

How to make Sustainable Fashion cool

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Abstract

Purpose: The research aim is to understand what members of Generation Y, between 20 and 30 years old, consider cool and explore that in the context of sustainable fashion.

Design: The research aim is achieved by consulting the literature on both the concept of cool and sustainable fashion. In-depth semi-structured interviews with thirteen male and female members of Generation Y (Millennials) and PR and/or fashion professionals based in the UK, France, Germany and Norway, are conducted in order to gain first-hand insights into the current perception of cool in the context of sustainable fashion.

Findings: The results of the analysis indicated that sustainable fashion could be made cool in the eye of the Millennials consumer, if presented in a subtle way. Millennials care about doing good and that is now considered cool, however traditional promotional channels like advertising seldom work. They prefer to “discover” that a brand is sustainable, which adds more value to it and makes it cooler.

Value: There is no evidence of other academic work on the specific connection between sustainable fashion and cool, thus the value of this work. Additionally, a creative Artefact: PR Best Practice Report proposes a set of tools for professionals in strategic communication planning. The findings highlight a new interpretation of cool meaning doing good. It could be argued that and for Millennials the meaning of cool is understated good.

Keywords: Sustainable fashion, cool, strategic communication

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Introduction

Sustainable fashion (SF) is a term that everyone is familiar with, yet it is challenging to explain its exact meaning. The main issues sustainable fashion is facing can be summarised as “misrepresented” (Lewis, 2008) and “well-meaning, but ugly.” (Stoppard, 2016).

A challenge for the stereotypical comprehension of sustainability in fashion is Vetements with its reconstructed Levi’s Jeans that promote the idea of repurposing or Patagonia’s soft ban” in place for the word “sustainability” (Choinard, 2008, p. ix). Regardless those radically different business behaviours suggests that being sustainable and being cool might not be as far apart.

This study will approach the understanding of sustainability in fashion by finding the opportunities and ways to relate it to the concept of cool, to help introduce more clarity in both concepts and ease a perception shift for sustainability in fashion among members of Generation Y.

This study’s focus is specifically on 20-30-year-olds members of the Millennial generation, as they are now the largest in the UK, amounting to 21% of the overall population according to ONS (Lyons, 2016). Millennials are a generation of “opinionated sceptics” (Chong, 2017), curious, yet critical and mistrusting, asking questions and requiring transparency from business and media (Chong, 2017). Social marketing campaigns have been on the rise, as Millennials want to see that the company is not just interested to promote itself, but also seek to have a positive impact on society (Landrum, 2017). Their suspicion of the true motivations of brands is a result of their “desire to actively make an impact on the world” (Chong, 2017).

This suggests that talking about sustainability is a challenging task, as even the slightest suggestion of “greenwashing” can alienate a lot of Gen Y’s. Additionally, it is difficult to talk about sustainability and cool given the wider capitalist backdrop: capitalism is so incorporated in our lives and the way we think that it is difficult to imagine a different system. Capitalism is cool and its most vivid representation is consumer culture and cool commodities (McGuigan, 2012). Cool capitalism is the “incorporation of disaffection into capitalism itself” (McGuigan, 2012, p. 431). Capitalism does not care about the environment, capitalism cares about profit, growth and success. This economic model makes it very challenging to be sustainable and even more difficult to make it look cool.

Al Gore and David Blood wrote the polarizing text “A manifesto for sustainable capitalism” (Gore and Blood, 2012) to illustrate how an oxymoron could be a “rare turning point[s] in history when dangerous challenges and limitless opportunity cry out and clear” (Gore and Blood, 2012, p.66). They don’t talk about economic growth, but “long term economic value” and suggest reforms that acts as capitalism

while accounting for the social, environmental and governmental impacts of a business. (Gore and Blood, 2012).

This further illustrates the complexity of our contemporary world where fashion as a system, sustainability and cool as concepts, all hold complexities that are closely intertwined with the wider socio-political backdrop that goes beyond the means of this work.

Keeping this wider context in mind, the research aims to bring clarity to the concept of cool in relation to SF according to members of Generation Y between 20 and 30 years old.

To achieve that a set of objectives is outlines as follow:

- a. Introduce clarity to what Generation Y believe is cool
- b. Determine what cool means in a sustainable fashion context
- c. Propose a Best Practice Report on fashion PR tools and strategies aimed for sustainable brands that want to be perceived as cool

Literature review

Exploring cool

Looking for “beginning of cool” (1995 p.7), Connor goes back to African American men who were subjects of slavery and discrimination. At the time internalising emotions and ‘keeping their cool’ was much safer (Belk, Tian and Paavola, 2010).

The connection between cool and black culture continues into music like blues, jazz and hip-hop, and sports like basketball (Belk et al. 2015). In jazz, Lester Young is renowned for his iconic stage looks and hedonic attitude. Here, the expression “I’m cool” means “I’m calm” (Belk et al. 2015, p.190). His predominantly white audience of hipsters, “seeking a rebellious expression of individuality within the frustratingly inhibiting atmosphere of the 1950s” (Belk et al. 2015, p.191), makes for the ironic detachment of the artist to his audience, as he would sometimes turn his back to them. More of Young’s legendary legacy of *cool* is his iconic “sunglasses inside” look, no smiling on stage and his almost incomprehensible slang (Dinerstein, 1998). Dinerstein also pays attention to movie stars like James Dean, as the ultimate rebel bad boy of Hollywood, an iconic status he achieved with his “Rebel without a Cause” film.

Definitions and conceptual framework

Pountain and Robins (2000) and Armfield (1986) leave the seriousness aside and look at cool from the “cool-persona’s” perspective.

Armfield’s Complete Handbook lacks academic value it pinpoints some “rules” of cool (Armfield, 1986, p.10-13). Pountain and Robins do not list rules, but explore cool as a general state of mind, an attitude, a perception. One of their most iconic definitions of cool is: “a phenomenon that we can recognize when we see it” (2000, p. 18). This confirms that cool is difficult to define, as it relates to different situations and contexts.

Pountain and Robins also suggest a set of personality traits associated with cool persona, with three especially important: narcissism, ironic detachment and hedonism (2000, p.26). Some of these are related to the history of cool, as the concept of ironic detachment, that dates back from blues and jazz artists and they give the example of “boredom in the face of danger” (Pountain and Robins, 2000, p.26).

If Pountain and Robins and Armfield never give a solid definition of cool, academics try to put a conceptual framework to the term.

Mohiuddin et al. (2016) conduct an extensive literature review of all the academic texts working with the concept of cool and narrow it down to seven defining terms that summarise a lot of synonyms words used (2016, p.133):

- deviating from the norm
- pro-social
- self-expressive
- indicative of maturity
- evasive
- attractive
- subversive

For detailed description refer to Appendices 1.

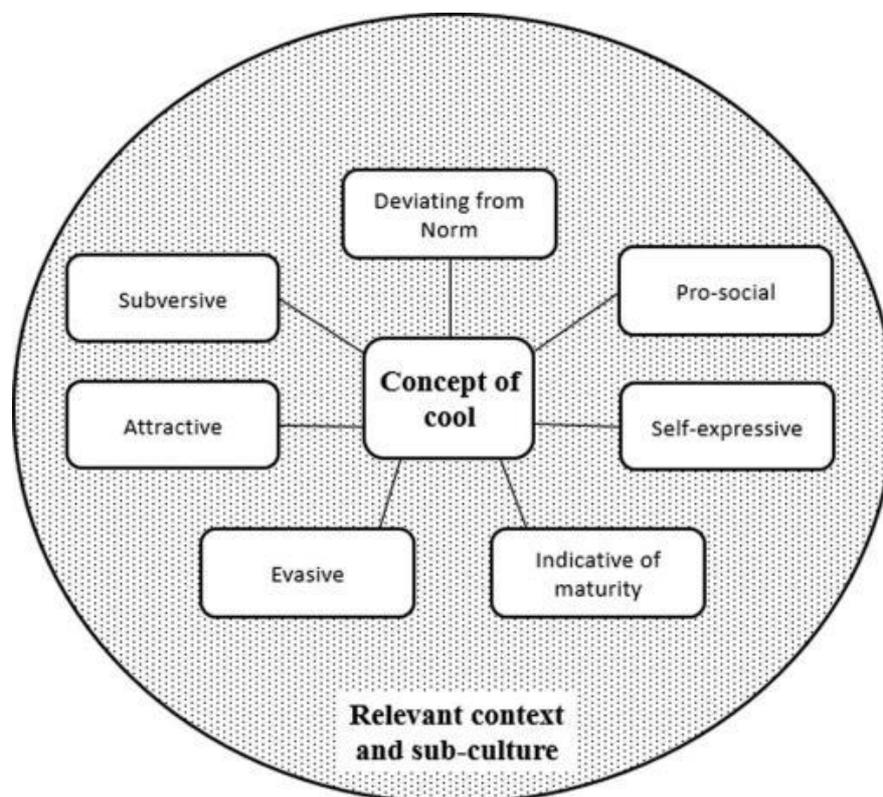


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of cool (Mohiuddin et al., 2016)

The context also plays a role in the desired interpretation of the term, which the authors illustrate as the “Relevant context and sub-culture” (2016, p. 134).

This paper focuses on social marketing, which gives it the connotation of wanting cool to be perceived as *good*, which is not always the case, as pointed out by Pountain and Robins (2000).

Ferguson agrees that defining cool is a task too difficult, however an important theme in his work is the transferability of cool from the product to the user, or from the celebrity to the brand and then to the consumer (Ferguson, 2011, p. 272). This accounts for a phenomenon very popular in today's culture, illustrated as gifts to influencers on social media.

Measuring cool

Other researchers like Runyan et. al (2013) conduct research that aims to look for a way to measure the formation of cool among members of Generation Y consumers in the fashion industry. The conclusion is that there are two aspects of cool – hedonic and utilitarian, with several dimensions to each. This fascination with measuring cool is closely connected to consumer behaviour, what he calls an “advanced form of intelligence on consumption practices” (Runyan, 2013, p. 324). His work also insists that the more popular something is, the less cool it becomes. (Runyan, 2013). Ways to measuring cool are important mainly to marketers to be able to measure the results of their efforts.

This accounts for a divide in the academic world in the ways of working with cool with on one side the conceptual thinkers around cool (Armfield, 1986, Pountain and Robins, 2000, Mohiuddin et al. 2016) and on the other side those looking to measure cool empirically (Runyan et al, 2013, Noh et al. 2014), where the latter could cause an exhaustion of the term cool in the context of measurable marketing campaigns.

Elaborating on the idea of consumerism and the measure of cool, Quartz and Asp team up to explore the effects of “cool on the brain” (2016, p. 60). They combine the abstract definitions and scientific measuring by identifying cool through fMRI scanning of the brain (Quartz and Asp, 2016). The research shows that cool is not only measurable but also a “game changer” in the understanding of consumer behaviour (Quartz and Asp, 2016, p. 7). They suggest that the understandings of consumerism today as “instilling false needs” (Quartz and Asp, 2016, p. 10) that are manipulating people into consuming by advertising and media, is a “historically monumental mistake” (Quartz and Asp, 2016, p. 9), According to their findings, consumption is a natural action that affects the status instinct and the rebel instinct and that “cool consumption” is a “solution to the Status Dilemma” (Quartz and Asp, 2016, p.10).

What they found is that cool is “lighting up” parts in the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC) of our brain, part that helps us reflect on ourselves and gives us a sense of self, while it also subconsciously monitors our surroundings for relevant things to the self, including products. The conclusion they arrive at, is that our brain constantly evaluates the environment subconsciously, and rewards us when our brain registers that others think positively of us (Quartz and Asp, 2016). This suggests that cool could be its own subconscious “economic value that our brains see in products that enhance our social image” (Quartz and Asp, 2016, p. 87).

This view of cool suggests a paradigm shift as it is insisting on the importance of cool in contemporary consumer behaviour and communication by exploring the instinctive reaction consumers have related to items they consider cool.

Cool & Fashion

Looking at fashion today, cool has a meaning, but not just the meaning of rebellion or ironic detachment; we have brands with very complex value layers.

An example is Virgil Abloh, creative director at Off-White and Louis Vuitton, who earned a degree in architecture, but who has taken over both street wear and high fashion scenes. Along with Heron Preston, another influential street wear designer, they discussed “What is cool?” at Vogue’s first Forces of Fashion conference (Satenstein, 2017), emphasising on social media’s influence on customers. Abloh, goes as far as calling cool the new idea of luxury (Satenstein, 2017), as it is dictated by young consumers who willingly wait in line for days for a limited-edition product. That compliments the idea of Quarts and Asp, who consider cool to be its own economic value.

Often the terms fashion and cool go together when thinking about trend forecasting – this has turned into a professional occupation known as “coolhunting” (Gladwell, 1997). The process of coolhunting, finding niche, new, exciting trends, similar to the diffusion of innovation as described by Rogers (2003), accelerates the adoption of the next cool thing by big designers, which makes the lifespan of products shorter than ever before and the chase for cool faster. Gladwell (1997) puts it neatly in his first rule of cool: “The quicker the chase, the quicker the flight”. This acceleration of processes is in direct relation with the socio-economic system of capitalism, which enhances its relationship with cool and innovation. The chase of cool is similar to defining cool: as soon as you reach it, it isn’t there anymore.

Therefore, the two main challenges of this research will be to identify a conceptual framework of cool and apply it successfully to the concept of SF, as part of a system that inherently is not suited for it

Exploring sustainability and fashion

Thompson and Haytko explain that the meaning someone ascribes to fashion depends on their “personal meanings, life goals, self-conceptions and context specific reference points” (1997, p.18). They also recognise that the complexity of the meaning collides with different value systems, which creates frustrations around the “autonomy issues” of the personality and the “conformity issues” of fitting in

(Thompson and Haytko, 1997, p.16). Their research shows that people either perceive fashion as part of the fashion dream of glamour and success, or trivialize it by distancing themselves from it to showcase of better moral stance (Thompson and Haytko, 1997).

Sustainability in fashion is not a new concept. The UN has introduced the most wide-spread definition of sustainable development, which reads: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Janet Hethorn and Connie Ulasewicz define sustainability in fashion on three pillars – people, processes and environment, summarising this as the “model of Interconnectivity” (2008, p.xiv).

For many the idea of SF signifies losing part of the power of fashion symbols, but according to Stoppard, the impression of SF is “well-meaning, but ugly.” (2016). Black, conversely, ensures that “sustainable fashion does not mean the end of fashion” (2012, p.8). This suggests that sustainability and fashion do not go well together. Some even claim that it is an oxymoron (Hethorn and Ulasewicz, 2008; Clark, 2008; Black, 2012; Gordon and Hill, 2015). And that is logical considering the disposable nature of current mass market for fast fashion. However, much like sustainable capitalism, SF, as a concept, holds the opportunities for future development (Clark, 2008).

Sustainable Fashion

The word sustainability is used in the media, marketing and promotion to insist on more environmentally friendly consumption for the aware consumer (Beard, 2008). While intended as an explanation for a rather complex term, the interpretation is left to the consumer, who is, according to Lewis, the most influential agent in the industry transition (2008). That leads, as argued by Bread (2008), to confused consumer and brands. This therefore affects the general credibility of the term. Consequently the term “greenwashing” has emerged as a term after Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) campaigns have been exposed as just pretending to act ethically (The Business of Fashion, 2017). However, during a Business Of Fashion Summit in China, it was agreed that the fashion industry is “maturing fast” in its approach to sustainability, with examples like Kering (The Business of Fashion, 2017).

Historically some argue that sustainability has been a way of life for a lot of people before the industrial revolution (Welters, 2008). It was the fast development of automated production and growing availability of fabrics that accelerated us to the world of “conspicuous consumption,” as coined by Thorstein Veblen (1899). This has pushed fashion to become the fast-fashion we know today.

The success of fast-fashion can be explained by its ability to sell the idea that every consumer could afford the “luxury” to wear an outfit once and throw it away. Lewis criticises the success of fast-fashion, liaising it directly with bad working conditions and environmental damage (2008). However, in order to tackle the threat from fast-fashion mega-companies, more clarity about what sustainability means is needed. Lewis suggests that SF is “misrepresented” (2008, p. 236), meaning that the exaggerated eco-look is naïve and does not correspond to the new idea of fashion: “terms such as “organic” and “sustainable” are not adequately defined for fashion’s new tasks. He continues: “Without destination or knowledge of what the journey towards sustainable practice might mean, a general definition of SF design remains imprecise and without origin.” (Lewis, 2008, p. 237). Such strong critiques of the fashion practice create a sense of urgency of a much-needed change in the perception of sustainability in fashion. This in big part informs the research’s aim to bring more clarity to how cool could be part of the new task of fashion and of strategic communication practices of PR professionals.

To help understand sustainability, Henninger, Alevizou and Oates present a Matrix of sustainability (2016, p. 412) that allows brands to understand and communicate their level of sustainability, according to their brand identity and priorities (See Figure 1).

	Low Basic priority	Medium priority	High priority	Organisational evidence	Third party evidence
Forward thinking					
Innovation					
Ethical/sustainable design	✓				
Ethically sourced					
Meaningful, interesting					
Local production					
Production techniques (recycling, upcycling, traditional techniques)					
Versatile					
Promoting fair trade, fair wages	✓				
Transparency/traceability					
Checks for harmful substances	✓				
Long-term focus					
Environmental standards	✓				
Human rights/working conditions	✓				
Community support/integration					
Financially viable					
Environmentally friendly materials					
Renewable sources					
Limited transportation					
Fashion with conscience					
Heritage					

Figure 2: Sustainable fashion matrix (Henninger et al. ,2016)

Other scholars focus on the consumer practices around SF. McNeill and Moore define three types of consumers according to their habits and attitudes towards fashion consumption: “self”, concerned with pleasure, mostly fast-fashion consumers; “social” who is somewhat torn, concerned with their social

image while having concerns about the environment; and the “sacrifice” consumer who is aiming for minimal negative impact on the planet (2015).

Connecting these categories with the research aim, the “social” consumer is considered as most prone to be influenced by the results of a successful cool perception shift of SF. This is confirmed by McNeill and Moore: “These individuals could be seen to hold the most potential as a market for sustainable fashion.” (2015, p. 221). These consumers are often torn between their desire to fit in – the before-mentioned “conformity issue” (Thompson and Hayko, 1997) – as they value the opinions of their peers, while they also struggle with the “autonomy issue” (Thompson and Hayko, 1997), visible in their desire to act ethically and eco-friendly. The difficulty faced by practitioners is to raise awareness of SF, to challenge the perceived lack of social acceptance and higher costs of these fashion items (McNeill and Moore, 2015). This leads to the conclusions that SF is evaluated as full of potential, but is perceived as undesirable and misunderstood. While cool could be seen as a value system on its own. So, in order to introduce positive change this research with aim to connect the two terms.

Methodology

Research

A clear understanding of the underlying guiding philosophical assumptions, helps the researcher select a better research strategy, data collection and sampling techniques (Saunders et al., 2016). For this work, the most suitable philosophy is interpretivism as it will help explore the meaning attached to the term cool and make sense of it in the complexity of the contemporary world, as well as help creating new meaning in the context of sustainable fashion.

This is an exploratory study, as its purpose is to explore the perceptions of the key terms. As no other study has looked at cool and sustainable fashion together, the aim will be to “get a feeling” of the connection and potential of the two.

Research Methods

The research design is qualitative research (QR), as this is often used with the interpretive philosophy (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). QR deals with the opinions of the participants with regard to the chosen subject of study, to help the researcher create new conceptual frameworks and interpretations of the terms (Saunders et al., 2016).

For the purposes of this study a mono-method approach will be adopted.

In-depth interviews will be conducted with PR and fashion professionals to understand their perceptions of the term cool and whether they could see a connection between sustainability and fashion. Additionally, in-depth interviews will be conducted with members representing Generation Y, to explore their understandings of cool and sustainable fashion.

Research Strategy

The research will be using a thematic analysis approach to understand the data and facilitate the organisation of themes emerging from the findings. That will be combined with the practice based (PB) approach.

PB research will help to illustrate the new ideas emerging from the data in a practical way that will be easy to understand and use by PR practitioners. Defined by Candy as research where “creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge” (2006, p. 3). This strategy generates new knowledge through the combination of original scholarship research and an artefact material that demonstrates the

contribution to the researched field (Candy, 2006). The creative outcome should be contextualised within the fields of SF and cool and based on the conclusions drawn from the primary and secondary research. Therefore, this is the most suitable strategy for achieving the objectives of this research, including the production of a PR Best Practice Report (See Artefact) that visualises the link between sustainable fashion and cool, and the integration of these in strategic communication planning.

Data collection

Primary and secondary data collection

The data collection originates from primary and secondary research. Primary data is the data “that does not exist independent of the research process” (O’Leary, 2014, p. 201).

Semi-structured interviews will be used to collect the data, in the form of interviews – face-to-face, over Skype or the phone. This type of interviews are often combined with exploratory studies (Saunders et al., 2016), which will allow the acquisition of data around the concepts and perceptions of cool and sustainable fashion.

Secondary data is already available data that has not been produced by the researcher and can be used for further analysis and knowledge acquirement (O’Leary, 2014).

Secondary data for this research is collected from a wide range of sources: books, journal articles, general online media research, and market research reports. This allows the researcher to build an understanding of the subject, and the capacity to analyse the concepts explored and achieve the aim of the study.

Sampling

The researcher has decided on non-probability, purposeful sampling, with a combination of homogenous and critical case sampling technique, to help the interpretation of key concepts. Young members of Gen Y and PR and fashion professionals will be interviewed. The homogenous technique is applied to Gen Y (20-30 years old) allowing greater depth of understanding of the data and increased dependability of the findings (Robinson, 2013; Saunders et al, 2016), and critical case to professionals to heighten their ability to inform the study by drawing on their influence in the industry (Saunders et al, 2016). Altogether thirteen interviews were conducted with five professionals and eight Millennial consumers.

For interviewee profiles see Appendices 4, for sampling techniques see Appendices 3.

Interviews

The researcher has prepared two interview guides with questions covering all three objectives, as advised in the literature (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, p. 31).

The guides were separated in three stages – easing into interview, core questions and closing the interview (O’Leary, 2014). Typically for semi-structured interviews, all participants have had questions in common while also some questions were omitted or further investigated, depending on the capacity of the interviewee to inform the research (Carruthers, 1990).

All interviews were one-to-one, recorded on an iPhone device and later transcribed word by word.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted when possible as the literature suggests that this is the best way to conduct semi-structured interview as it allows the full potential of the method to come to life (Saunders et al., 2016).

Conducting phone and online audio chat interviews allows the researcher to expand the interviews on an international level (Rubin and Rubin, 2012), which reinforces the research’s dependability.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is defined as “a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data” (Clarke and Braun, 2017, p. 297). Its aim is to summarise and interpret key elements of the data.

To visualise and explain the data in an easy way the Attride-Stirling model of data analysis will be applied (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 386) (See Figure 3).

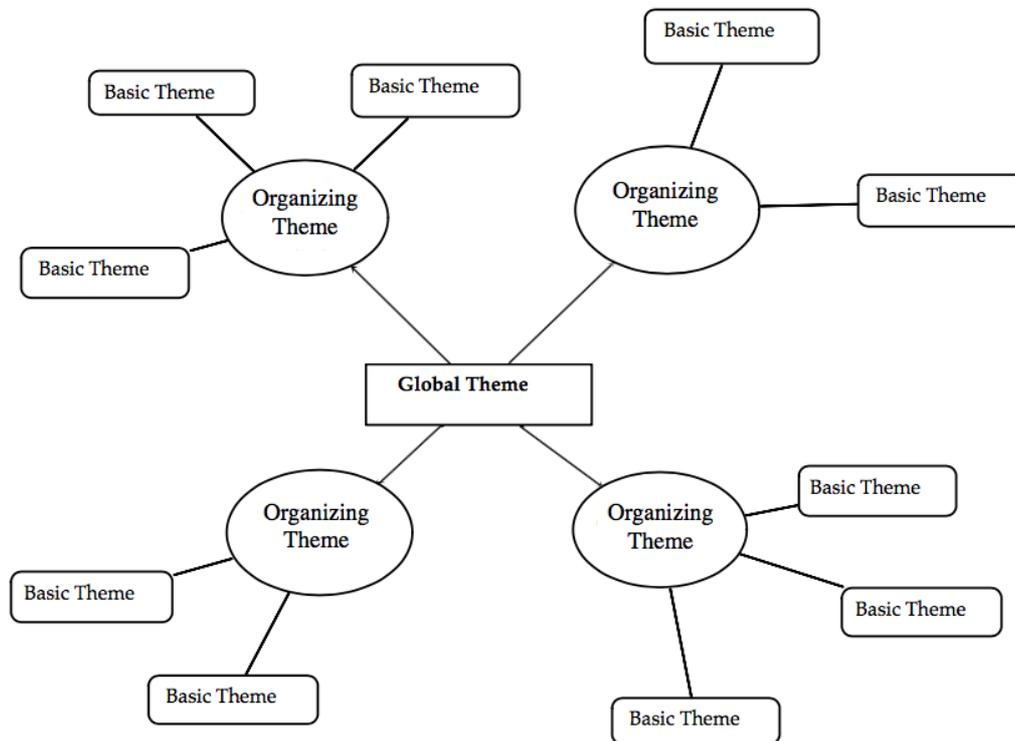


Figure 3: Thematic Analysis Template (Attride-Stirling, 2001)

After several filtering and coding of the data, the researcher has formulated the Basic themes that were then organised into bigger Organising themes that were grouped together as Global themes.

Limitations of approach

Pratt (2008) suggests that many qualitative researchers adopt the evaluation criteria of quantitative research models. It is also argued that using reliability for evaluation is very “vague” in qualitative research (De Ruyter and Scholl cited in Kapoulas and Mitic, 2012, p. 361). To justify the methods used for this research and the richness of the findings, the decision maker has adopted alternative criteria of evaluation that go as follow:

- dependability - accounts for the changes that might occur during the research process
- credibility - suggests that the research is conducted following the accepted practices and ethical guidelines (Bryman and Bell, 2015) (See Appendices 6)
- transferability - does not guarantee the direct implication of the data to other groups of the population studied (O’Leary, 2014), however, the findings are considered relevant and the conclusions drawn applicable to an extent of Generation Y
- authenticity - concerned with presenting truthful findings, while accepting the existence of multiple realities and perspectives. (O’Leary, 2014).

developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Ethics

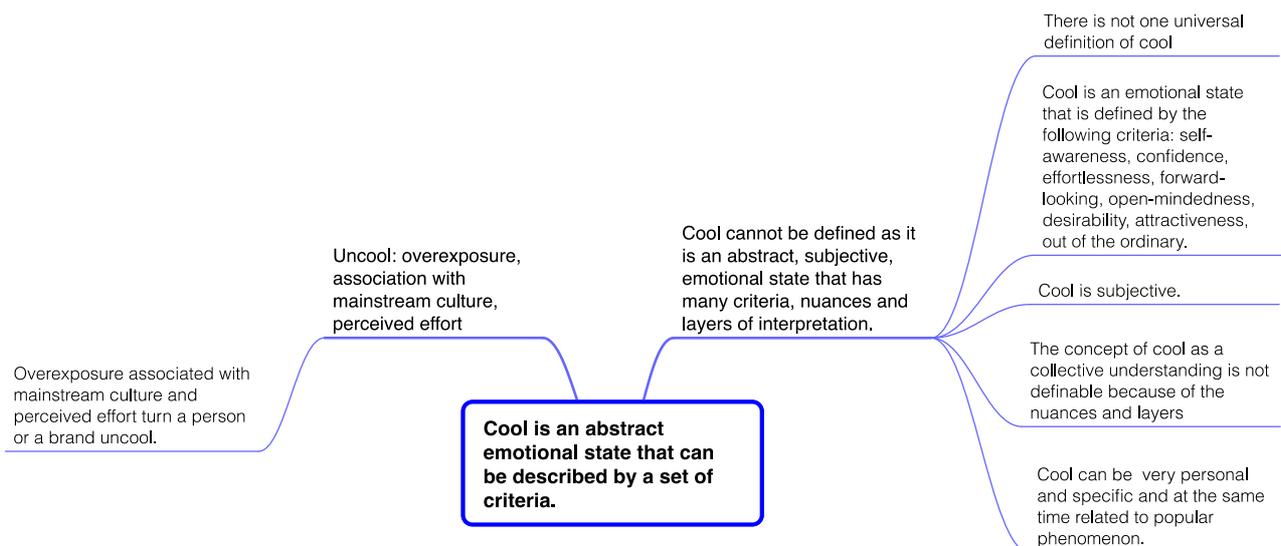
Confidentiality has been provided by coding the participants' names in the findings. See Appendices 7 for full overview of ethical principles applied.

Thematic Overview

For an easily understood overview, the researcher has used the network mapping as proposed by Attride-Sterling (Figure 3). Three Global Themes were identified in consumer data and two Global Themes in the Professionals data.

Consumers

1. Cool is an abstract emotional state that can be described by a set of criteria

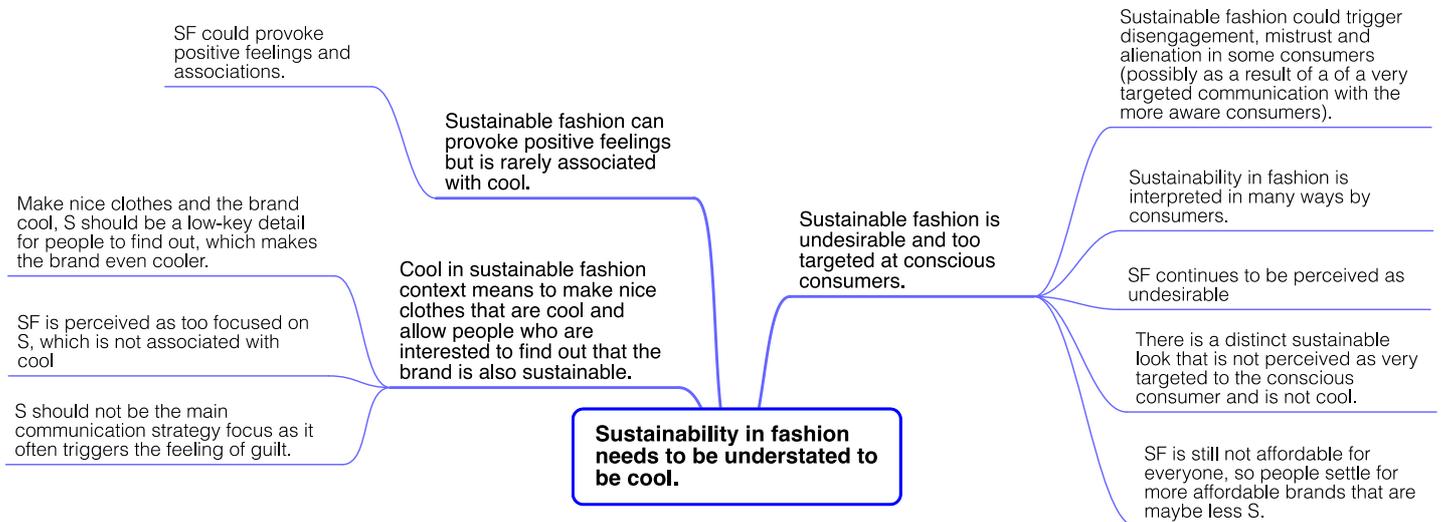


Picture 1: Global Theme 1

The primary research shows that there is no unanimous definition of cool, which is aligned with the literature. However, all the participants could provide insights into their personal understanding and describe cool in their own words, insisting that it is something to be recognised and/or felt.

A set of criteria emerged that the researcher has summarised as: self-awareness, confidence, effortless, forward-looking, open-mindedness, desirability, attractiveness and out of the ordinary.

2. Sustainability in fashion needs to be understated to be cool



Picture 2: Global Theme 2

Almost all participants agreed that sustainability is cool when it is not in the main communication point, but something that a person can find out if interested. Campaigning openly about sustainability can alienate certain consumers, especially from the “fashion crowd”.

“[Y]ou don't have to be like campaigning about it then you're taking away from the product like then you're selling a sustainable product not a fashion piece.” Con 5

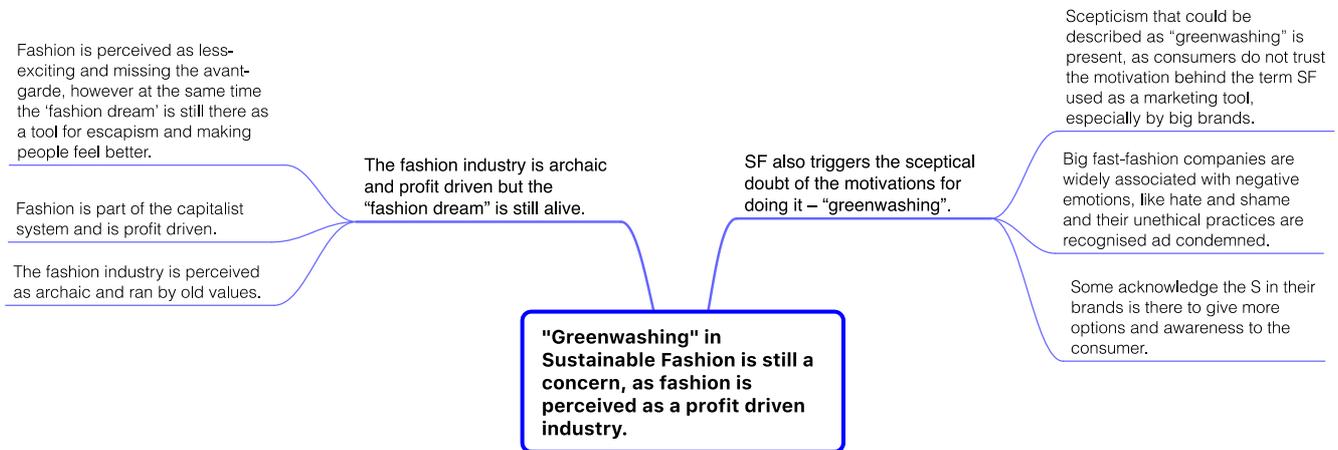
However, for everyone sustainability can make them feel good, but only few perceive it as affordable. Certain participants associate doing nice things with cool, which conceptually aligns with the idea of sustainable fashion.

“I feel much smarter and much more elegant when I buy something that's made locally, where people are paid fairly etc.”

Con 3

“[A] lot of things can become cool in their own way. Like being nice to people can be cool.” Con 5

3. Greenwashing in sustainable fashion is still a concern, as fashion is perceived as a profit driven industry



Picture 3: Global Theme 3

The fashion industry operates in a capitalist system and consumers have expressed concerns about the motivations and claims behind sustainable fashion products, as exploited by big companies to generate more profit.

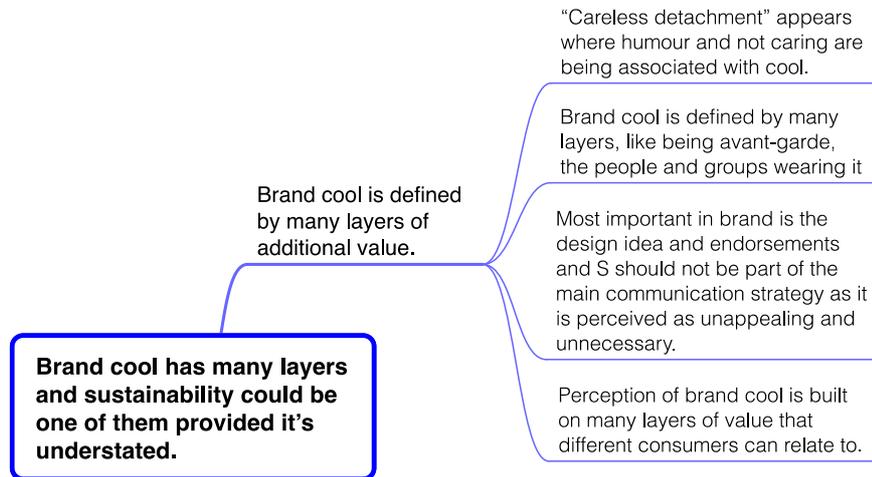
“[S]ustainable fashion became much of a marketing discourse nowadays obviously so I think this majority of things that are sold as sustainable are not 100% sustainable and there's no such thing as 100% sustainable” Con 8

They link this with the view that fashion is an outdated industry, using old business models.

“[I]n the capitalist society that we're working in, if it doesn't come to the point that it's that it's better to do sustainable fashion revenue wise than normal fashion I don't think people will do it because of rational thoughts.” Con 2

Professionals

1. Brand cool has many layers and sustainability could be one of them provided it's understated



Picture 4: Global Theme 1

Professionals have provided insights into their interpretation of what cool in sustainability is for Generation Y, confirming what the consumers have described with more detailed explanations. Practitioners insist on the importance of many layers of value for a brand by creating of strategic partnership, so a consumer could be exposed to it holistically.

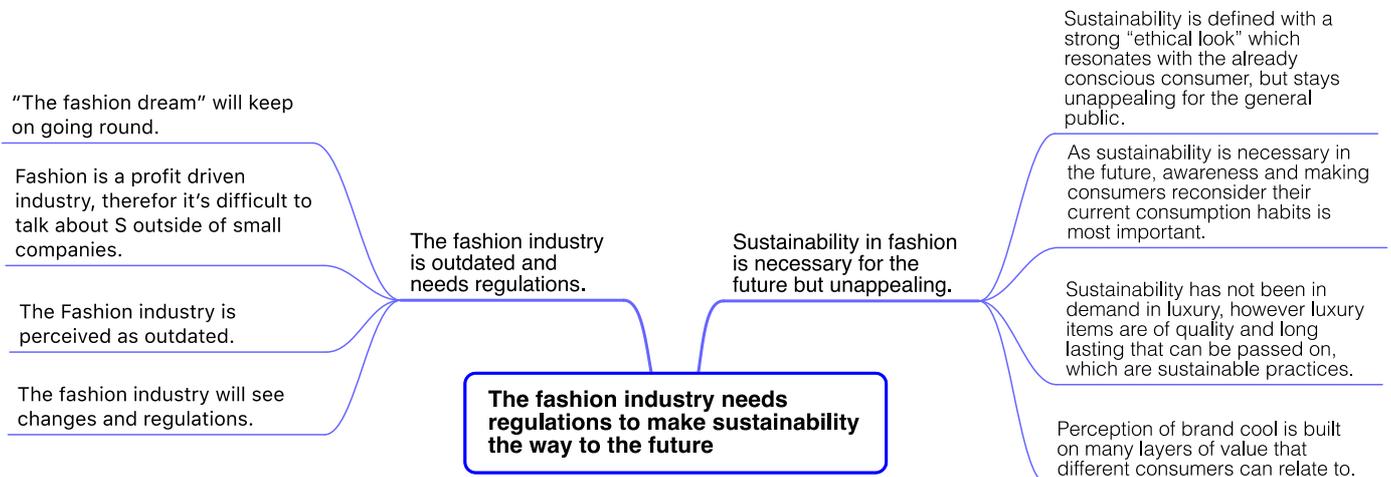
"When working with client we always try to take an idea and then package with as many additional layers of value as we can." Prof 2

Most frequently, professionals talked about references and peer recommendations and avant-garde qualities – products ahead of its time.

The term "careless detachment" highlights a new way of being 'woke', while not shouting it out loud. It is similar to the "ironic detachment" associated with Millennials.

"So for example for me the best way to sell it [sustainable fashion] to me and my generation who doesn't care about things like that, it would be just to do it and not mention it." Prof 5

2. The fashion industry needs to be more regulated to make sustainability the way to the future



Picture 5: Global Theme 2

Sustainability in fashion is perceived as undesirable and not cool and is not a priority as the demand is not significant.

"There are lots of common things between sustainability and luxury. But again maybe because of the client did not care maybe because of many, many reason they did not really move into that." Prof 3

However, sustainability is necessary for the future of the industry, according to professionals. They are capable to articulate where the issues lie, as for instance with the "ethical look" Prof 2.

And suggest possible solutions to the problem, such as raising awareness of consumption habits and giving responsibility to consumer and/or governments.

Professionals are also very aware of the business values and outdated rules in the fashion industry.

"If there's industry behind it's hard to speak about sustainability. In the end, it's always about making profits." Prof 1

Connecting the findings with the literature and contextualisation of artefact

The literature as well as the research findings confirm that cool is very difficult to define (Armfield, 1986, Pountain and Robins, 2000, Ferguson, 2011).

Generation Y participants highlighted the emotional side, it is almost like a feeling, a complex balance of subjective emotions and popular culture, something that is both personal and accepted by a lot of people. This stands in opposition to the literature where researchers tried to define it qualitatively (Armfield, 1986; Pountain and Robins, 2000; Mohiuddin et al. 2016) and quantitatively (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012; Runyan et al, 2013; Noh et al., 2014; Quartz and Asp, 2016). Professionals account for a more rational, almost fabricated cool, named “brand cool”. It describes the layers of “added value” PR and fashion professionals seek to add to a brand and product, often with strategic partnerships, to position them as cool. It seemed that cool functions like a construct that needs a lot of strategic messaging and endorsements to attract Gen Y. The findings confirm Runyan’s conclusion that cool means different things to different people (2013).

A set of criteria of cool also emerged from the results. The researcher has compared those to the conceptual framework proposed by Mohiuddin et al. (2016), finding confirmation, with slight variations, for all of them. These criteria can allow brands and PR professionals to better understand their “cool” positioning and the valuable characteristics of a brand in order to create communication in alignment with their strengths.

Mohiuddin et al. (2016)	This research
Deviating from norm	Out of ordinary
Pro-social	Forward looking, open minded
Self-expressive	Confidence
Indicative of maturity	Self-awareness
Evasive	Effortless
Attractive	Attractive, desirability
Subversive	Forward looking open minded

Figure 4: Cool framework – criteria comparison

To illustrate what cool means for Millennials the researcher has developed a Cool Brand Map (CBM) which will uses Mohiuddin’s criteria to determine brand cool. More details in the Report (Figure 5).

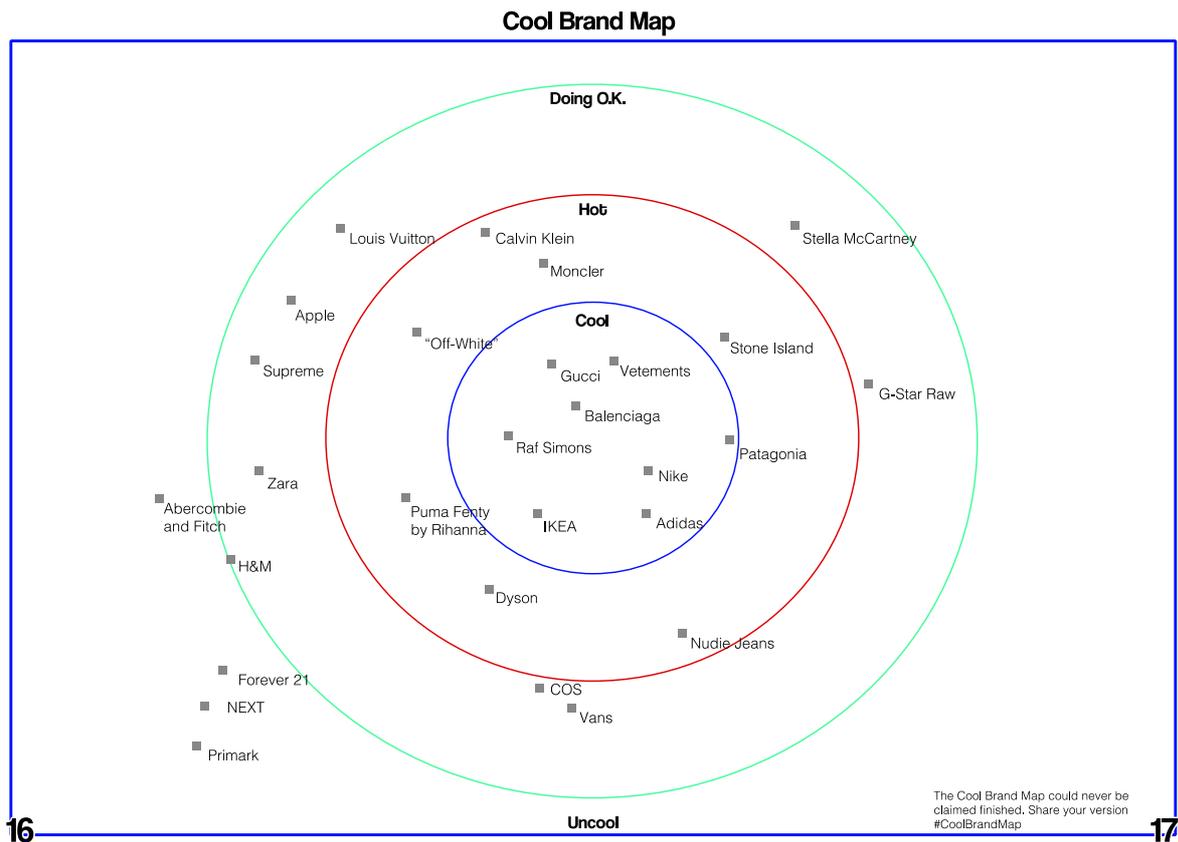


Figure 5: CBM (compiled by the author)

A big part of the history of cool is tied to rebellion (Connor, 1995; Dinerstein, 1998; Ferguson, 2011; Belk et al. 2015). Embodied by iconic personas like James Dean, the “Rebel without a cause”, studied by Dinerstein (1998), today rebellion takes a new meaning. As one participant explains, you don’t have to be a skater to be cool, you can also be nice and be cool. As touched upon before, Gen Y are “opiniated sceptics” (Chong, 2017) and they are aware of how the systems affects them and seek to do better.

Contextualising that within the concept of cool, Millennials are rebels with a cause. This may come as a surprise as the literature can leave one with the impression of cool existing as a narcissistic, cynical, pleasure seeking individual, as described by Pountain and Robins (2000). This idea still applies, as brands like Balenciaga and Gucci, that capitalise on ironic detachment, cynicism and the “cool mask” (Dinerstein, 1998, p.266). But the underlying awareness opens an opportunity for being nice, doing good and being cool coming together. Essentially this is an opportunity to introduce sustainable fashion in a new light and align it with the idea that being pro-social is cool (as seen in Mohiuddin et al. (2016) criteria).

Most important for this work is cool's meaning for sustainable fashion. Both professionals and Millennials have given the same unnegotiable feedback – understated.

Main things consumers look for are quality, design and image of a brand. They mention sustainability, as an element of the background, however, with the potential to add more value and be a trigger of consumption.

As the literature addresses, sustainable fashion is not appealing or attractive to millennials (Lewis, 2008; Black, 2012; Stoppard, 2016), which is confirmed by this research.

These conclusions require to ask, why sustainable fashion is so unappealing and alienating for most of Gen Y?

Firstly, there is the “misrepresentation” (Lewis, 2008, p. 236) of sustainable fashion, which confuses consumers, brands and media about what the term truly means. A lot of the literature on sustainable fashion suggests that the change of the fashion industry is in the hands of the consumer (Beard, 2008). Beard's claim that there is an issue with the way brands, the media and consumers (2008) speak about sustainability, is confirmed by this study. Millennials have an idea that varies about what sustainability is, from equal distribution of profit to a consideration of ethical and environmental issues around design and production.

Therefore, the researcher has taken on the task to create the Spectrum of Sustainability for consumers and brands, to introduce clarity into the ways sustainability can be understood and practiced. The main goal of the spectrum will be to raise awareness and help professionals understand and communicate correct practices around sustainability in fashion in a way that is easily understood. And also make clear that 100% sustainability is impossible, when talking about consumable products, and allow the space for all different practices (Figure 6).

Spectrum of Sustainability

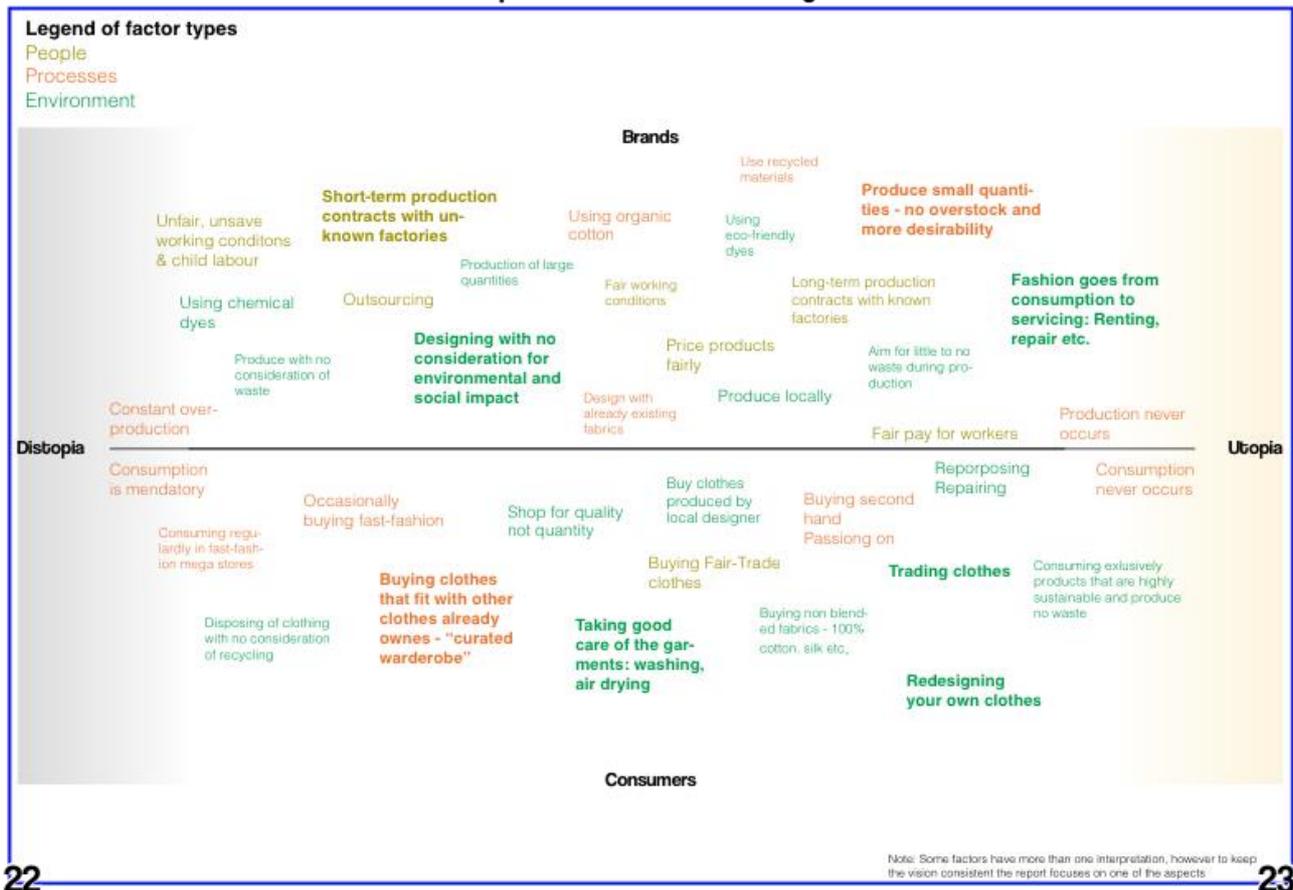


Figure 6: Sustainability Spectrum (compiled by the author)

Another reason for the unappealing image of sustainable fashion is the incorrect consumer targeting. Professionals express concern that their industry is outdated and in need of regulation, suggesting an incapacity of the industry to respond adequately to consumer needs. This mixture of the emotional response – getting excited about the fashion dream world – and the rational – fashion as an outdated and polluting industry – creates confusion and a lack of trust in the industry. The findings highlight that the participants don't feel as a part of the conversation around sustainable fashion because it seems that it is addressing the conscious consumer, or the “sacrifice” consumer (McNeill and Moore, 2015). The focus of the promotion has completely shifted to the production or materials which is not the “fashion dream” that people want to buy into. Therefore, there is a need to reconsider the messages that sustainable brands send, as it needs to be aligned with the target and the brand values. Some participants even suggest that sustainable fashion should not be a term, it should just be fashion, which implies the need for a bigger shift in the industry.

As a practical solution to the issues around the perception of cool and sustainable fashion and the issue of incorrect consumer targeting, the researcher has provided a Cool – Sustainability Map (Figure 7).

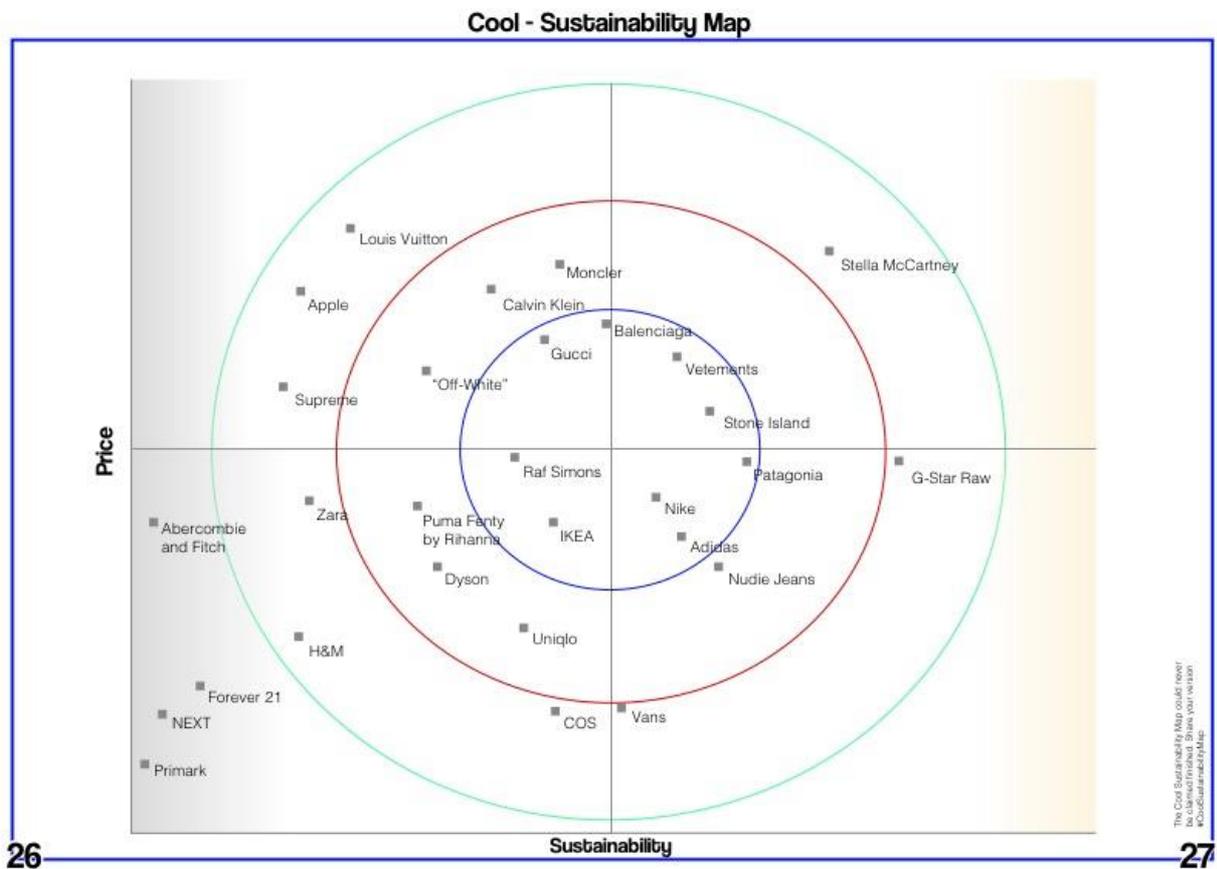


Figure 7: Cool-Sustainability Map

The aim of this map is to illustrate the complex relationship between cool, sustainability and price, that are all important aspects of the purchase decision process of Millennials.

The map also accounts for four categories of consumers depending on the positioning in the map and their communication needs: unconcerned average consumer, unconcerned luxury consumer, conscious luxury consumer and conscious average consumer. The interest of this work is communication strategic planning for luxury and average conscious consumer. They both fit in the larger category by McNeill and Moore of “social” consumer (2015), who has the highest potential of being influenced and adopting sustainable fashion practices, if the perception of SF was shifted.

The consumer categories are further developed in the Report.

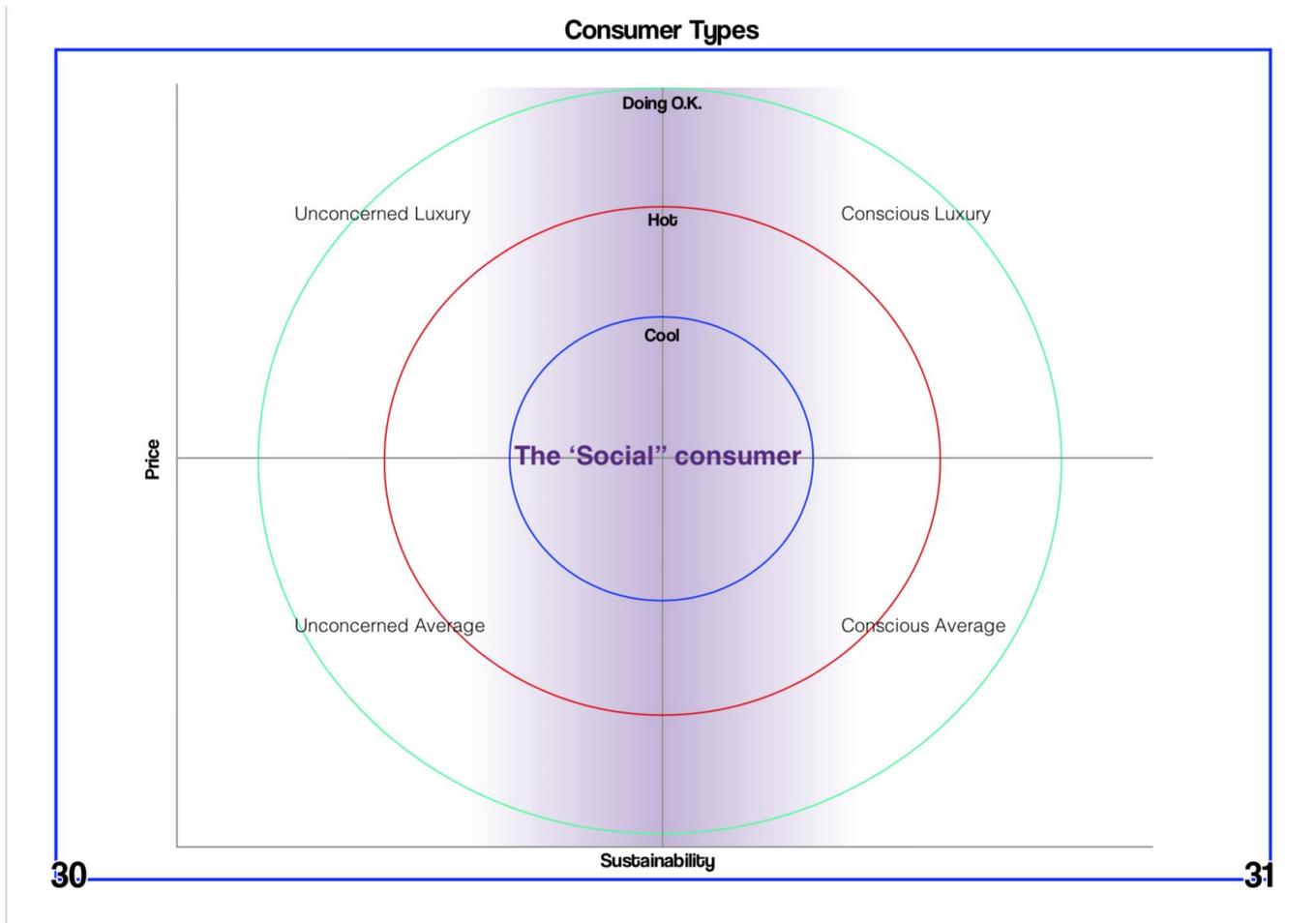


Figure 8: Consumer Types

Based on these findings sustainability shall continue to be part of the communication strategy, however in a less pronounced manner, first in line are the design and quality. Understated sustainable practices make a fashion brand even cooler in the eyes of Millennial consumers, according to the findings. Aggressive, explicit messages on sustainable practices therefore do not work on Gen Y. It is best if they “accidentally discover” it. Practices that challenge the intuitive business logic also grab Millennial’s attention as it often involves original new services.

Cool and sustainable fashion carry the potential of introducing change to the fashion industry if presented in balanced way.

Cool and sustainability in combination, could also be a trigger for (the right type of) consumption. Some participants have highlighted feelings of positive perception of self when consuming products that are more ethical and cool products that they find out are sustainable are perceived as “even cooler” (Con

7). This can be linked back to the findings from Quarts and Asp that suggest cool being a “game changer”, acting as a sort of social meter that constantly scanning for relevant references. The combination of cool and SF adds an additional layer of value.

To summarise, the tools: The CBM, the Sustainability Spectrum and the Cool-Sustainability Map (CSM), outline a foundation for recommended PR Best Practice and strategic communication planning for sustainable fashion, linked with cool. (See Artefact).

Artefact

Find the full report:

<http://bit.ly/cool-sustainability-report1>



Figure 9: Report Cover Page

Conclusion

This research aimed to bring clarity to the concept of cool in relation to SF according to Millennials aged 20-30 years, while focusing on three objectives.

For the first objective - to introduce clarity into what Millennials believe is cool - the researcher has found that much of the original characteristics of cool are still present to an extent today, like ironic detachment or rebellion. However cool means different things to different people and Millennials go beyond the hedonic or utilitarian values of a brand and seek more. They see cool also as doing *good*. Millennials are rebels with a cause and they want brands that have many layers of value and sustainability could be one of them.

For the second objective - determine what cool means in a sustainable fashion context - the findings show clearly that explicit messages on sustainability rarely spark the interest of Millennials. They prefer a subtle message and finding those details on their own. The research also clarified some issues around the understanding of sustainable fashion and its unappealing image.

To address the third objective - propose a PR Best Practice Report - solutions are provided, seeking to make a sustainable brand cool. In order to visualise the findings, the researcher has used information designs techniques, to prepare a set of tools that can be seen in the Artefact. The CBM is positioning brands regarding their level of cool and the Sustainability Spectrum that aims helps professional in PR understand the nuances in the term to avoid greenwashing are merged into the CSM.

The CSM provides the visual representation of the connection between sustainability and cool. It also takes price into consideration, as higher prices have been a concern regarding SF for many years. It provides a solution for the “social” consumer (McNeill and Moore, 2015) who is constantly balancing the friction between getting cool products or getting sustainable products. This map, allows a visual representation of this dynamic, allowing brands and PR professionals to better understand what a consumer needs, in order to either offer products satisfying that need, or adjust their messaging to address their target customer. This will eliminate the problem of alienation and will influence positively the overall perception of sustainable fashion, as everyone will have a different interpretation of it, yet it will be the one they care about.

Limitations regarding sample size could be overcome in future research with more interviews conducted with Millennials and PR professionals, in order to improve the transferability and dependability of the findings.

Further testing and development of the PR tools is recommended, as the maps proposed are dynamic and can change as consequence to significant events in the fashion industry. The artefact can be taken as a starting point of further testing of the maps and make it the foundation of an online platform discussing the issues and challenges around making sustainable fashion cool.

The value of the findings in this research lies in the confirmation that cool today can mean *good*. A connection with SF was found and it is interesting as it is quite simple – understated. Therefor the Report can help professionals understand the underlying issues around the communication practices and adjust to get the right message across, as Millennials care and do want more cool-*good* products.

This relates back to the bigger socio-economic backdrop mentioned in the beginning. The link between cool and SF is aligned with the idea of sustainable capitalism, as it is not rejecting the idea of consuming, however it introduces new, more creative ways to do so, that has been touched on with the Sustainable Spectrum. It could be argued that this research brings a new perspective and value to sustainable fashion that could encourage the rethinking of bigger issues in the fashion industry and in consumer practices.

Appendices

Appendices 1: Framework of cool: Cool characteristics explained (Mohiuddin et al., 2016)

Characteristics	Adjectives associated with cool in literature	Suggestions to associate the characteristic with social marketing programmes	Example of suggested social marketing programme tactics
Deviating from norm	Unconventional, counter-cultural, non-conformist, rebellious, extra-ordinary, fresh, innovative, creative, exclusive, niche, separatist	Highlight that a competing behaviour is a mainstream norm Communicate the flaws in the existing norm Communicate that the desired behaviour change is deviating from the norm	Truth® highlighted that normative beliefs regarding smoking were based on manipulative claims by tobacco companies
Self-expressive	Individualist, unique, authentic, anti-commercial, personalised, improvised, oriented to self-esteem, sexually permissive, humorous, interactive	Provide social platforms and opportunities to target segments for self-expression Substantiate authenticity	Truth® engaged target segment in social critique and advocacy to fight back against tobacco companies VERB™ provided means for participants to develop games by themselves
Indicative of maturity	Autonomous, genuine, sincere, purposeful, composed	Use humour Allow unaided and independent evaluation of existing norm Facilitate contribution of the target segment to the campaign	Truth® did not use instructive messages, allowed target segments to make unaided and independent decisions Truth® involved target segments in tactic development
Subversive	Irreverent, confident, hedonistic, trend-setting, novelty oriented, transient, spontaneous, unpredictable, indulgent, thrill-seeking, risk-taking, abusing substance	Include suitable suggestions from the target segments Promote maturity as a feature of the programme Arrange exclusive attractive events such as small concerts or parties Communicate how the social programme and the desired behaviour change can be hedonistic and irreverent	Rescue SCG arranged concerts for target segments VERB™ arranged road tours for target segment
Pro-social	Pro-social justice, democratic, anti-exploitation, overcoming insecurity, self-development oriented and empowerment oriented	Communicate how the existing behaviours are not pro-social Promote how the desired behaviour contributes to pro-social objectives	Truth® highlighted that normative beliefs regarding smoking were based on manipulative claims by tobacco companies
Evasive	Calm, low-profile, subtle, mysterious, ironical, difficult to understand	Incorporate irony in messages Use selective media to communicate to target segment	Truth® developed ironical messages Rescue SCG used selective media to communicate to target segments
Attractive	Interesting, fun, good quality, aesthetic, fashionable, provides status within sub-group, popular	Arrange exclusive attractive events such as small concerts or parties Involve attractive celebrities chosen by the target segments Gain insight and understanding of sub-cultures and the relevant rituals and use activities that engage with these cultural elements	Rescue SCG arranged concerts for target segments VERB™ arranged road tours for target segment VERB™ used attractive celebrity chosen by target segment for endorsement

Table II.
Characteristics of cool and relevant social marketing programme tactics

Appendices 3: Sampling techniques

Chosen method	Application
Non-probability sampling	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Includes an element of subjective judgement - No rules of sample size <p>(Saunders et al, 2016)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Helps the interpretation of the key concepts: cool and sustainable fashion - Considering the time and resource limitation an optimal sample size will be aimed for
Purposeful sampling	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used in qualitative study - Researcher purposefully chooses the individuals to inquire, based on ability to inform the study <p>(Creswell, 2013, p. 156; Robinson, 2014 p. 32)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Careful selection of participants to be undertaken <p>Target of the study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - young members of Generation Y (20-30 years old) - PR and fashion industry professionals
Combination of homogenous and critical case	
<p>Critical case</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used to emphasise a point or because of the importance of participants - Could be basis for logical generalisations <p>Homogenous sampling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focuses on one group with similar characteristics <p>(Saunders et al, 2016)</p>	<p>Professionals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Selection of influential practitioners in PR and fashion <p>Consumers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Members of Gen Y (20-30 years old) - Interest in fashion and cool

Appendices 4: Interviewee profiles

Research Code Name	Occupation	Location
Pro 1	Freelance fashion PR professional	Berlin
Pro 2	Fashion PR director	London
Pro 3	Chief Strategy officer in sustainable fashion & tech company	
Pro 4	In-house PR practitioner in luxury fashion	Milan
Pro 5	Personal shopper and creative consultant	London

Research Code Name	Occupation and age	Location
Con 1	Student, 26	London
Con 2	PR executive, 26	London
Con 3	Account executive, 25	Paris
Con 4	Digital creative developer, 27	London
Con 5	Art dealer and music manager, 23	Oslo
Con 6	Studio Manager in fashion, 25	London
Con 7	Architect, 27	Berlin
Con 8	Student/ sustainable fashion blogger, 28	London

Appendices 7: Ethical principles

The principles outlined are as seen in Sanders et al., 2016 p. 243-245. The application to the research is outlined by the researcher.

Table 1: Ethical principles and application to this research

Ethical principle	Application to this research
Integrity and objectivity of the researcher	The researcher has made effort to be as objective as possible in the research process by conducting detailed secondary research that challenges any preconceived meanings about the research question. Bias has been actively avoided by requesting third-party feedback from research supervisor and other academics not involved in the research process. The findings have been honestly and transparently analysed in order to protect the credibility of the research. Those are available upon request. No conflict of interest has occurred during the research process.
Respect for others	The researcher has acted responsibly towards participants' time, effort and willingness to participate. All participants were treated equally respectfully.
Avoidance of harm	Due to the 'light' character of the research no real treat of causing harm has emerged, however the research has treated all participants with respect and dignity, respected their rights and wished before, during and after the research process. All data used in the research is gathered and used with the permission of the participants.
Privacy of those taking part	The researcher has respected the right to privacy of those taking part, providing them with information about the research before they agree. Informed consent forms are provided to them once they agree. Afterwards the researcher has used coding in order to protect the identity of the participants.
Voluntary nature of participation and right to withdraw	The researcher has approached potential participants with respect, meaning that those, that did not shown interest, were not 'pushed' to take part, and those that could not find time were not 'chased', but rather the researcher has thanked them for the interest and proceeded to recruit other participants. The researcher has made it very clear to all participants that they can withdraw from the research at any moment without giving a reason, not answer questions they do not desire to, to change their consent, all outlined in the Informed Consent Form.
Informed consent of those taking part	An Informed Consent Form has been provided to participants in face-to-face interviews. All other were provided with the PDF file via e-mail before the interview. For the full version of the Informed Consent Form see Appendices 6.
Ensuring the confidentiality of data and maintenance of anonymity of those taking part	Individuals and the organisations they work for have been kept confidential in the research Findings and Analysis. The confidentiality of the participants is ensured by the researched, by coding their names into research code used for quotes in the research. This helps enhance the dependability and credibility of the findings.
Responsibility in the analysis of data and reporting of findings	To avoid falsification of the findings the researcher has transcribed the interviews word-to-word. By not altering any of the primary data, the researcher has allowed for unexpected outcomes to come to the surface, adding true value to the results (this connects back to the application of abductive approach)
Compliance in the management of data	The researched has not taken any actions, to their knowledge, that contradict the laws and legislations about management of personal data.
Ensuring the safety of the researcher	The safety of the researcher has not been threatened during the researcher process.

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