

Present and Future of Fast Fashion: Roadmap to Sustainability

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Structured Abstract

Background scientific research: Sustainability in Fashion companies is no longer an option but the “new normal”, evidenced by its privileged place in the Fashion Industry’s Agenda in 2020 (Ley et al., 2020). Fashion industry is considered to be the second most pollutant in the world, textiles are the fourth highest-pressure category for the use of raw materials and water, after food, housing, and transport, and fifth for GHG emissions (European Commission, 2020). Clothing production doubled from 2000 to 2014 and the number of garments purchased each year by the average consumer increased by 60% (Remy et al., 2016). People use their clothes half as much as they did in 2000 (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017): in some countries such as China, clothing utilisation has decreased by 70% in the same period (Remy et al., 2016). Undoubtedly, the fashion industry is now a relevant player in the economic scene, with a contribution of more than \$2.4 trillion to global manufacturing (UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion, 2020), and more than 300 million people employed if we include the clothing industry along the value chain (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2020) all across the world. It is clearly a growing sophisticated business with a fragmented and relative low-tech production system (Remy et al., 2016).

Covid 19 pandemic has shown the weaknesses and the opportunities of the supply chains in fashion: offshoring vs nearshoring; massive orders cancelled vs changing collections by basic products; on line retail benefits vs hunger in lockdown workers from producing countries, etc. All the rungs of the value chain have been affected (from cotton farmers with around 100 million households directly engaged in the production (Uddin, 2020) to shop retailers temporary laid-off, not to mention the thousands of factories that have reported cancellations only in

Bangladesh worth \$3.18 billion, affecting 2.28 million workers until the 1st of May 2020 (BGMEA, 2020).

Sustainability in fashion is not a new issue, as many scholars have pointed it before (Sandin et al., 2019; Ferri and Pedrini, 2018; Ferri, 2017; Mora and Bellotti, 2016; Ozdamar and Atik, 2015; Prieto et al., 2019; Joy et al., 2012; Blázquez, et al., 2020) to name only a few.

These past months with pandemic crisis, fast fashion brands (sometimes based on huge production and low prices), have had to make difficult decisions to survive. The next years are supposed to be similarly uncertain. Pandemic and uncertainty seem to have affected more fast fashion than luxury sector, but is it real?

Research hypothesis/Problem to be addressed: In this difficult time for the fashion industry, is there currently room for sustainability in Fast Fashion? Which are the main challenges for Fast Fashion to achieve sustainability in the short and long term?

Methodology used to involve participants in the workshop: There are many issues to be tackled when talking about sustainability. We will put up 10 subjects in a “virtual box”, so as each participant has to choose one and discuss the possible solutions, good practices or researches in process. The dialogue among the participants and the solutions to each challenge will be registered and classified to elaborate a “Roadmap to sustainability in Fast Fashion” at the end of the Workshop, with the participation of the attendees.

The subjects proposed for discussion are:

1. What do we understand as sustainability?
2. Can the Fast Fashion’s business model be sustainable?
3. How to balance this situation among consumers in developed countries and producers in developing countries?
4. How the massive job cuts because of the losses during pandemic in big retailers can affect social sustainability?
5. Is there any Fast Fashion brand committed to responsible sourcing practices?
6. Many stores across the world have been closed for ever in these six months. Which is the future of apparel stores to attract Coronavirus consumers? Does the e-commerce would be a good solution or are there other non-sustainable effects?
7. How to reorganize companies in danger of bankruptcy, paying attention to the 3 P: People, planet and profit?

8. Are there good practices in fast fashion design (use of leftover fabric as main fabrics, reuse of remaining stocks in timeless designs, etc.?)
9. Have the consumers changed their commitment to responsible consumption, when the crisis affects directly to them?
10. Is the shift to nearshoring a real solution to pandemic crisis? What would it mean in offshoring countries workers?

Results expected and achieved at the conference. Relevance for fashion theory and practice: The dialogue among participants (scholars, personalities from the industry, practitioners, etc.) is always enriching. With this workshop we can obtain some insights of the questions at the present moment and highlight a possible roadmap for fast fashion sustainability in pandemic times.

It might serve as a basis for developing an in-depth research on any of the aspects turned to be more relevant.

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