

## **Experimenting and Evaluating Sustainable Fashion Label System Prototype**

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### **Abstract**

The fashion industry is the third most polluting industry (Howell, 2020) following fuel and agriculture. It creates 10% of humanity's carbon emissions (Fleischmann, 2019). The production and consumption of fashion products cause an irreversible negative impact on humans, animals, and the environment. There have been several studies, projects, and initiations aiming to increase the sustainability of the fashion industry. But the consumers' sustainable behavior about purchase and consumption is still not satisfactory (Vehmas et al., 2017; Kong et al., 2016; Kong and Ko, 2017).

Two main factors avoiding consumers' ability to act on their favorable attitudes are (1) lack of awareness and (2) lack of credible information and communication (James and Montgomery, 2017; Peirson-Smith and Evans, 2017). In other words, fashion consumers either lack awareness about sustainable products or have awareness but cannot reach information easily and digest the attained information. For example, fashion brands create their labels in parallel with their product lines including concepts and procedures such as organic, ecological, sustainable, or ethical. Nevertheless, they do not clearly explain their intention and they do not measure the impact of these practices. They barely provide how and where their sustainable goods are produced, which sustainable procedures are followed, and what impact they created on human and animal life and the environment.

On the other hand, there are trustable certifications measuring fashion products' sustainability based on their determined criteria such as OekoTex, Fair Trade, Certified B Corp, PETA, and more. However, some of them are perceived to be too technical and complicated for fashion consumers (Koszweska, 2011). These measures are not easily digested by the consumer. Moreover, terms and procedures are also unfamiliar to the consumer as well as other stakeholders of the fashion system (Thomas, 2008). For example, the consumer does not know what upcycling, downcycling, and recycling referring yet certifications, brands and experts use such terms to define sustainable products. All these confusing or technical sources of information cause frustration and avoid inclining of sustainable purchase and consumption (Evans and Peirson-Smith, 2018).

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The literature and preliminary findings of this research document that if sustainability awareness and sustainability literacy of information sources are increased, fashion consumer can alter their behaviors in more sustainable directions. To be able to increase these two, literature and our preliminary findings led us to the lack of an attention-grabbing, and easy-to-understand tool providing a mediating role. Therefore, this research aims to explore characteristics of a label system to communicate five sustainability criteria of a fashion product to increase sustainability awareness and literacy of fashion consumers. These criteria are (1) material, raw material, and procedure, (2) environmental impact, (3) <sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub> social and ethical welfare, (4) animal welfare (5) post-purchase and product care. In this way, it is expected to assist sustainable behavior regarding the purchase, and consumption of fashion consumers by filling the gap to give sustainability information of a fashion product.

By the time this abstract is submitted, the literature review, three exploratory focus group sessions (as the first set), a participatory design workshop in Global Fashion Conference 2020 (GFC2020), an online survey, and three sessions of the second focus group set are completed. Based on what literature indicated as previously highlighted, we conducted three focus group sessions and discovered that (1) fashion consumer has knowledge gap about sustainability. (2) There are transparency, trust, and literacy problems in fashion. (3) Different levels and types of information are required for different consumer segments. (4) A tool to increase awareness and behavior is needed. In the second round of literature review, we listed existing certifications, labels, terms and five criteria that fashion consumer expects to know about the sustainability of a fashion product. With these findings, we conducted a conference workshop at GFC2020 to evaluate the idea. The result of this workshop motivated us to focus on what consumers need and how to develop the label. Then, we finished the second set of focus groups and collected feedback and information to design a prototype of the label. With all focus group findings, four user personas are defined. These personas represent four diversified fashion consumer segments which are (1) people who know about sustainable fashion but feels confused about what they know, (2) people who are skeptical and cynical about sustainable fashion, (3) people who are romantically positive about sustainable fashion and (4) people who are a more selfish and pragmatic therefore prior themselves over sustainable fashion consumption.

As the next step, these personas are planned to be used in a participatory design session for prototype design of label. Designers, consumers, policymakers, brand executives, and researchers are planned to be invited to this session.

Before Global Fashion Conference 2021 is held, we will have the prototype design responding to the needs of four personas. In the GFC2021 workshop, we plan to exhibit the prototypes to the conference audience for testing and evaluation. The workshop methodology will use participatory design approaches with vignettes, and prototype testing methods. The participants will be given four vignettes that will be written

after prototypes are completed. These vignettes will be telling different scenarios involving the usage of label prototypes. Through these vignettes, participants will be able to take a role in different scenarios. In this way, they will be able to interact, use, and experience the label prototypes. In the end, they will be asked to comment and critique the prototypes.

Expected results of the workshop are a source of information to be worked on by designers for the second iteration of prototypes and user as well as expert feedback that will be used on developing the final label design.

**Keywords:** sustainability, fashion communication, labelling, participatory design workshop, vignette, persona, segmentation

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