

FLOURISH



THE
CREATIVITY
ISSUE

SUSTAINABILITY

SHOULDN'T BE A
DIRTY WORD

KELLY DARCY

THE FASHION CONSULTANT ON
A SUSTAINABILITY MISSION

NOVEMBER 2019



DEFENDING SOMETHING DOESN'T MAKE YOU AN EXTREMIST

KELLY DARCY

Three times this week I have been challenged on my life choices, the first one was in a charity shop where I was buying second-hand crockery for a vegan afternoon tea party I plan to host. The lady behind the counter asked me if being vegan was good for the animals, and so I mindfully explained, she promptly defended her stance with "what about the farmers?" I said, "well, we all have to evolve sometime, and there are other things they can grow aside from livestock". We exchanged thank you's as I left the shop and I thought it was a fair exchange of opinions. This level of conversation I believe is helpful because even though the transaction had some awkward elements, I felt like I had left with a fair amount of balanced opinion on either side if only the rest of my interactions this week had followed suit.

The second exchange of words I had this week involved meeting a friend at a members club on Dean Street London, as I had arrived early I asked the barman to suggest a vegan wine, and his response was "what the hell is in wine that doesn't make it vegan?"

Again I calmly responded with a justified response "well it is sometimes filtered or fermented in fish guts" the laughter and barrage of jokes I received for a good five minutes was embarrassing, to say the least. To the point where after I had sat down, he later came over to apologies for his behaviour. Then the next day I was at a textile conference luncheon at the Houses of Parliament and the person on my left at the table I was seated at worked for a manmade fibre company. I hoped we could have some healthy conversation regarding sustainability, and yes you guessed it, the conversation went

down like I had just accused the guy of being single-handedly responsible for climate change. I explained we all have a part to play, and no one is entirely to blame, can we not all do better? This week, in particular, given all these interactions that I have faced personally, I can sense the apparent angst surrounding the discourse of sustainability. This level of polarisation between us as humans is increasing in the digital age where social media allows us to adopt a stance we may not have if we were talking face to face. Because we can hide behind a keyboard and become a lot more opinionated without being directly confronted physically, that and the exposure to homogeneity due to the ease of online globalisation means we have increased cognitive dissonance. The cognitive dissonance theory (CDT) suggests that when individuals hold two or more contradicting cognitions, they feel psychologically uncomfortable (Festinger, 1957)

Cognitive dissonance is explained psychologically as when we have two or more contradicting cognitions we struggle with the internal conflict. An example is loving Mulberry or Louis Vuitton handbags but knowing that they only work with calf leather and that a young animal is killed (not even as a by-product of the food industry) for the soft longlasting accessory, this is significantly converted with fans of the luxury fashion houses. This internal conflict works in conjunction with another psychological phenomenon that is almost certainly going on at the same time, and that is confirmation bias, this is where we will defend to the ends of the earth our stance on something because we justify what we have previously thought, known or done historically. It is hard to 'Nudge' someone into a different way of thinking or making an alternative action. For years for me, it was 'well a Louis Vuitton bag will last me a lifetime, and I can hand it down as an heirloom, I love the craftsmanship and the heritage' I proclaimed like it was my own business, then I realised I was being brainwashed, now don't get me wrong I have a marketing background and feel that marketing can be an excellent tool if used with integrity, back to 'Nudging' as quoted by Leonard. T (2008) "Thaler and Sunstein, in many situations, a planner must make choices that will affect the behaviour of others. Their motivating illustration imagines a well-read campus cafeteria manager, Carolyn. Thaler and Sunstein call her a choice architect. Carolyn is up on the new behavioural research: she knows that different architectures (and not merely price) affect how people choose. If, for example, she replaces cake with fruit in the impulse basket next to the cash register, people buy more fruit and less cake". With choice, architecture comes a huge responsibility, but I believe we all can be choice architects and build a better fashion industry for it.

If we give our industry leaders, contributors and consumers autonomy over their decisions with fair balance for example price; why should the trainers that are made from recycled materials cost ten times more than the polyester on RRP not manufacturing costs as recently revealed by a former Addidas employee. The UK government Environmental Audit Committee produced 2019 a report on 'Fixing Fashion' in early 2019 and quoted "We want to see a thriving fashion industry in the UK that provides decent work, inspires creativity and contributes to the economic success of the UK. The fashion industry's current business model is unsustainable, especially with growing populations and rising levels of consumption across the globe. Over-consumption and climate change are driving widespread environmental damage. The exploitative and linear business model for fashion must change. The various parts of the fashion industry must come together to set out their blueprint for a net-zero emissions world. This will require reducing their carbon consumption back to 1990 levels. Given scientists' stark warnings on climate change and biodiversity loss, we need to fix fashion". It is clear from a political, social and economical point we need change and choice architects to 'Nudge' the population into choosing better or working to overcome their psychological cognitive dissonance, it is time for unhelpful truths rather than comforting lies but for an industry that relies on the need for expression, individuality or belonging and the 'must-have' mindset. It is all too easy to revert to the same old methods of profit over people and planet. The industry creates jobs and contributes to economies in lesser economically developed countries who now themselves look at the western approach to consumerism with disbelief in how much we have and aim to do better even with their evergrowing populations and rising middle class. These jobs are on the line if the consumer mindset and actions shift so much more to the consume less approach. Still, with the growing population of the world, the demand for clothing will far exceed the current crisis we face, put simply there will not be enough natural resources.



DESIRES FOR FAST FASHION IS FUELLED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

The UN says that "by 2050 the equivalent of almost three planets could be required to provide the natural resources needed to sustain current lifestyles given the growth in global population" SDG Goals Publication (2019). There literally at present is no plan B, yet there is so much resistance from some of the population it is like the B-word *spoken softly* Brexit. Mentioning anything to do with solving or just even making a small difference to the wicked problems of the fashion industry is like taking a red rag to a bull.

It appears there is a distinct buzz feeling to the word sustainability, and you can't attend a conference or read a publication in any sector or industry these days without coming across the word. Is that diluting the topic of sustainability or proof that it is really on everyone's agenda and if so why is there such a level of discomfort for some of the population when faced with the engagement of it? Also featured in the UK Governments Environmental Audit Committee papers was a suggestion of make and mend

"Our desire for fast fashion, fuelled by advertising, social media and a supply of cheap garments, means we are disposing of over a million tonnes of clothes every year in the UK. Under the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the UK is committed to 'to ensure sustainable consumption and production'. We need to reduce the environmental footprint of the UK's textile production and consumption. To do that, we need to reduce textile waste, improve resource efficiency and reduce the carbon emissions and water footprint of the clothes we buy. We need to simply buy less, mend, rent and share more. To support this we recommend that lessons on designing, creating, mending and repairing clothes be included in schools at Key stage 2 and 3. The creative satisfaction of designing and repairing clothing can offer an antidote to the growing anxiety and mental health issues amongst teenagers. As well as providing a space to promote creative expression, the skills learnt can also provide a potential pathway towards job opportunities". of course this would be a brilliant solution but most schools and education providers today focus on the digital revolution and of course the industrial revolution.

If I ask my younger sibling of a teenage age group to sit with me to repair a tear in her top, she responds with I don't have time for that I am learning how to code, which I should be proud of because she is dedicating her extracurricular activities to something that is mostly male-dominated. Still, I don't want her not to be able to fulfil the basics such as cooking from scratch, sewing or repairing clothing and hanging a shelf.

Can understanding cognitive dissonance play a part in choosing to consume more ethically? Is this awakening or realisation just a plaster over the increasing sustainability crisis? For me, It relies on understanding the issues and facing them with a PESTEL approach in human-centred design processes, we must advocate policy change and look to taxation reduction for good practice and increased taxation for harmful practices, we absolutely can not ignore the impact to economic growth but the market is shifting to an online consumerism regardless. Most of the companies are based outside of the UK for tax benefits, and socially we need to look at the psychology of the consumerist mindset and make effective choice architecture decisions for ourselves and those we directly or indirectly affect. There should be innovation in technology, no doubt, but there should be a level of awareness that technology has a severe lack of governance, especially digitally. The environment should be at the top of everyone's list as the climate crisis is irreversible. NASA confirms this in their Scientific Consensus 2018, and finally, legally there is a real sense of delay and catch up in policy, law and legislation where unfortunately due to the way the UK legal system works there is an uphill battle to pass anything through the justice system. For now, I will leave you with this thought;

Believe in something like it is going out of fashion.

