

The Sustainable Dilemma and Strategy Behind Fast Fashion: From Greenwashing to Real Change

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Abstract

Fast fashion brands are favored by consumers because of their fashion, low price, and fast update speed. However, this business model has caused serious pollution to the environment, and the so-called "sustainable" initiatives are often mere formalities and criticized as "green whitewashing". This article analyzes the environmental and social issues of fast fashion and proposes strategies for brand responses, such as H&M's used clothes recycling program and Uniqlo's down recycling program. Despite this, these measures have the problem of poor implementation and cannot effectively deal with the nature of fast fashion. To be truly sustainable, fast fashion brands must make fundamental changes in their business models that don't just rely on superficial eco-friendly initiatives.

Keywords

Fast fashion, green whitewashing, sustainable development.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, fast fashion brands are becoming more and more popular due to their stylish, cheap, and fast-updating features. However, this business model has caused serious pollution to the environment. In response to the growing pressure on environmental protection and consumers' concern for sustainability, many fast fashion brands have launched a series of sustainable measures to reduce their environmental impact. However, these so-called "sustainable" measures are often not really sustainable behind them, and are even criticized as "greenwashing".

For example, some brands launch "eco-friendly" clothing made from recycled materials, but these collections often represent only a small fraction of their total production and have a negligible impact on overall production. At the same time, these brands continue to produce large quantities of cheap clothing at an alarming rate, encouraging overconsumption and leading to more waste accumulation and wasted resources. The core problem with fast fashion lies in its business model itself, which relies on rapid production and consumption cycles, which are fundamentally contrary to the principles of sustainable development.

In addition, so-called sustainable measures are sometimes just marketing gimmicks that lack transparency and real results. For example, some brands claim to use "green production processes", but the specifics and actual effects of these processes are often opaque, making it difficult for consumers to verify their authenticity. What's more, some brands continue to exploit labor in low-cost countries, ignoring working conditions and wages, and violating the social responsibility of sustainable development.

2. Development status of fast fashion brands

(!)The definition of a fast fashion brand

A fast fashion brand is a business model that is characterized by quickly translating fashion trends into products and selling them to the masses at a lower price. These brands often update

their designs and inventory frequently to ensure that their products are up-to-date and reflect the latest fashion trends. Fast fashion brands are also known for their efficient supply chain management and fast production cycles, allowing them to launch new products and meet consumer demand in a short period of time.

(2) The reason why fast fashion is loved by consumers (5 points)

Affordable, Fast fashion brands often offer trendy products at relatively low prices, making them affordable to more consumers. This price advantage appeals to consumers who want to keep up with fashion trends but are on a budget.

Fashion updates fast, Fast fashion brands turn the latest fashion trends into products and put them on the market quickly at breakneck speed. This rapid update frequency allows consumers to purchase new styles at any time and satisfy their fashion cravings.

Wide range of options, Fast fashion brands often have a large product line that covers multiple categories such as clothing, accessories, footwear, and a selection of different styles and styles. This wide range of options is able to meet the individual needs of different consumers.

Accessibility, Fast fashion brands often have a large number of stores in commercial centers or shopping malls, while also selling online. This makes it easy for consumers to find and buy the products they like.

Social media influence, Fast fashion brands are highly active on social media, attracting a large number of young consumers through collaborations with fashion bloggers, celebrities, and fashion information.

H&M has shown a high level of wisdom in the selection of its partners.

Instead of blindly chasing the biggest stars, they chose four fashion icons with a wide social media presence and a large number of loyal fans: PEYTON LIST, HANNAH SIMONE, TYLER POSEY, JANA KRAMER.

(3) Fast fashion clothing causes serious waste And pollution

Fast fashion is a business model that designs, produces, and sells cheap, on-trend clothing that aims to quickly get from high-end fashion runways to consumers. The main problem with this model is its significant burden on the environment.

Specifically, it is manifested in the following five aspects.

Water consumption and pollution: Water is used in large quantities in the production of fast fashion, especially when dyeing and treating textiles. In addition, these processes are often accompanied by the release of harmful chemicals that can flow into rivers and oceans, causing serious damage to aquatic ecosystems.

Carbon emissions: The fast fashion industry is one of the main sources of global carbon emissions. From production and transportation to final sales, each step generates a significant carbon

Waste problem: Due to the low price and high consumption of fast fashion, the life cycle of clothing has been greatly shortened, and a large number of clothing has quickly become waste. These discarded garments are often landfilled or incinerated, resulting in waste of resources and environmental pollution.

Over-exploitation of natural resources: Fast fashion requires a large number of raw materials, such as cotton, synthetic fibers, etc., and the production process of these materials is often accompanied by over-exploitation and destruction of natural resources.

Impacts on biodiversity: Dyes and chemicals used in garment production can pose a threat to wildlife populations and affect biodiversity.

3. Fast fashion brands response strategies

(1) H&M's used clothing recycling program

H&M's used clothes recycling programme is part of the brand's efforts to address the environmental impact of the fast fashion industry. Launched in 2013, the program aims to reduce garment waste and encourage consumers to recycle clothing they no longer wear instead of throwing it away.

H&M's goal is that by 2030, all of the brand's materials can be recycled or purchased in a more sustainable way.

(2) Uniqlo down recovery plan

The first product Uniqlo plans to launch is a V-neck puffer jacket made from 100% recycled materials, with a total of 4 colors, priced at 7,990 yen (about 520 yuan), and will be sold in 67 Uniqlo stores in Japan, 22 overseas stores and the official website from November 2.

4. True and false

(1) Industrial change or marketing tool

If the whole process of second-hand clothing recycling can be carried out completely, it is a phenomenon that has the characteristics of both the industrial revolution and the characteristics of a commercial tool.

Second-hand clothing recycling not only has the characteristics of the industrial revolution (technological innovation, improving resource utilization efficiency, environmental protection), but also serves as a business tool to meet market demand, enhance brand image, bring economic benefits and receive policy support. As such, it is a combination of the two, which synthetic fibre drives industrial progress and has important business value.

But Second-hand recycling programs for fast fashion brands are often not implemented effectively due to a number of complex factors. This involves not only the brand's own business model and economic interests, but also the constraints of consumer habits and socio-cultural perceptions. In addition, inadequate recycling infrastructure and technology, as well as the lack of relevant policies and regulations, also pose significant obstacles to the implementation of second-hand recycling programs. As a result, while these brands may have launched recycling programs, in practice, they are often poorly executed and ineffective.

(2) "GREEN MONEY LAUNDER"

It's not that chemical fibers are bad. It's the culmination of human technology that has made clothes cheap and warmth accessible to more people over the past few decades. It's not a problem to make clothes, the problem is that the fast fashion industry has jumped on the bandwagon, creating too much unnecessary, quickly discarded fashion waste and making us pay the price of pollution.

The key to the success of fast fashion is quick trial and error, and clothes that don't sell must be taken off the shelves as soon as possible, giving way to new styles. What to do with this inventory?

Danish television media broke the news that H&M sent 60 tons of new clothes to a Danish incineration plant in 2013-2017, while Bloomberg reported that a power plant helped H&M destroy 15 tons of stock in 2017 alone.

However, in recent years, consumers' awareness of environmental protection has increased rapidly, prompting consumer demand to pay more attention to environmental protection and sustainable development, intensified market competition requires brands to display environmental protection measures to maintain competitiveness, the pressure of policies and

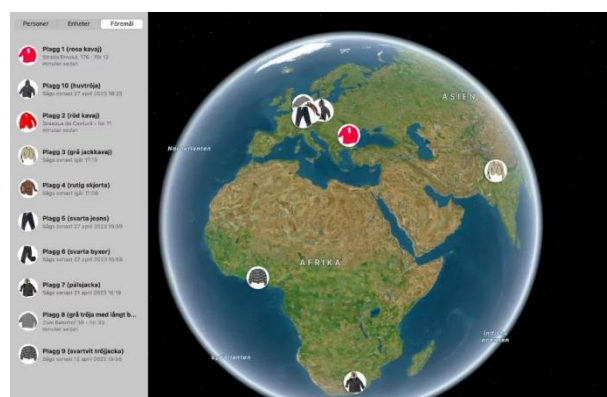
regulations makes enterprises must demonstrate their compliance, and brand reputation management needs a positive environmental image to increase consumer loyalty and trust, while reducing the impact of negative public opinion. In addition, environmental protection and sustainability can bring direct business benefits and cost savings. HM has come up with a series of environmental initiatives for all these reasons.

In 2013, H&M Group launched a used clothes recycling project called "Let's close the loop". In the story of H&M, it will turn around the fact that less than 1% of textiles are recycled into new textiles every year, and will be fully circular by rewearing or reusing.(See Part 2 for details).

In this beautiful idea, the small recycling bin carries the "green dream" jointly built by fast fashion brands and consumers. Only now, this dream has become a bubble that bursts at the first poke, and the so-called environmental protection cause is actually just another embodiment of the consumerist trap. On June 13, Swedish media outlet Aftonbladet published an investigative report on the whereabouts of H&M's recycled clothes. Of the 10 pieces of clothing they attached to the GPS tracker, none were properly disposed of. On the other side of the seemingly parallel between fashion and environmental protection, "Let's close the loop" drifts across the ocean and turns into "garbage mountains" in Africa and Latin America, slowly rotting under the sun or in the washing of the sea.

The 10 pieces of clothing, "complete and clean, unstained and undamaged", were placed in the recycling bins of eight H&M stores in Sweden and then embarked on a "round-the-world journey" after a simple sorting, and in the end, they would circle the globe almost one and a half times together. H&M Group is committed that used clothes should not be wasted, but should be reused as a valuable resource. On its website, H&M indicates that all recycled clothing will go to the sorting plant of the international textile recycling group I:CO, where it will be sorted and evaluated according to nearly 400 different standards, and the clothes that are not suitable for re-wearing will be turned into other textile products. If you can still wear it, you will be disposed of and sold as second-hand clothes.

But according to Aftonbladet's investigation, none of the 10 pieces of clothing reached I:CO's sorting facility for proper disposal, and two of them were in good condition or near new and ground into fibers. What's more, three pieces of clothing were sent to Benin, South Africa and India, where used clothes were the biggest killers of the environment. As of the time of publication, there are three pieces of clothing that may not have received a signal update because they are still being transported by sea, but it is difficult to expect how different their destinations will be.



According to the tracking data, the ten pieces of clothing were shipped to different countries and regions.

(3)Ture cost

In addition to H&M's "greenwashing", fast fashion has brought us far more harm than that. Fast fashion brands produce and sell large quantities of cheap clothing at high speeds, and although

they superficially meet the needs of consumers in pursuit of fashion, there are huge environmental and social costs hidden behind them.

First of all, the environmental damage of fast fashion is enormous. These brands use a lot of water and chemicals in their production processes, resulting in severe water pollution and toxic waste discharge. In addition, fast fashion emphasizes rapid upgrading, resulting in an extremely short life cycle of clothing, and a large number of old clothes are discarded, causing a serious solid waste problem.

Secondly, the impact of fast fashion on society cannot be ignored. In order to reduce costs, these brands often locate their production bases in developing countries where labor is cheap. In these places, workers often work long hours in poor working conditions, with little pay and no basic labor protection. Frequent factory safety incidents, such as the 2013 Lana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh, killed and injured thousands of workers.

In addition, fast fashion contributes to a culture of overconsumption. Low prices and changing fashion trends tempt consumers to frequently buy unnecessary clothing, ignoring quality and durability. This consumption pattern not only wastes a lot of resources, but also cultivates a superficial understanding of fashion, ignoring the labor value and environmental significance behind clothing.

5. .Start with a piece of clothing

Repair ,no need to replace

Patagonia is an outdoor apparel brand known for its environmental protection and social responsibility. In 2013, Patagonia launched the "Worn Wear" project as part of the fight against fast fashion and overconsumption by encouraging customers to repair, recycle and reuse clothing.

Free Patch Service:

1. Patagonia has a number of repair stations around the world that offer free repair services. Customers can send damaged Patagonia products to these repair stations for free repair and maintenance.

The company also launched the "Worn Wear Repair Tour", a roving repair service that provides on-site repair services to customers at specific times and locations.

Exchange, no need to destroy

Buffalo Exchange is a chain of stores specializing in second-hand clothing, founded in 1974 in Tucson, Arizona, USA. Buffalo Exchange's unique business model allows customers to bring their used clothes to the store for sale or exchange. Depending on the condition, brand and fashion of the garment, the store gives cash or store credits, which can be used to purchase other second-hand clothing items in-store. This model not only encourages recycling, but also provides customers with an affordable shopping option.

Let fast fashion slow down

Long-lasting design, also known as durable design or timeless design, is a design concept that focuses on the longevity and long-lasting aesthetics of products. The concept not only emphasizes the functionality and quality of the product, but also its adaptability and durability during long-term use.

Long-lasting design emphasizes the use of high-quality and durable materials to ensure that the product will maintain good performance and appearance over a long period of use. It is designed with a classic aesthetic that makes the product timeless and timeless, avoiding chasing ephemeral fashion trends and thus reducing the frequency of replacement. In addition, long-lasting design focuses on the versatility and adaptability of the product, which can be used in different environments and uses, providing greater practicality. The product is also designed

with ease of repair and upgrade in mind, ensuring that when certain components are damaged or the technology is outdated, they can be easily replaced or upgraded, extending the overall life of the product.

References

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