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## **SUSTAINABLE FASHION**

### **MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SUSTAINABLE FASHION**

#### **Concept of sustainability and SDG 12**

The concept of sustainability was defined in 1987 in the Brundtland report and was then adopted by the United Nations' World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED): "sustainability means being able to satisfy current needs without compromising the possibility for future generations to satisfy their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

The first scientific contributions on sustainability focused on the use of natural resources and their influence on quality of life (Robinson, 2004). More recent conceptualizations of sustainability recognize the relationship among three important principles: economic growth, social equity and respect for the environment (Bansal, 2002). This idea corresponds to the "triple bottom line" approach (Elkington, 1998), which is based on the idea that business performance should be monitored according to three perspectives, namely economic, environmental, and social.

In other words, to practice sustainable development and address the impact on future generations' wealth, companies must adopt a long-term horizon and let economic growth sustain social progress and the environment (Lamming and Hampson, 1996). The social principle requires

that everyone be treated fairly and equitably. The economic principle requires the adequate production of resources so that society can maintain a reasonable standard of living, and the environmental principle asserts that society protects its environmental resources (Bansal, 2002).

The UN clarifies sustainable development in SDG 12, Sustainable consumption and production, as promoting resource and energy efficiency, giving access to fundamental services, sustainable infrastructure, green practices in both production and consumption of goods and services, and a better quality of life for all and decent jobs. Its implementation helps to achieve general development plans, diminish future economic, environmental and social costs, reinforce economic competitiveness and reduce poverty for all.

### **Brief background on sustainable fashion**

Sustainable fashion has been introduced as an approach to unravel a large number of the environmental issues related to fashion production and consumption (Bly et al., 2015). Harris et al. (2015) sees sustainable fashion as clothing that coordinates at least one part of environmental and social sustainability, for example, fabrics that are produced out of organic material or distributed through fair trade, defined as in Princen (2005) depicts sustainable fashion as clothing that is produced from materials that can be completely composted, sufficient and reused. Fashion consumption can be viewed as less risky to the environment. Sustainable fashion has been identified by various designations, such as “ethical”, “ecological”, “green”, and “slow fashion”. However, sustainable fashion consumption is difficult to carry out, as there are few barriers that slow the fashion industry down to advance further towards true sustainability (Harris et al., 2015).

### **CHALLENGES**

#### **Engaging with consumers effectively**

Engaging with consumers effectively is a challenge. In a case where retailers had successfully improved the sustainability of their clothing, they offer were struggling to communicate these improvements to the customers. The key barriers can be identified as: the complexity of sustainability in clothing, the lack of transparency in the supply chain and consumer skepticism.

Retailers explain that one cannot just say in one sentence what sustainability is in fashion. Terms such as “Carbon footprint”, “embedded water”, “embedded energy”, “social projects” are used, but how much time does the consumer have to actually deal with these things? Explaining these issues to consumers is complex, particularly determining how to describe the multifaceted sustainability benefits of the purchase and identifying which communication media to use.

A second barrier is a lack of transparency, which makes it difficult for a consumer to identify and select sustainable fashion when making a purchase. A third barrier is the complexity in the supply chain. Retailers will know the direct supplier, or the primary cutting and sewing factory. But retailers are unlikely to know every aspect of the supply chain, for example, where accessories such as buttons or motifs are made or sewn on.

Another barrier is skepticism about retailers’ sustainability claims, with consumers questioning both the veracity of these claims and the motives of those making them. The existence and significance of trust has implicated this issue. Improving the transparency of the supply chain and earning consumers’ trust were seen as ways of engaging effectively with consumers to address the barriers of complexity in sustainability and clothing supply and demand.

### **Mainstreaming sustainable clothing**

Another key challenge is mainstreaming sustainable clothing: moving it out of its specialty and on to the high road. Notwithstanding this goal, key obstructions to the mainstreaming of

sustainable clothing are the stigma and stereotypes associated with its design. Unfortunately, “people still have the perception of sustainable clothing as “not looking like normal fashion” or looking “hippyish”. Just being environmentally friendly will not make people buy sustainable clothing, because that is not an essential purchasing motivation. Motivations focus on the consumer wanting to feel good in the product, the product being the right fit, **and ... the right** hand feel and color.

Normalizing the design of sustainable clothing and making it less demanding for consumers to get it would help to mainstream sustainable clothing and tackle the stigma and stereotypes that ruin its uptake. This is consistent with reported negative perceptions and constraints on the growth of sustainable clothing in the literature (Beard, 2009; Hiller Connell, 2010) and the role of clothing as a method of self-expression among both the young and more mature consumers (Holmlund et al., 2011; Michaelidou and Dibb, 2006; Piacentini and Mailer, 2004). The pervasiveness of high road fashion (Woodwood, 2009) underlines the need to standardize sustainable clothing design.

### **Changing consumer's mindset**

Enhancing sustainable behavior includes changing consumers' attitudes from following fashion and purchasing lots of new clothes, to putting resources into clothes that will last and suit them. This mindset of over-consumption and disposability has led to a more transitory relationship with clothing. Perfectly good clothes are routinely disposed of before they are worn out, because clothes can be more easily and conveniently replaced than repaired or modified. The skills for repairing clothes are also disappearing, and even when consumers have these skills, there is a sense that one does not have to do that anymore. Pockets of resistance to these attitudes and decline in sewing skills were acknowledged, but described as sub-cultures. For some consumers, with the

desire to be able to form a longer-term relationship with their clothing, clothes nowadays are of lower quality, making it difficult to acquire items that will last.

### **Reducing the focus on cost**

Clothing has become cheaper and more readily available with both upstream and downstream consequences. Upstream, retailers strive to reduce costs and improve margins. The result is that buyers will change suppliers ‘...just purely because of price...’, without necessarily considering the environmental or ethical implications. These practices are perhaps not surprising. Research with consumers highlights their unwillingness to pay more for ethical or sustainable options, and the reward packages for buyers are based on finding the cheapest rather than the most sustainable option. A suggested intervention by decision makers in the private sector is to align rewards with ethical and sustainability objectives. Advertising is needed to reduce consumers’ focus on cost, accentuating other benefits that increase the value of clothes, such as with branded clothing. A brand-focused mindset might encourage consumers to value clothing that embeds sustainability within its branding and values. Increasing the quality and style aspects may compensate for higher price. Informing consumers about the social and environmental benefits of certain branded clothing will also create more demand by many consumers.

### **FASHION THAT DOES NOT HARM THE PERSON WHO MAKES IT (Fair working conditions)**

In 2012, a garment factory called Tazreen Fashion caught fire in Bangladesh. Without the existence of fire safety laws, the company was not required to provide smoke alarms or fire exits or have its workers perform fire drills. At the point when the factory caught fire, 11 of the members of the management were able to escape, while 112 women employed as seamstresses were engulfed in the fire. Soon after that, more than 1,100 workers died in the Rana Plaza garment

factory when the building collapsed. There were no standards as to what condition a building must be in to be considered safe for employees, a situation found in too many countries around the globe.

It took all of these people dying before Bangladesh started making standards for fire safety. The people in charge of the factories were never held responsible for how they treated their workers and worker's unions are illegal there. In spite of the attention that had been given to the issues, various companies who continue to place their employees in awful conditions still exist, simply because they have not been caught yet. In the U.S, laws changed after the deadly Triangle shirtwaist factory fire in New York City in 1911.

Going beyond the superficial objections to sweatshops raised by activists in the 1990s, the more sophisticated arguments still fail to undermine the basic economic and ethical defense of sweatshops. No economic mechanisms have been identified that would allow higher wages or better working conditions to be legally mandated without harming workers. Specifically, there is the challenge to demonstrate what economic mechanisms would allow for universal adoption of higher wages and better working conditions. Until the point where such mechanisms are widely available and in use worldwide, consumers and government must stop denouncing all legal mandates for higher wages and better working conditions and advocate for voluntarily adopted organizational strategies. There have not been any universal economic mechanisms identified, with legal mandates for wages and safe working conditions. Some national laws or regulations, if they already exist, have been violated. Solutions in the best interest of the workers all along the supply chain in the fashion industry should be advocated if worker welfare or autonomy and environmental protection are the goals.

It is the employer's responsibility to make sure that the workplace is free of health hazards and dangerous conditions. Individual employees are motivated to produce more when strong national laws and regulations exist and are enforced for their protection at the workplace.

For example, the U.S Occupational Safety and Health Administration sets general guidelines that apply to all industries, such as the requirement that workers be provided with safety gear and that workplaces must be protected from toxic chemicals. It additionally sets industry-specific standards, especially for fields that tend to be dangerous. Safety requires training, and employers are required to provide this training in a language employee understand. Also, workers have the right to file complaints when mandated conditions are not being met, and they must be allowed to see relevant records such as workplace injury information.

### **FASHION THAT DOES NOT HARM THE ENVIRONMENT (Organic and natural core materials)**

Since globalization and multinational companies have taken over the fashion industry, it appears that the impact of choices by consumers is very small. However, seeing each purchase as a vote in favor of how one wants the world to function gives everyone a say in the changes one wants. It is more than individual purchases that are critical. Voting for government officials and strategies that help conservation, supporting environmental causes, and staying up-to-date on current environmental issues are all necessary steps for citizens everywhere to take. Constraining brands to be straight-forward about their manufacturing processes and supporting companies that use environmentally conscious steps are vital to implementing change.

Planning to have a more sustainable way of life by reducing waste, composting and finding ways to re-purpose items with friends and acquaintances are a good start for individuals, going one step further towards achieving sustainable fashion alternatives.

These are just a few steps we can take as consumers, businesses, and government towards preserving the environment. Nobody is flawless, but if we can all take steps towards sustainability in the fashion industry, we can create more positive outcomes. Conservation starts with improvements and changes we can make in our everyday lives and fashion choices, and that's what sustainable fashion intends to do. So, instead of feeling apprehensive and questioning this industry, take the opportunity to explore and see how your decisions can make a difference.

## **CONCLUSION**

This is the time for rapid change in fashion in the global environment. There is a competition among all fashion-related people, celebrities, and the brands in working with fashion-related organizations. The term “Sustainability” is not simply for “fashion” but also for the overall improvement of consumption and production amongst all people and industry. Sustainability of the environment is a necessity to check global warming, ecological balance, reduce natural calamities, conservation of vegetation, conservation of wildlife, and so on. **Fashion-concerned consumers** are in search of clothing made under safe conditions by labor produced according to ethical standards using energy-efficient processes and respecting the environment. That is **making fashion in a sustainable way**. Many brands are very conscious of these demands in the Western world. Elsewhere brands are finding their own way to achieve these goals. Recycling of fashion items, using less water and land, creating fewer emissions of toxic materials to the environment and minimizing use of products that produce greenhouse gases, all are **policies promoting sustainability in the fashion arena**. Regarding ethical aspects, fashion brands are very conscious about compliance with labor laws against child labor and for a safe, healthy and congenial environment at work for the workers. Now it is up to consumers to put their beliefs into action when purchasing fashion-forward clothing in the marketplace.