

Fashion brands websites as a potential channel to educate sustainable consumers

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Abstract

Background scientific research: Sustainability in fashion is not an option anymore, but the new normal. The industry has experimented a shift towards more respectful ways of sourcing and production, and it tries to involve the final consumer in its practices to close the loop.

New regulations are expected in the European Union, promoting the Extended Producer Responsibility, as a part of the New Economy Action Plan for a Green and Competitive Europe under the New Green Deal (European Commission, 2020:13). One of the objectives of the new regulations is to empower both business and private consumers to choose sustainable textiles.

In recent years, and mainly during the Covid-19 pandemic, the ecommerce has experimented a big increase, doubling the share of previous years. Only in Spain, e-commerce meant 19.4% of the total fashion sales in 2020 (Modaes, 2021). Both, luxury and mass-market sectors are doing efforts to increase their sustainability and to report and communicate their results as a transparency exercise. However, there are some differences depending on the scope of the information: corporative websites of the fashion groups offer well-structured and abundant information about the sustainability values of the corporation, while the fashion brands' websites are more focused on sales, and offer uneven information.

A lot of scholars have developed different models to evaluate websites (Dach and Allmendinger, 2014; Strähle et al., 2015; Siano et al., 2016; Otto et al., 2016), but a lot has changed since their studies, and their models have not been updated in recent years. This study wants to offer a new model, updating the others and

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providing a basis to compare corporative websites of the groups, and e-commerce websites of the brands. After the model, we want to explore the potential of the websites to educate their consumers in the sustainability aspects, in order to engage them in the possibility of closing the loop with the brands (Dach & Allmendinger, 2014; Baldassarre & Campo, 2016; Olofsson & Mark-Herbert, 2020).

Research issue to be addressed: In this study, we want to find out a model for evaluating how both corporate groups and fashion brands communicate sustainability through their websites; and to explore the potential of their websites to educate their consumers towards more sustainable choices.

Methodology used: First of all, we have done a review of the literature on sustainability and fashion, communication and fashion, and different models of evaluating websites.

Then, we have analyzed four big fashion groups, the biggest in terms of fast-fashion and in terms of luxury: Inditex, H&M, Kering, and LVMH. We have applied the models of evaluating to their webpages: for those of the four groups, and for those brands of the groups that have a section or microsite on sustainability. This is a total of 4 corporative webs and 17 brands' webs. We have disregarded the brands more related to non-textile fashion (like eyewear, or watches in the luxury groups; or home and textiles in the fast fashion groups). We have also not considered the fashion brands that don not have any specific section about sustainability.

Results achieved (conclusions) or expected as well as their relevance for theory and practice: After having applied the OSEC model to the 21 websites analyzed, we propose a new version of this model, updating some aspects and adding others, to meet the needs of both, the corporative and the ecommerce websites. Ranking the information with the new model, we have obtained that the four groups analyzed (Inditex, H&M, Kering and LVMH) are very consistent in terms of communicating sustainability. If we go to the brands websites, the results are quite different, ranging from 23-25% in Marc Jacobs, Brioni or Uterqüe, to 69% in Monki or 75% in Gucci.

The groups are giving more information about sustainability to their investors and the general public than the brands to their consumers. There is a huge potential to involve consumers form the e-commerce websites.

Moreover, the trends are similar in bots sectors, luxury and mass markets. Kering and H&M obtain the same punctuation (80%), and the best brands in terms of communication are ARKET (H&M Group), and Gucci (Kering group).

Keywords: sustainable fashion; sustainability communication; corporate website; e-commerce; consumer involvement

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