

Research in Practice: Proposal for Dissertation

Three key words: Fast Fashion, Sustainability, Anthropocene

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The growth in clothing consumption in recent years and the desire to stay on top of the latest trends has made the consumer drawn to low-cost clothes. Figures show that in 2019, 11.9 million women and 10.9 million men purchased clothes from the major low-budget clothing store *Primark* in the UK (Sabanoglu, 2020). With Primark being the largest retailer of fast fashion means that it is a contributor to the damaging effect on the environment. Concerns over the negative effects of current manufacturing processes of inexpensive clothing, the short life cycle and the disposability of cheap garments, the impact on landfill, and a passionate view of the urgent need for action worldwide in response to the current epoch of the Anthropocene has influenced my desire to investigate this topic further. This will help mitigate my future professional practice against the climate crisis. This has led me to select my 3 key words.

“Fast fashion is a term used to describe the readily available, inexpensively made fashion of today” (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). Many people want to keep up with the latest trends disregarding that waste has a major impact on the planet. “The UK produces over 1.5 million tonnes of textile waste a year, generated by the 35 kilos of clothing the average person purchases a year” (Jack, 2010:378). New practices need to be implemented throughout all stages of a garments life cycle to reduce the carbon footprint and waste in landfill. This will involve the fibres used in the design to the production of the garment, all the way through to the consumer. In recent years, high street brands such as *H&M*, *Topshop* and *Zara* have become leading brands in fast fashion. They produce clothing that has been influenced by the designs being showcased each season from top designers on catwalks. However, it is not just the manufacturing process that contributes to the problem. Clothes are not being reused or recycled enough. Consumers’ attitudes need to change towards being less wasteful. The high street brand, as previously mentioned, is the largest contributor to clothing being sent to landfill. Five years ago, the contribution to landfill waste was “7% of the waste stream and, now by weight, it was up to 30%” (Jack, 2010:108) with Primark being a main contributor.

Most low-cost garments are made from inexpensive un-recyclable materials, often in third world countries, which become more difficult to dispose of. They quickly become off-trend and then thrown away. Low-cost clothing is produced using several types of low-quality fibres. This can be seen on the care label of the garment. Low thread count, weight and

construction are common characteristics with low-cost items. All these factors indicate that the garment has less wearability. High street retailers today are beginning to become more aware and responsible for the negative ecological impact clothing is having on the environment and are beginning to make sustainable choices in their business paradigm.

Adverts have been broadcasted through social media and television to try and show their audience how they are becoming more environmentally friendly. For example, H&M's advert appearing on social media sites recently, using the famous actor Maisie Williams from the *Game of Thrones*, is promoting the brand to help its sustainability campaign to use only recycled or other sustainably sourced materials by 2030 (Independent,2021). The high-end denim brand *Levi*, in 2021, launched a campaign called *Buy Better, Wear Longer*. Like H&M, their adverts also featured famous faces, such as Jaden Smith, Emma Chamberlain, and Marcus Rashford MBE. Nonetheless, Levi's want consumers to purchase higher quality garments to help the clothing consumption impact, as these last longer. Levi's president Jen Sey claims:

So, we are also using this campaign to encourage consumers to be more intentional about their apparel choices: to wear each item longer, for example, to buy Second hand, or to use our in-store Tailor Shops to extend the life of their garments.

(Levi Strauss & Co,2021)

As Charles Darwin stated: "The most successful species are those which adapt best to the changing environment"(Darwin,1859). The Levi brand is doing this by investing in organic and natural fibres and using modern technologies to produce their garments. Also, to prompting consumers to keep garments for longer to reduce their carbon footprint. Educating the new generation on how fast fashion is unethical through social media platforms can have the potential to change attitudes and fashion habits, and to have the ability to shift to an industry that will produce less waste.

As industries strive to become more sustainable to alter the garment life cycle, to meet new goals to tackle the climate crisis, key advocate Kate Fletcher, Professor of Sustainability has launched a report *Earth Logic a Fashion Action Research Plan*, which is a "visionary and radical invitation to researchers, practitioners and decision makers to call out as fiction the idea that sustainability can be achieved within growth logic" (Fletcher and Tham, 2019,). This plan addresses the issue of design responsibility, to help avert the effects of the planet in a

decade. The system shows how it cuts straight to the core of the problem in overproduction and over consumption driven by economic growth. Kate Fletcher's plan is changing the perspective of the fashion sector to help prevent effects on the planet.



Fig.1 Eight Earth Logic Values

(colours relate to the fashion nests)

EARTH LOGIC – FASHION NESTS

SYSTEMS CHANGE IN CONTEXT

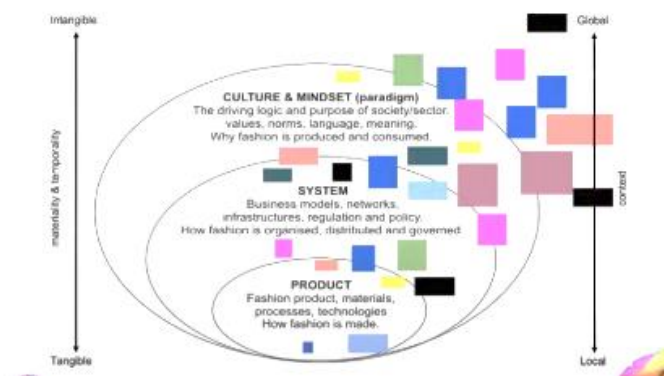


Fig.2 Earth Logic fashion nests system

To produce fast fashion, cheap manufacturing processing and techniques prioritise profit margins, rather than their environmental impact. The growing responsibility of a garment's life cycle is becoming more important to the companies involved through the chain and the consumer to what alternative approaches can be made. 'Buying less would be the largest prevention associated with the transition to sustainability' (Fletcher and Tham, 2019), according to Kate Fletcher in her video conference about *Earth Logic*.

This follows onto the second keyword *Sustainability*, as fast fashion rapidly produces garments to mass markets, the manufacturers need to adapt by finding new methods to reduce damage to the environment. Combining the two key words to make '*sustainable fashion*' can examine ethical factors in terms of design choices in production, to methods that the consumer can help reduce waste going to landfill. In recent years, the types of fibre quality have improved. Although to produce these fibres, it creates more toxic chemical

pollution “fibres and fabrics consume natural resources as well as using water and energy” (Goode,2013:145).

Giorgos Kallis, a political ecologist, believes there needs to be a shift in all production to stop generating excess and unnecessary products, goods and services and return to just manufacturing the basics (Earth Logic,2020,14:20). Kallis gives an example of this being more evident in the Covid-19 crisis, when industries were producing vital and necessary resources for the protection of public health but did not have the capacity to shift and distribute the resources, leaving the industry with an over production of PPE merchandise. The outdated economic system that drives the fast fashion industry has many factors and decisions that are made for goods to become a manufactured product. ‘Textile colouring and treatment accounts for between 17 percent and 20 percent of global industrial pollution’ (Mahapatra, 2016:18). Using certain dyeing processes and unethical fibres are destroying the planet. Manufacturers need to re-evaluate their environmental and carbon footprint. Reinforcing more sustainable approaches will help improve the environmental impact. Sofia Minney, MBE FRSA, a founder of *People Tree* (a fashion company that pride themselves on fair trade garments) who also is a campaigner for ethical fashion agrees with this: “There is a different way to doing fashion- producing less but increasing value addition in every product that we make and buy” (Earth Logic 2020).

The fashion industry uses synthetic fibres, which are rejuvenated from natural materials. These can magnify the ethical issues on a garment's life cycle. The chemical content of dyes in the colouring process, for example disperse dyes, uses copious quantities of water, even though the alternative options which are reactive dyes, are more environmentally friendly by using less water; they use a chemical formula during the steaming process (Baumann, Lacasse 2012:249). Natural colourants which are extracted from plants are the eco-friendly source for the fashion industry for adding colour to fibre. “The tannin colourants from plants are better options to replace or act as co-partners with synthetic dyes” (Mohammad, Salam,2016). Using natural based dyes to a greater degree is the way forward to add sustainable value to garments.

Additional negative impacts towards reaching sustainability are from printing methods but manufactures can adapt to more ethical ways to make a change. Rotary, digital and transfer printing are the primary methods used in manufacturing textiles (Goode,2013:137). Digital

printing process are more ecologically friendly as it directly translates the image onto the fabric resulting in 'reduction of waste, and transportation and warehousing costs' (McCann, Bryson2009:303). Plant fibres are being used in industry and high street brands are becoming more committed and responsible to ethical fashion. One high street brand *Zara* has created a collection called *Join Life* which uses recycled cotton and the biomaterial *TENCEL* to produce catwalk-inspired designs, created from entirely sustainable and forest-friendly materials (Fisher,2019). Using these methods and the new processes the manufacturer can help the rising issues of water consumption, landfill, chemical usage, and pollutions and therefore lessen their carbon footprint.



Fig.3 Zara 2021 Flowy Straight Leg Jeans Using TENCEL™

The life cycle of the garment does not stop after manufacturing and responsibility passes onto the consumer who can find ways to shop ethically, buying lasting quality products, reducing how many new clothes are bought, using them for longer, choosing classic styles and recycling consciously are some of the easiest steps to becoming more eco-friendly. 'Fads are a kind of fashion that people adopt very quickly, with great enthusiasm, the fads climb the peak of tide early, and their decline is equally fast' (Kazmi,2007,541). This can

mean adjusting how we shop, choosing garments that have a classic design and looking for ethical conscious brands making garments from sustainable materials or recycled fabrics instead of the latest cheap trends. 'H&M has been committed to sustainable products for their collections, more than 34,000 tons of clothing to reuse and recycle' (Nayak 2019:237).

Staying on the high street the new 'trendy' way to shop fashion is buying second-hand clothes, generation Z thrives upon shopping from charity shops and thrift shops. What is more, recently, auction sites or resale apps have become popular with the new generation, with vintage clothes coming back into fashion. The launched app *Depop* combines upcycled clothes from upcoming designers and resale in one app. 'Its online shopping for the social media generation' (Benson,2018). The app is incorporating the push to end fast fashion whilst bringing in sustainability. Learning how to fix or mend your clothes, 'Gen Z is the do-it yourself generation, having grown up with YouTube which can teach them how to just about do anything' (Stillman, Stillman2017:13). Generation Z and the future generations are showing that becoming sustainable can be easy and trendy.

My final keyword investigates the *Anthropocene* within fashion and how the industry rises the fossil fuels which is damaging our planet. The *Anthropocene* meaning "the age of humans" according to scientists, as humans have made so many changes to the planet so quickly (Smithsonian Digital Studio,2018). With the ever-increasing rate that we use resources due to our ever-growing population our fashion industry has a large negative impact. With social media making people think they constantly need the current fashion trends; we buy more clothes than we need.

Shoppers snap up five times more clothing now than they did in 1980. In 2018, they averaged sixty-eight garments a year. As a whole, the worlds citizens acquire 80 billion apparel items annually. (Thomas,2019:15)

In the UK, the domestic market value for fashion is 66.6 billion (Global Fashion Industry Statistics, 2021). Needless to say, this number will continue to grow due to the industry being ferociously competitive. Being in 'the age of humans' the only impact that will make a difference is people. Natalie Isaacs the author of *Every Woman's Guide To Saving The Planet* is an example that one woman can make difference and inspire others to join.



Fig.4 Campaign picture 1 Million Women

She created the organisation that is accomplishing small changes in the fight against climate change. Natalie tells us “Climate change is not waiting for us to wake up and catch up” (Isaacs,2019:24). By creating a blog, she gave women an avenue to talk about how they are becoming more eco-friendly by exchanging stories, challenges, encouragement, and advice (Isaacs,2019:23).

What needs to be done to make a change to the climate crisis is to educate and make people aware of the devastation our civilisation is causing our planet. In recent years Education, Sustained Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) has been embedded into the curriculum of compulsory education. Hopefully, in time to come, in making the younger generation aware of the impact that waste has on the planet, an improvement to the carbon footprint can be witnessed (ESDGC,2008). Generation Z, the millennials (Gen Z) needs to become educated in how to implement change to help mitigate the climate crisis, they can influence their elders and others to change their behaviour and make improved choices. This can be said with other countries, in looking at how they are becoming more environmentally friendly can influence the world to make a global change for the better.

India is one of the countries that is becoming more sustainable, with new brands promoting sustainability competing with established brands. A brand *Littleens* are using biomaterials such as orange peels, aloe vera and bamboo to produce yarn. Fashion designers Richa Mittal and Avni Behl from the Indian based *SPACE* are creating sustainable fashion fibres. They set

out to sell their natural fibres to high street brands when identifying a gap in the market. “The Indian brands aims are to go green and leave no carbon footprint” (Dogar,2021). Even though these are an ‘up and coming’ brand does not mean that their ideas will not encourage bigger brands to follow suit across India. Referring to Isaac’s book, her message from it was to “never underestimate the power you have to fight the climate crisis. You just need to act”(Isacc,2019). At the same time, Ulster University have used their design skills to create repurposed clothes instead of using fast fashion high street brands to buy new (Ulster University, 2021). They used the method of *make do and mend* which was originally issued in *World War II* for housewives to be both thrifty, yet stylish with reusing old clothing (Norman2014:11). The method of re-working clothing back in the world war, shows how the generation can relate back to history at times when the country had less and learn to adapt it into the present. Showing our civilisation, the effects of the planet due to over-consumption in fashion and showing people ways to re-purpose clothes is the key to help reduce the carbon footprint.

To conclude, the dissertation proposal I have researched and examined, the term ‘fast fashion,’ and how it increases our carbon footprint due to waste will be investigated further. Also, I will look further into how high street brands are accountable for the increase in the carbon footprint and need to take responsibility, as well as the consumer. I discuss how industry is beginning to act slowly, becoming more sustainable, and how important this is to their image and their consumer’s choices. They advertise through social media to entice the customer by showing that the change is happening, and they are shifting to be a more ethical industry. Though the proposal I have gained knowledge of how brands are becoming more eco-friendly using different methods. Following on, to how Fletcher has developed a research plan with a system on how the manufacturers can shift to a reduced fashion sector with Kallis alongside her, to give a realisation how this has happened within the Covid-19 crisis. With guidance from Minney, a British social entrepreneur, who has reinforced the argument of my second word Sustainability, with her knowledge from her brand *People Tree* being a sustainable fair-trade label, and a strong advocate of using plant fibres as a more sustained choice for fashion instead of man-made fibres. Continuing with this, I looked at what methods and processes the manufacturer uses to what the consumer can do to reduce consumption. Finally, as the Chinese philosopher Confucius said “tell me I will forget; show

me and I may remember involve me and I will understand” (Maynard, Larkley, 2008:86). I looked into the age of the Anthropocene and delved into what we can do, as a civilisation, to educate and influence others on the impact waste has on the environment. This research into my three words followed onto the question for the final dissertation: *‘How, we as a civilisation, are affecting the carbon footprint from buying fast fashion, and how can we become more sustainable?’*

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Images

Fig.1 Fletcher, K. and Tham, M., 2020. EARTH LOGIC Fashion Action Research Plan. [image] Available at: <<https://katefletcher.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Earth-Logic-plan-FINAL.pdf#:~:text=EARTH%20LOGIC%20Fashion%20and%20sustainability%20context%20The%20fashion,product%20obsolescence%20and%20continually%20increasing%20throughput%20of%20resources.>> [Accessed 10 May 2021].

Fig.2 Fletcher, K. and Tham, M., 2020. Earth Logic—Grow out of Growth & Consumer-Facing Transparency. [video] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnZ_6Xi0e6Y> [Accessed 10 May 2021].

Fig.3 Zara (2021) Join Life Collection (image). Available at: <https://www.zara.com/us/en/flowy-straight-leg-jeans-p07149063.html?v1=102601233> (Accessed 10th May, 2021)

Fig. 1 Million Women, 2020. How Well Do You Know The 5 Rs?. [image] Available at: <<https://www.1millionwomen.com.au/blog/the-5-rs-refuse-reduce-reuse-repurpose-recycle/>> [Accessed 10 May 2021].