing industry can lead to lengthened lifespans of the clothing we own. Therefore the way demand and supply operates can be transformed to do better.

Thinking about storytelling in the marketing mindset, Erica Charles and Ruth Marciniak assert that “the importance of added value in branding cannot be overstated. Added value serves to distinguish a brand from a product and provides meaning to consumers in the symbolic construction of self-identity” (Charles and Marciniak 2021). One can own the branded clothing, and therefore own the story with the message given by its storytelling. It is powerful to own sustainable narratives as it shapes the self-identity of the viewer.

Fashion is a strong visual medium. Stakeholders in fashion oftentimes use visual storytelling to communicate messages. What is so dangerous about not being intentional and blindly consuming is that the things audiences read and see go right into their brains and inform their world views, emotional baseline and beliefs.



Image 5: A high fashion brand's advertisement for its women's Spring-Summer 2022 Campaign (Lois Vuitton 2022).



Image 6: A social media influencer promoting a fast fashion label (Ruby Rose UK 2022).

How does one encourage audiences to take care of their clothing? Storytelling can lead conversations to combine, shape and transform mindsets from the current popular consumer narrative to one of stewardship or caretaking.

Everchanging fashion trends that urge consumers to buy the latest style can be attractive to many people because of the powerful influence of advertised consumer narratives.

Advertisement materials often associate fast fashion brands with desirability and conformity, which influence audiences to embody this narrative in their own behaviors and self-images. But the same enemy tools that power fast fashion can also be employed for our good.

Video storytelling can change the consumer narrative we discussed in previous chapters to a caretaker narrative by creating awareness, influence and building empathy among consumers. The message video storytelling can deliver to masses is: “Your purchasing decisions and the way you care can change the whole fashion cycle.” One might not witness the impact of one’s existing patterns of fashion consumption because the garments’ production happens so far away, most probably in a South East Asian apparel manufacturing company. However, with video storytelling audiences can be informed about the power their actions have, for example, by demanding care and higher moral standards in apparel production. Video storytelling brings up the empathy we should have towards the environment and fellow human beings who are involved in the apparel manufacturing process. If the idea of fashion undergoes a change, we can raise the industry’s sustainability bar with the help of video storytelling.

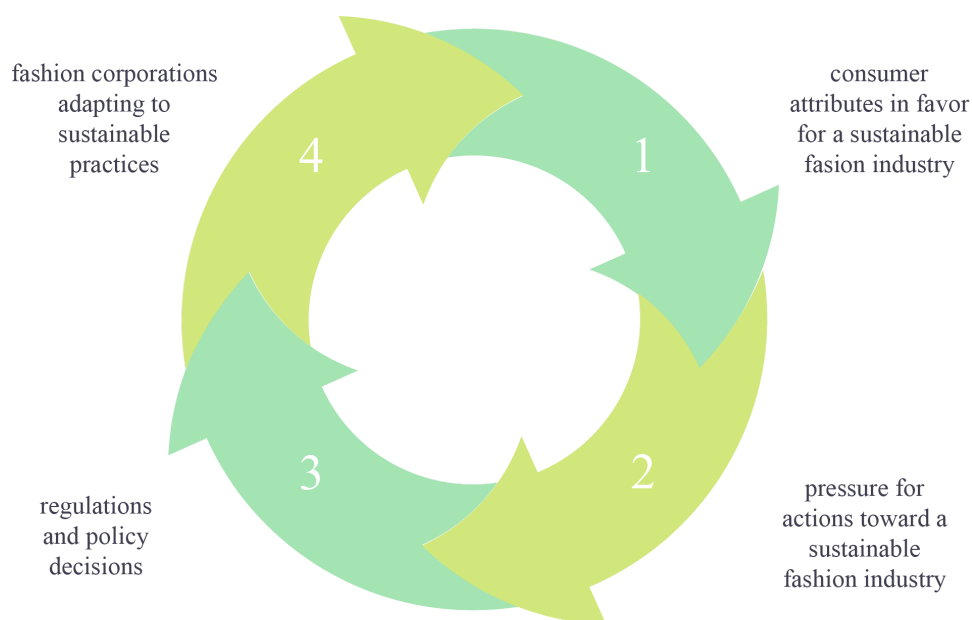


Image 7: How a change in consumer attitudes can lead to big transformations in the fashion industry.

We can not think of a sustainable future by ignoring the collective effort needed from mass audiences. A huge change can be achieved by making mass audiences aware of their agency as consumers, which can be as impactful as direct engagement with governmental and corporate policy makers. The operations of the fast fashion industry can be transformed through social and environmental sustainability initiatives implemented at both the grassroots and policy-making levels. As a source of influence, video storytelling is able to alter the actions, opinions, and attitudes of its target audiences to shape conversations on the caretaker narrative in sustainable fashion.

When I went to the store and bought my clothes years ago, the clothing stores were nice, clean, and I never had the slightest idea of the cruelty and ecological footprint the fashion industry caused because there was no evidence of this in the shops. Mountains of clothing waste are not something many people see with their own eyes in their lifetimes. In an economic and social system where decisions are made solely on the basis of profit, the margins of which are increased through the exploitation of vulnerable communities. These communities, often in far-off regions of the same planet you and I live on, pay the highest price for this system to run. Often we don't understand the impacts on people or our shared planet because we do not witness these repercussions directly with our own eyes.

Why don't consumers think of where their clothes come from? Why don't we connect with the entire truth of our clothing's' stories and the real ecological, economical, social and psychological footprint created by the vast majority of fashion corporations and by the mass populations who purchase their products. These consumers have been misinformed by fashion corporations. However, strong visual communications can make an impact by bringing visibility and mass awareness to the full story of fast fashion.

To engage audiences with the idea of being a caretaker, there needs to be an emotional appeal to trigger our humanity and a change within. Caretaking is not limited to mending one's clothing but extends to attempts at mending each other, society and environment. Effective forms of visual storytelling can change larger narratives in fashion.

Current stakeholders in fashion are already using the language of strong visual storytelling to promote fast fashion. The same language can be redeployed to promote sustainable ways of being. Fast fashion is extremely visual, and a strong visual time-based media can powerfully communicate alternatives to the present cycle of fast fashion. Although storytelling is a significant part of this change-making effort, the imagery used in connection to it is a crucial component in determining whether the messages communicated will impact human behavior.

3.4 How to change attitudes and behaviors through the caretaker narrative

Dr. Daniel Amen, who has analyzed more than 83,000 brain scans, reports that his number one takeaway is “We can change our brains. You are not stuck with the brain you were born with” (Amen 2013). When I say a caretaker, I mean it literally to be a caretaker, a steward, a guardian for the clothing we own, at the same time metaphorically I mean changing mindsets which are biased by fast fashion-based consumption patterns that make up today’s throwaway culture. This implies that we can mend one other and the planet, or on the other hand we can destroy one other and the planet.

Pursuing sustainability isn’t inherently selfless or sacrificial. It comes with benefits and positive outcomes for ourselves and for the industry at large. Identifying and recognizing those benefits and communicating the benefits using video storytelling can be a great way to inspire others to understand and adopt the caretaker narrative.

Video storytelling can inclusively change consumer narrative-led behavior into ways of life informed by the caretaker narrative. In the digital age, videos are easily accessible and have the power to create emotional connections between the self and the caretaker narrative.

For audiences to adopt a sustainable caretaker lifestyle, they should be motivated by an emotional response. This is more effective than directly asking audiences to buy sustainably made products and support sustainable corporations. Video storytelling has the ability to increase the empathy of mass audiences and therefore is an appropriate tool for healthy persuasion and retention of the audience’s attention.

The habitual attraction of humans towards videos formulates how we see and sense circumstances and environmental conditions surrounding us. Video storytelling doesn't only have the capability to impact how we participate in virtual digital spaces . . . it has wider impacts too. Videos are straightforward, especially when storytelling is embedded into the video's imagery, permitting quick engagement, greater appeal and intense exposure for audiences. Video storytelling reaches the brains and hearts of target audiences.

The documentary film *True Cost*, directed by Andrew Morgan, about the Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh helped me build empathy towards the people most exploited by the fast fashion industry. As someone who has academically researched the cost of fast fashion, I became extremely emotionally impacted by encountering the industry's effects on vulnerable communities and the environment. I felt a human connection with the stakeholders of the apparel industry and felt trust in the storyteller, the director Andrew Morgan. Most importantly, I became deeply committed to the subject matter—the cost of fast fashion and who is paying that cost. The documentary formed a lasting emotional, personal impression on me as well as an intellectual one. Whenever I see a fast fashion label or related advertisement, I am instantly reminded of the visuals I encountered in *True Cost*. “Personal relationships are necessary for stewards, because stewardship behavior is built on trust and commitment” (Kuppelwieser 2011). Therefore I believe smart storytelling is heavily impactful and a must when imagining sustainable futures.

3.5 A storytelling model—what should be told and to whom?

We should make unfamiliar iterations of the caretaker narrative interesting to the masses. Video storytelling introduces compassion, affinity and care as motives for changed behavior and model characters inspired by those motives. In this manner, the story provides an impetus for change in its audiences. A powerful and definitive objective of video storytelling is to lay out empathy, compassion and care, which are emotions that motivate people to react to a situation and take action in its favor.

If you don't feel the internal need within yourself, breaking the propaganda culture of fast fashion's consumer narrative is hard. Stories catering to the need and intentionality to be a caretaker of clothing—and therefore a steward of the planet—are the types of stories I would like to see more of in conversations on sustainable fashion. Ideal stories can reframe the experience of fashion with intentionality of care and portray the joy one gains through acts of care. Making space for conversations on the benefits of the caretaker narrative and the beauty of engaging in the caretaker narrative is also ideal. I envision video narrations about the beauty of engaging with the sustainable caretaker narrative, how it shapes and benefits the spirit and soul of the caretaker, as well as about the reality of climate change.

The narrative and the visuals of the videos should be guided by an attentive and pleasant attitude. Characters in stories can personify otherwise abstract data and information and add feeling to them. Characters can be the caretaker, nature, tree or a river. Character depth is necessary if stories are to deliver messages to their audiences. Asking questions and providing insightful answers is important too. It is also important to portray collective hope for a sustainable future in the stories portrayed by these videos.

I am hesitant to see too much negativity in video storytelling with these aims. Subjects like despair and crisis can repel audiences because they are hard to process. Therefore, one should not center the dystopian disaster. On the other hand, providing solutions audiences can apply to a problem is digestible and empowering. Video storytellers must be careful enough not to overwhelm wider audiences with too much scientific data and make sure the content is engaging and interesting to them.

4. Conclusion

For the betterment of ourselves and the planet, we must endorse the caretaker narrative over the current consumer narrative in fashion. Video storytelling is a powerful tool which should use to popularize the caretaker narrative in fashion to a mass audience and optimize their reception of routine acts of care. The transformative potential of the caretaker narrative through video storytelling—which includes realistic and relatable characters, conveys the joys of being a caretaker who makes positive impacts, and instills hope for a better future—is not limited to the fashion industry but also applies to the planet.

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