

Practice in context
ADAD5004

Dissertation proposal:
Sustainability, Innovation & Society

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Sustainability, innovation & society

Context for writing

Throughout this proposal I will be identifying and investigating 3 key words that I feel reflect my practice and course. The 3 key words I have chosen to include are sustainability, innovation & society. I will look at the relationship between the fashion world and its impact on the atmosphere, its connection with society and how it brings innovation. My intention is to research these chosen words in order to establish the connections they hold with each other to form a solid concluded question that I will investigate for my dissertation.

Sustainability

The meaning of sustainability is the ability to meet the demands of today without having an impact on future generations.

(investopedia, 2020) However, often the word sustainability is associated directly with climate change and the need to adapt an eco-friendly way of living to prevent further detriment to the rising temperature on earth. *'Sustainability is a diverse, interdisciplinary field focused on identifying how human culture and all living systems of the biosphere can endure and thrive into the long-term future.'*

(Robertson, 2017) In the context of the fashion world, to create an industry that is sustainable means to be conscious of decisions from the design and development of a garment, to the manufacturing and to the consumers. Taking each step into account and recognising possible ways of preventing waste and disposal, ensuring a fashion cycle that can be viable in preventing damage to the environment. (Fletcher, 2012)

A designer who has adapted this attitude, is Stella McCartney. McCartney uses a conscientious attitude that informs every decision from sourcing the materials, to creating the garments and

subsequently selling them. Each decision she makes is based on its ethical and environmental impact, ensuring a brand that is moral and doesn't exploit natural resources. (Luxiders, 2020)



Figure 1 – Stella McCartney and Adidas unveil Parley Ultra Boost X trainers made from ocean plastic. Dezeen.com

Stella McCartney has had a long running relationship with adidas, and in 2017 she collaborated with a marine protection organization named *Parley for the oceans* to design the *Parley Ultra Boost X trainers* with adidas as shown in **Figure 1**. The trainers were designed to utilize plastic waste sourced from the oceans to use as thread and yarn, enabling Stella McCartney to challenge the idea of sustainability within fashion, demonstrating to consumers that fashion can be sourced without having a detrimental contribution to global warming and the environment. (Thomas, 2019)

McCartney stated, *“To take something that is destructive and turn it into something that’s sexy and cool, how can that not be luxury?”* (Perchard, 2017)

Stella McCartney’s constant effort to improve her label, driving towards a more sustainable brand is what separates her from other designers and companies. *“The company is always looking for new ways to be more sustainable as it feels responsible for the resources it uses and the impact its activities have on the planet.”* (Lolli, 2021)

The impact the clothing industry is having on earth, begins at the production of garments and continues through to the consumption. Beginning with the waste produced during manufacture, and the energy required to produce these garments which requires the burning of fossil fuels, to the concept of fast fashion meaning that clothing becomes disposable resulting in *“On average, an individual in the UK produces up to 70 kilograms of fabric waste each year”* (dopplle.com, 2021)

The fashion industry is currently the second largest polluter on earth after the oil industry. During production, wastewater that been produced during the manufacture of garments is often left untreated and is disposed of directly through rivers. This water often *“contains toxic substances such as lead, mercury, and arsenic, among others”* (Charpail, 2017)

To understand the effects the fashion industry has on the environment allows us to recognise the importance of adapting a greener way of manufacturing and consuming fashion, like Stella McCartney has adapted. This greener attitude is based on the word sustainability, for something to be sustained all factors and aspects must be considered to ensure the demands of today are met without compromising the future.

Innovation

Following on from *sustainability* I intend to further understand my second key word, *innovation*. Innovation is a term that has become overused by the corporate world to the point where the word has adopted multiple definitions over the years. These multiple definitions cause a challenge in understanding the meaning of the word due to the many different versions created causing a lack of definitional clarity. (Shaver, 2014)

Jorge Barba works at an innovation company that helps businesses expand. He describes the definition of innovation as *“something new or different that delivers value to the world, with the key criteria that I’m not innovating if I’m not bettering people’s lives. Put simply, it is*

the future delivered." (ideatovalue.com) Basing my understanding of innovation from this definition, innovation is a term that describes bringing change to people's lives in a valuable way.

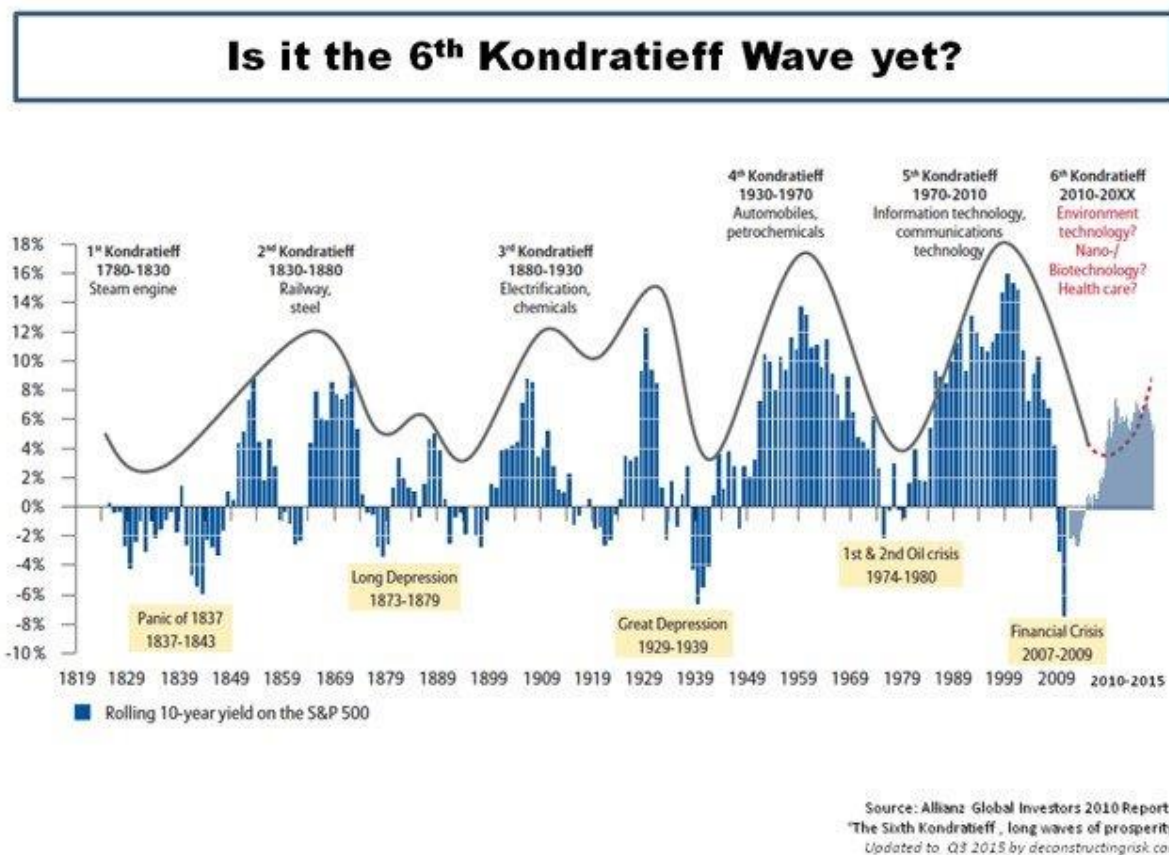


Figure 2- Corporatefinanceinstitute.com

The Kondratieff wave theory is a theory that allows us to recognise the evolutionary positive impact, importance and benefit of creativity and innovation in society. The theory was derived by soviet economist Nikolai Kondratieff in the beginning of the 20th century.

Figure 2 above demonstrates how the theory behaves, according to the Kondratieff theory, economies follow a cycle of revolutionary growth that last between 40-60 years following a decline due to stagnation or depression. Each wave that has occurred represents an innovation of the time. (Wilenius, 2012)

Since the beginning of the 18th century, theorists have identified 5 Kondratieff waves, the first lasting 50 years from 1780, following the invention of the steam engine. (corporatefinanceinstitute.com)

“The course of economic activity represents beyond doubt a process of development” (Kondratieff, 1978) The development of the railroad and Bessemer converter is what enabled the economy to progress again in 1830 creating a second Kondratieff wave. (Nefiodow, 2014) The Bessemer converter allowed a mass production of steel at a faster pace and cheaper cost, this was known as an industrial revolution, which defined the change from the use of iron to steel. The mass production of steel enabled better rail roads to be made which allowed longer trains with heavier loads to travel them, ultimately revolutionizing the transportation of both people and goods. (Dozr.com, 2020) The invention of the Bessemer converter can be described as an innovation, it brought change in a positive way which is the definition of innovation as provided by Jorge Barba.

Often invention and innovation can be confused. Invention is to create something that does not already exist, or to discover something that has not yet been discovered. Whereas an innovation is to introduce something new and exciting to the market which often involves manipulating inventions to have a purpose to a consumer. (Herbert, 2016)



An example of an innovator is Steve Jobs. *“Steve Jobs was an innovator. He didn’t invent the technological advances that went into his products, but he found ways to use the inventions of others to bring products to market that consumers wanted, and his entrepreneurial innovation resulted in benefits for everyone.”* (Holcome, 2011)

Figure 3- The first iPhone- Wired.com (2017)

In 2007, Steve Jobs unveiled the iPhone as shown in **figure 3**. A mobile device which was touchscreen, had a camera, and included the features of an iPod, it was considered highly advanced at the time. The following year, the AppStore was created enabling consumers to use their phones to download apps in order to social network and play games allowing the iPhone to become a portable computer. (History.com, 2020) *“The apple put the power of computing into the hands of ordinary people everywhere, opening up a world of discovery and innovation that continues to this day.”* (Imbimbo, 2008) Since its release, Apple sold 1.4 million iPhones within the first 3 months and was also named “invention of the year” by Times Magazine. (Machajewski, 2016)

Taking the already existing mobile device and adapting it to have better capabilities and features was a mobile revolution. The apple iPhone provided consumers with a platform that enabled them to have access to the internet, to capturing photos, to connecting with people all on demand and in their pocket. The iPhone is one of the greatest innovations of all time, it was the first breakthrough in leading the world to more technological advances in all aspects of life. (Molla,2017)

If we retort back to **Figure 2**, the Kondratieff wave theory predicts a steady growth that may be recognised as the 6th Kondratieff wave beginning in 2010. Each wave that has transpired has been the result of an innovation that has provided a better quality of life, perhaps the 6th Kondratieff wave will be the result of the technological advances that have developed since the mobile revolution of the first iPhone.

Society

“a highly structured system of human organization for large-scale community living that normally furnishes protection, continuity, security, and a national identity for its members” (Dictionary.com, 2021) As a surface pattern designer, my work is targeted at today’s society, creating patterns and designs that are in trend with fast

developing ideas and fashion that represent different people within society. Society has connotations of community, association and population (Thesaurus.com, 2020) allowing the word 'society' to be applicable to different groups.

From the definition provided above, identifying my country as the 'large-scale community' brings the understanding that the current generation that lives within my country are the people I consider to be a part of society. Society holds institutionalised norms and values that allow the members of society to feel secure, protected and free. Sociologists recognise 5 institutions within society which are religion, education, government, economy and family which form the basis of social life. (Babbie, 1994)

An artist who challenges the concept of society and the institutions within it is well known graffiti artist, Banksy. *"He loves to provoke, shock and even disturb society"* (Auriemma, 2019)

Anonymous graffiti artist Banksy conceals his identity in order to avert from the status of a 'celebrity' that often comes with being a well-established artist. This concept of not having an identity allows the viewers to focus on the purpose and underlying meaning of the work in comparison to holding a person responsible and enforcing consequences upon them for provoking the "norms" within society with an unsolicited opinion. (Theartstory.com, (2020)

"By displaying art in crowded cities across the world, Banksy puts social and political issues in our face. These pieces force us to stop and think—something that we often avoid doing in our day-to-day lives." (Johnson, 2020)

Figure 4- Kissing coppers, Guardian.com



A piece of work that challenges the forms of society is Banksy's 'Kissing Coppers' pictured in **figure 4**. This piece of work appeared on a pub located in Brighton. The image shows 2 men dressed in British police uniform and

sharing a passionate kiss. The image has, and continues to be perceived differently, gathering mixed interpretations of the work. Banksy is commonly known for combining both irony and dark humour into his pieces to present strong political and social messages without being obvious. Some identify the work as showing support towards the LGBTQ community, whilst others see the piece as mocking the legal system by presenting the police in a vulnerable way. (Court, 2018) I personally view this piece as a provoking response to the legal system on how *“Governments and legal systems have pathologized and criminalised lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people on the basis of their sexual orientations and gender identities”* (Nadal, 2020) Therefore by having 2 same sex officers who are deemed to have a high social standing within the government perform an act of kissing highlights the irony of how the government have previously opposed same sex couples to hold the same rights as heterosexual couples. This is just one example of the many works by Banksy which pushes the boundaries of social standards and thoughts.

Through exploration of my 3 chosen words, I am now able to understand the deconstruction of the words and their meaning. This proposal for my dissertation has enabled me to recognise the importance of sustainability in the world of fashion and how the efforts of designers like Stella McCartney are vital in establishing a greener industry. I have gained better understanding on the differences between invention and innovation after exploring how the iPhone led to a mobile revolution, and how innovative thinking leads to economic growth as shown through the Kondratieff theory. I now acknowledge the formation of a society and how artist Banksy uses his platform to challenge the reforms expected by the institutionalised values and orders set out by government. Sustainability, innovation and society, although all these words seem unrelated, through exploration I can see that all 3 rely on one another in some way. In order to become sustainable, we must think more innovatively, to be innovative we must consider society and

what can we do to provide a better way of life for the people within it. We must consider the effects on society if we don't become more sustainable. Throughout this proposal I have been able to see how these words intertwine and connect, allowing me to reflect on what questions I may consider exploring for my dissertation. To end this proposal, the question I challenge myself to explore is "What challenges face society in the effort of pursuing a more sustainable fashion industry?"

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Figure 2-

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Figure 4-

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