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The Impact of Fashion on Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

This research, part of Advanced Integrated Design, examines the impact of fashion design on sustainability. The fashion industry's rising production of non-permanent clothing harms the environment. This study encourages fashion industries to create durable clothing, thereby transforming the environmental impact from negative to positive. Given the pressing nature of this issue and our inadequate response, the topic's significance is clear. Our environment is crucial, and this research tackles the challenge of accurately assessing and attributing the environmental and social impacts of new fashion products.

Keywords: *Fashion influence, Environmental Impact, Sustainability, Social Impact*

Introduction

Business models within the global fashion industry yield significant negative impacts on the environment. The extensive use of water, pollution from chemical treatments in dyeing and processing, and the destruction of vast amounts of unused materials through incineration or landfilling contribute to making the fashion industry one of the most environmentally detrimental sectors. This study adopts a sustainable approach to minimize, decelerate, and close the loop on the resources utilized throughout the phases of fashion product production, design, realization, and distribution. It aims to analyze emerging business models striving to diminish the environmental footprint of the fashion industry. By conceptualizing a company's business model as a system designed to create value for consumers and capture value for the company, this research introduces an additional analytical dimension – environmental value. It proposes alternatives to examine whether sustainable fashion business models can supplant traditional, unsustainable ones. The research posits that challenges like scalability limitations, alignment discrepancies with consumer preferences in fashion, and obstacles to modifying the supply chain hinder the current sustainable business models from becoming the industry's new standard.

1. Studied Literature

Integrated Design, as a field, is teeming with extensive information and plays a significant role when applied to the topic "The Impact of Fashion on Sustainable Development." Recent years have seen an increase in the production of unsustainable garments by the fashion industry, negatively affecting the environmental landscape. Hence, the aim is for these industries to pivot towards creating more sustainable garments to shift from a negative to a positive environmental impact. This shift is crucial for protecting our planet and ensuring a greener future for upcoming generations.

1.1 Critical Elements within This Field and Theme Encompass

Market Entry and Recognition - New entrants in the textile and clothing industry aim to secure a market share in the vast \$3 trillion industry, with some brands gaining notable recognition despite lesser-known company names. (FERNANDO, 2023)

Growing Emphasis on Sustainable Fashion - The global fashion industry is increasingly focusing on sustainability due to environmental concerns like climate change, plastic pollution, and overproduction, among others. (Cimino, 2018)

Fashion's Impact on Sustainable Design - Studies highlight the significant role of fashion in shaping sustainable design principles, covering aspects like material choice and consumer behavior. (CoSchedule, 2022)

Awareness and Social Consequences - Recent research points to a growing awareness of the fashion industry's social and environmental impacts. (Gazzola, 2020)

Environmental Footprint - The fashion industry is a major contributor to global CO2 emissions and plastic production, posing significant sustainability challenges. (Alison, 2023)

Sustainability Challenges - Key issues include the consumption of resources, use of pesticides in natural fiber production, and disposal of used clothing. (Young, 2009)

These points summarize the critical elements of sustainability within the fashion industry, highlighting the need for environmental awareness, sustainable practices, and the challenges faced in reducing the industry's ecological footprint.

Controversial aspects in the field of Integrated Design Application and the research theme "The Impact of Fashion on Sustainable Development" include:

Increasing challenges related to the existential risk of climate change and the effects of pollutants, toxic waste, and the depletion of key resources are driving a paradigm shift towards sustainability in the fashion industry. This is crucial for protecting the health and natural environment of the planet. (Wollgast, 2021)

The textile industry faces significant criticism due to "fast fashion" practices, where consumers are encouraged to buy mass-produced, cheap clothing, wear them for a short period, and then dispose of them. This consumer behavior generates a vast amount of waste, with estimates indicating that 80 to 100 billion new clothing items are produced globally every year, while every second, a truckload of used clothes is burned or dumped in a landfill. (Bliss, 2019)

Complicated supply chains in clothing production make it difficult to accurately calculate the emissions generated from the production, transportation, and disposal of a pair of pants or a new jacket. The problem is compounded by how garments are transported and managed when no longer wanted by consumers. (Ro, 2020)

1.1.2 Unquestionable aspects in the field and research theme include:

Despite the fashion industry often promoting its sustainability credentials, the bitter reality is that over the past 25 years, it has failed to significantly reduce its negative impact on the planet. Many products continue to be produced using non-biodegradable, petroleum-based synthetic materials, which end up in landfills at the end of their life cycle. (Pucker, 2022)

Sustainable fashion is not as well-known as it should be, as it requires high resource consumption, factories often are not environmentally friendly, and excessive production results in large amounts of waste ending up in our oceans. There's a misconception that sustainability in fashion is too nature-oriented, making it less desirable for consumption. (Chaturvedi, 2022)

The importance of choosing this topic is evident, considering the drastic increase in awareness about sustainability and the need for greater action in this regard. The environment's role in our lives is essential, and various literature, including books, online resources, interviews, and TV shows, continually inform us about the fashion industry's impact on our environment.

1.1.3 Fast Fashion and Environmental Sustainability

Incorporating sustainability into the fast fashion industry remains challenging in effectively preserving the environment and societal well-being, despite efforts to implement sustainable policies and approaches. Moreover, some companies engage in "greenwashing," falsely promoting sustainability claims through dubious environmental certifications, misleading consumer perceptions about their commitment to environmental standards and their products.

The textile industry is a major contributor to global pollution and waste, responsible for 10% of CO2 emissions and 4% of greenhouse gases, exceeding the combined emissions of countries like Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. This critical situation demands that fast fashion brands shift towards using natural and renewable resources to positively impact the environment and conserve biodiversity and ecosystems.

A positive example is H&M's partnership with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), where H&M has committed to taking rapid and effective environmental protection steps. Through initiatives like incorporating recycled trousers in dress production, H&M aims to demonstrate its commitment to sustainable development and achieve its goal of becoming 100% "climate positive" by 2040.

Fast fashion has the potential to become a positive change agent by adopting sustainable practices and encouraging all stakeholders, including governments and consumers, to adopt eco-friendly behaviors. This change will contribute not only to improving individual well-being but also to preserving vital biodiversity and ecosystems on our planet.

1.1.4 How Does Fashion Affect the Environment We Live In?

The term "environment" stems from the French word "environnement," encompassing all elements and influences shaping and sustaining the natural world, from plants and animals to protecting the planet from negative impacts like carbon dioxide emissions. Understanding our impact on nature is essential. Humans have begun to recognize their crucial role in protecting and developing Earth, appreciating the essential qualities contributing to its survival. Through this understanding, humans learn to appreciate their responsibility in safeguarding and advancing the planet, becoming more aware of "Environmental Concern." This term involves actions and choices influenced by an individual's concern level for environmental harm and degradation. The goal is to find solutions that minimize these negative impacts and secure sufficient resources for future generations. As a result, environmental concern becomes a key motivator for consumers aiming to purchase sustainable products, with studies showing a direct and positive impact of this concern on purchasing decisions. Research by Farzin et al. (2023) confirms the positive influence of "Environmental Concern" on the desire to purchase eco-friendly fashion.

2. Sustainability Overview

Sustainability broadly refers to fulfilling current needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet theirs. It emphasizes maintaining a careful balance among three key pillars: environmental, social, and economic, aiming for long-term well-being for both people and the planet. Sustainability seeks to harmonize these pillars, recognizing their interdependence. This includes responsible resource use, waste reduction, renewable energy promotion, ethical business practices, and fair resource distribution, aiming to build a more sustainable and prosperous future for all.

2.1 Sustainability in Fashion

Clothing and fashion share a symbiotic relationship. While clothing is a direct form of body covering, serving as protection and uniformity, fashion extends beyond this to include accepted styles and trends at a specific time and place. This symbiotic link creates a natural flow where clothing becomes the medium through which fashion is expressed and manifested. Clothing may be fundamentally functional, but fashion adds a dimension of social norms and aesthetics. While clothing items are tangible, fashion is characterized by its variability and adaptability over time and space.

Fashion historian Christopher Broward highlights fashion's transient nature, describing it as "clothing designed primarily for presentation and readiness, closely tied to market demands at the moment." (Schmaltz, Oct 24, 2019). This definition underscores that fashion transcends mere functionality; it is also a means of personal expression and a reflection of social changes and trends, influencing and reflecting the culture of its time.

2.2 Designers Embracing Sustainability in Fashion

Eileen Fisher - American designer Eileen Fisher, founder of Eileen Fisher, Inc., is celebrated for her simple, sustainable, and comfortable women's clothing. Fisher's brand is commended for its environmental commitment, prioritizing eco-friendly materials like organic cotton, which minimizes the environmental impact of its production.

processes. Eileen Fisher aims to demonstrate its commitment to sustainable development, aspiring to become 100% "climate positive" by 2040.

Stella McCartney - British designer Stella McCartney is renowned for her sustainable approach to fashion. Born to Beatles member Paul McCartney, she graduated from Central Saint Martins in 1995. McCartney's brand challenges fashion norms by using organic cotton, recycled polyester, and Mylo, an innovative mushroom-based material, proving that beautiful fashion can be sustainable without compromising style or quality.

Marine Serre - French designer Marine Serre, known for her innovative and sustainable fashion approach, gained significant attention with her "Radical Call for Love" collection in 2016, featuring a unique crescent moon print. Serre's brand, launched in 2017, is praised for blending sportswear with couture and streetwear elements, emphasizing sustainability through recycling and the use of recycled materials.

Christopher Raeburn - British fashion designer Christopher Raeburn is recognized for incorporating sustainability and ethics into his designs. Raeburn's signature use of recycled military surplus materials into contemporary, desirable clothing not only extends the life of these materials but also promotes reuse and reduces waste. He emphasizes ethical practices, environmental responsibility, and sustainable innovation, pioneering a movement towards a more sustainable and ethical fashion industry.

3. Methodology

This research focuses on practical aspects of managing industrial pollution and the practical treatment of such pollutants, emphasizing the significance of environmental management and sustainable development in the presentation and treatment of practical fashion collections.

To investigate the impact of using recyclable materials in the fashion industry on environmental protection, the following methods were applied:

Literature Review: Focused on identifying and analyzing various existing literature sources to understand current trends and challenges in sustainable fashion.

Secondary Data Analysis: Involved collecting and analyzing existing data to assess the environmental impact of using recyclable materials in fashion.

Highlighted case studies to illustrate impact and challenges include:

Eileen Fisher's Commitment to Sustainability: Examines Eileen Fisher's recycling practices and use of organic materials.

Adidas and Parley for the Oceans Partnership: Analyzes their collaboration to create clothing from recycled ocean plastic.

Patagonia's Foundation on Sustainability: Looks into Patagonia's efforts, including clothing repair policies and the use of organic cotton.

Stella McCartney's Sustainable Fashion Innovation: Explores Stella McCartney's approach to sustainability, using innovative materials like Mylo and vegan leather.

Zara's Sustainability Program: Reviews Zara's efforts to make its product line more sustainable, including the use of sustainable fibers.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

- The core issue of textile and clothing pollution arises from insufficient knowledge and awareness of sustainable practices regarding garment disposal.
- Textile factories incessantly augment the production of apparel featuring new styles and designs, contributing to a cycle of consumerism where the allure of the latest fashion trends encourages people to dispose of old clothing.

- A significant gap in awareness about the environmental impact of textile and clothing pollution exists among both manufacturers and consumers.
- Elevating awareness about the detrimental effects of fashion pollution is vital to prompt individual and collective action towards sustainability.
- Implementing effective strategies to enhance awareness and inspire people to tackle fashion pollution is essential for mitigating its environmental impact.

Sustainability Recommendations for the Fashion Industry

- Increase Transparency: Encourage brands to disclose their production methods and supply chain details to help consumers make informed choices.
- Use Sustainable Materials: Shift towards eco-friendly materials like organic or recycled fibers to lessen environmental impact.
- Implement Recycling Programs: Develop initiatives for textile recycling to minimize waste and promote garment repurposing.
- Encourage Responsible Consumption: Educate on choosing durable, quality clothing and support sustainable brands.
- Invest in Green Technology: Focus on technologies that enhance resource efficiency and reduce production pollution.
- Adopt Circular Economy Practices: Promote garment reuse, repair, and recycling to extend clothing life and reduce waste.
- Seek Sustainability Certifications: Aim for standards like GOTS or Fair Trade to showcase commitment to eco-friendly practices.
- Form Eco-Friendly Partnerships: Collaborate with NGOs and environmental groups to foster sustainability in fashion.
- Back Sustainable Regulations: Support policies that enforce eco-conscious practices in the fashion sector.

Opens Pathways for Further Research:

This study lays the groundwork for additional research in fashion industry sustainability, providing a platform for deeper exploration and knowledge expansion in various aspects of the field. Areas for Further Investigation:

- Long-term Effects: Examining the long-term environmental and social impacts of sustainable fashion practices.
- Consumer Behavior Analysis: Analyzing how consumer choices and behaviors are influenced by sustainability in fashion.
- Technological Innovations: Investigating technological advancements that enhance sustainability in the fashion sector.
- Social Impact: Studying the social implications of sustainable practices within the fashion industry.
- Policy and Regulation Efficiency: Evaluating the implementation and effectiveness of policies and regulations aimed at promoting sustainability.
- International Comparative Studies: Conducting comparative research across different countries to understand global sustainability practices in fashion.
- Role of Education and Awareness: Exploring how education and awareness initiatives can foster sustainable practices across the industry.

These areas offer rich opportunities to extend the boundaries of current knowledge and contribute to a more sustainable future for the fashion industry. Pursuing these research directions can build a stronger knowledge base to address environmental and social challenges related to fashion and encourage more sustainable practices industry-wide.

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