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Assessment 1 Proposal

Sustainability versus Fast Fashion:
Do Fashion brands utilise social media to promote Sustainability?

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Chapter 1

1.0 Introduction

People now focus more on environmental preservation and protection as they engage in their daily businesses (Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir, 2019). A sustainable development entails progressive evolution that meets the needs of the current generation without depleting or limiting the ability of the proceeding generation to meet their needs (Kang and Kim, 2016).

Fashion industry in particular has been linked with the subject of sustainability over the last decade. Many fashion giants have been involved in activities that affect the environment in negative way throughout the years, however now more than ever these organisations turned their focus not only on profit, but on protecting environment as well. Sustainability in fashion relate to the levels of sourcing materials, manufacturing, designing garments to maximize the benefits to consumers while minimizing their negative impacts on the environment (Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir, 2019).

Social media plays a critical role in enlightening consumers regarding fashion industries, their activities, fashion trend, brands, and the different measures that enhance sustainability (Kang and Kim, 2016).

The sector's fashion businesses monitor environmental impacts while sourcing raw materials, manufacturing, designing garments, marketing, and consumer consumption (Fletcher, 2010). Some of these stages are associated with unhealthy impact on the surrounding environment. However, consumers are willing to pay more for sustainable garments or products, which is another reason why brands are becoming more focused on sustainability. (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

Furthermore, social media improves the relationship between fashion brands and customers, making it the ideal way to discover trends, learn about the fashion industry's environmental impact, and how various brands promote sustainability (Han *et al.*, 2017).

Determining how fast fashion uses social media to educate customers about sustainability is critical.

1.2 Purpose of the Research

The proposed research purpose is to investigate the relationship between sustainability and fast fashion focusing on whether fast fashion brands utilise social media and how actually social media promotes sustainability.

Sustainability has been an important part of the fashion industry lately. Many fast fashion brands had wrongdoings over the years that contributed to the increased concern over the environment and society. Fast fashion brands like Zara and H&M gained a negative reputation concerning sustainability.

It is evident that there is not enough literature regarding the topic of sustainability in fashion. Authors are concentrating on the explanation of sustainability and mentioning different practices, however there is not clear evidence on how organisation can track its progress towards sustainability. From the other side this study has the aim to understand how customers respond to the sustainability practices by the brands, particularly in fast-fashion segment. The collected information about the practices used by the big and powerful organisations as well as the feedback from the customers will be used in that study. As a result, this work can be accessed and used by smaller brands in fashion industry within their operation.

1.3 Proposed Aim

The proposed study will meet the purpose by aiming at examining sustainability and fast fashion narrowing down how the fast fashion brands use social media to promote sustainability.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

To examine whether fast fashion brands promote sustainability or not.

If yes then, to research whether fast fashion brands use social media to engage sustainability.

To explore how fast fashion brands actually use social media.

1.5 Research Questions

Do fast fashion enterprises provide sustainability?

What types of social media do fast fashion promote sustainability?

How does fast fashion use social media?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Sustainability / Social Media Definition

The definition of sustainability from the etymological point of view explains the term from the viewpoint of sustain (Zhang and Chan, 2020). Accordingly, sustainability means continuity to a different level (Imperatives, 1987). Equally, the definition of sustainability from the environmental perspective is the process of avoiding the depletion of resources to enhance a balance that does not allow a decrease in quality of life (Sarkis and Zhu, 2018).

Quental et al. (2011) states that eco-friendly firms decrease waste, save resources, and protect open areas. Sustainability ensures continuity, management of renewable resources and environmental balance. (Chang and Jai, 2015).

Social media is described as internet-based communication that enables users to share information, generate online content, and engage in discussions with one another according to Carr & Hayes (2015).

According to Corso and Robinson (2013), the use of social media to raise awareness about fast fashion environmental policies is possible. First and foremost, social media is a participatory platform that invites people to provide input and suggestions on pressing environmental concerns as they arise.

2.2 Importance of Sustainability and social media

Sustainability became an essential element of the product development especially in fashion. It is perceived as added value to it (Kang and Kim, 2017).

For example, many leading fashion companies are adopting a variety of sustainable methods in order to avoid causing harm to the environment but also to add perceived value to its products. Moreover, sustainability enables fast fashion to save resources worldwide. According to Hassan and Al-Kumaim (2022), most of the clothing and other fashion goods that enter the market are new, with only a handful that are recyclable contributing to the high levels of environmental waste.

The power of social media from the other side offers the best channel for communication to enhance the relationship between brands and consumers through improved connectivity and the revelation of current trends. Therefore, the brands can

utilize these channels in order to receive valuable feedback about their practices and improve over time (Gazzola et al., 2020).

As described by Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir (2019), the business should not only understand sustainability and try to integrate into its operation, but also to apply effective system to measure it. Moreover, the organisation should understand better all involved stakeholders that may affect the level of sustainability within the organisation. From the other side the social media analytical tools can be useful in the process of measurements and tracking progress.

2.3 The Speech Act Theory

According to Searle et al. (1980), the Speech Act Theory (SAT) postulates that the underlying intention and meaning of information of a speaker is within the sentences and words. The environment or context of the speech denotes the meaning and motivations of such utterances or words (Villarroel Ordenes et al., 2019). The expressive act includes the use of phrases like the desire for a product, opinions, or appreciation. In such cases, fast fashionists use words to show their manners or attitudes to comfort, apologise or appreciate customers or describe a product in terms of the solution it will provide to the consumer. Separately, the directive aspect entails using words that issue calls to consumers to demand or take actions based on the behaviour of a company.



Source: (Designed by Author, 2022).

Throughout the chosen literature can be found a significance between organisational intention towards sustainability and their actual actions. For that reason, the Speech act theory can be well utilized by the businesses in their systematic efforts to promote sustainability.

Chapter 3: Research Methods & Methodology

3.1 Research methods

The chosen methodology is Quantitative. It is a method that will allow to gain more detailed understanding of the norms and values of the participants and so draw a better picture about what activities towards sustainability would be more reasonable. Positive research philosophy will be utilised to manage scientific evidence in the concern field (Saunders and Thornhill, 2019).

For the purpose, the study will use survey-based questionnaires. The survey will aim to understand the perception of the participants towards sustainability and how it is actually presented by Zara and H&M global brands. The main focus will fall on the Social Media activities of these brands.

3.2 Sampling methods and types

The researcher in the proposed study will not test the hypothesis but will generalise ideas from the results and develop an understanding of a sample (Acharya, *et al.*, 2013). The researcher will use the purposive/selective sampling technique for sampling process. Therefore, the selection of participants will be made upon requirements. There will be 100 participants for the study.

Even though, annual reports of chosen brands are having information about their sustainability strategy, however from these reports is not clear whether they promote sustainability through their social media. For that reason, the main focus will be on the actual Instagram and Facebooks of these brands, rather than information provided in the form of report.

3.3 Data collection method

The study will need to look from two main perspectives: The Fast Fashion organisations from one side and from customer standpoint from the other side.

When it comes to the Fast fashion brands the study will collect information from their own social media platforms like ZARA and H&M Instagram pages and YouTube.

Through their social media, the study will investigate whether these brands are using the social media in order to promote sustainability and if yes, how they do it?

Zara

The Spanish Brand has been a good example of how fashion brands are using social media to promote sustainability. Zara Inc focuses on both its online reputation in engaging consumers and on the environmental issues in its manufacturing processes to produce high-quality garments (Chan, 2017).

In order to promote sustainability, the business has made extensive use of major social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Pinterest. Various initiatives of the company inspire engagement from its fans. The brand launched the #joinlife sustainable line in 2017. Zara was able to obtain over 1 million likes on their postings by using the hashtag tool (Unmetric, 2022).

"Join life" on Instagram is introduced as an approach to becoming a more sustainable brand. The company has created a strategy with a holistic approach, including both people-centred and planet-centred challenges.

The brand is working to reduce its impact and include sustainability in its day-to-day decisions. This includes their entire value chain, including product design, material selection, production processes, and store design. Zara is working on reuse and recycling programs and reducing the consumption of new virgin raw materials.

The company introduced the Join Life label which customers can easily identify with the products due to their tastes and preferences as well as contributing to the environment (Zara, 2022). A "Join life" clip has been advertised by the company on YouTube since 2018, allowing users to get access to and participate in the project. Video is 2 minutes long and includes several clips and narration that assist viewers to understand why sustainability is essential and how their campaign is related. The firm aims to revamp all of its packaging to make it more sustainable by reducing the amount of raw materials used and consolidating materials to make them simpler to reuse and recycle. Zara encouraging its customers to support this cause by joining in on the Join Life project (Zara, 2018).

H&M

H&M company engaged in various measures to enhance sustainability. Accordingly, the brand is using the power of social media in order to reach their targeted groups. According to Forbs (2021) the Generation Z are the audience that can be more interested in the sustainability, and so Facebook and Instagram ads focused on targeting that audience is very effective. H&M understood that and embrace it opportunity accordingly (H&M, 2020). As a main slogan of the campaign is chosen: "Lets wear the waste, lets change fashion".

In addition, H&M has been very active in the recycling old clothes. The brand offers its Garment Collecting programme, which offers to the customers to bring their unwanted garments to H&M store. Since 2017, the business has promoted a powerful "Bring it on" film on YouTube, where viewers may access and interact with the campaign. The video is one minute long and captures the audience's attention with a range of footage and a voice over explaining the significance of sustainability and their campaign. (H&M, 2017)

Finally, through the use of Influencer Marketing H&M is attracting the attention of their customers who are more interested in sustainable fashion.

An example of such activity is the partnership between H&M and actress Maisie Williams. The star from the Game of Thrones drama has been working with the fashion giant in order to promote the use of 100% recycled sourced materials in the creation of textile garments (Eco-Stylist, 2022).

From the other side the distributed online survey will aim to ask the chosen audience (16-65 y/o fast fashion consumers, that used social media) about their opinion over the research question.

3.4 Analysis of data

In order to analyse the collected information, the study will need to compare both extracted data; from brands perspective and from customer perspective.

Annual reports of chosen brands are having information about their sustainability strategy, however from these reports is not clear whether they promote sustainability through their social media. For that reason, the main focus will be on the actual

Instagram and Facebook of these brands, rather than information provided in the form of report.

3.5 Research ethics

The research will conform to IRB standards regarding human subjects (Kim, 2011). Moreover, the researcher will seek permission from the respondents to voluntarily join the study. Furthermore, the study will guarantee safety, privacy, and anonymity whereby the researcher will not disclose the names, and other information of the respondents to other people except for academic purposes and will avail the information to the respondent at any moment they would inquire.

Chapter 4: Resources and planning

4.1 Structure of Work Breakdown:

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
Introduction										
Literature review										
Research methodology										
Designing the survey questions										
Data collection										
Analysis of data										
Conclusion										
Final submission										

Table 2. Source: Vladislava Markova, 2022

4.2 Determined budget

Expenses	Budget
Journals and books	£35- £120
Printer, ink, computer & papers	£12- £30
Travel expenses	£10- £30
Estimated total	£57- £180

Table 1. Source: Vladislava Markova, 2022

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The profit has been a main focus of the organisations operating in the fashion industry. Moreover, Fast Fashion giants like Zara, H&M and Gap has been able to produce new collections constantly with very short time between each. The project has the main aim to evaluate whether the fast fashion organisations are taking responsibility for the environment and society through the applying sustainability approach in their activities. Furthermore, the focus is particularly on the utilization of social media for the purpose of promoting sustainability.

The researcher has the main aim to access the prospective of the brands themselves through their social media activities and also from the customers perspective and understand their point of view through the use of quantitative data collection methods.

This research proposal is outlining the actual steps that the researcher is about to take through the process of creation.

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