



From Fast Fashion to Eco-Fashion: Science and style

By Sarah Khan
3035786976



Agenda

01

Relevance of the topic

04

Literature review

02

Objectives
+tasks of the research

05

Research methodology
+ findings

03

Hypotheses and focus
questions

06

Conclusion

Significance of this research

The fashion industry is second largest contributor to pollution. From the air pollution from transporting and incinerating the unwanted fabrics to the water pollution from dyeing the fabrics, the fashion industry is definitely making climate change worse than it already is. There is no stopping to buying clothes that fulfill different desires and needs, however, there must be something that can be done in order to reduce the harmful impacts brought about by the fashion industry, especially fast fashion.

With this in mind, I decided to investigate sustainable fashion in the current fashion industry and look into the harms caused by fast fashion to be explored in the hope to reduced.



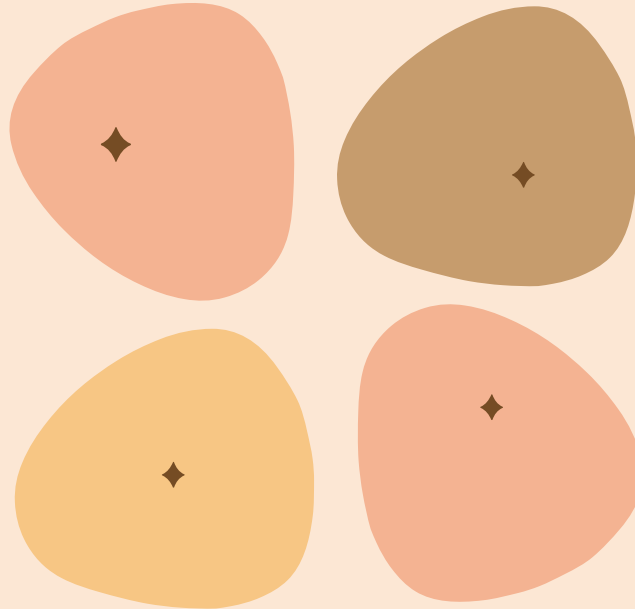
Tasks of the research

Look into the fashion industry

- Fast fashion operation
- It's current focus/plan

Challenges of sustainable fashion

- Consumers' and professionals' insight



Consumer perspective

- Consumer behaviour and thoughts

Solutions

- Using science and style
- Co-existence of fast fashion and eco-fashion
- Proposed suggestions



Objectives of the research

Understanding how fashion consumers and the fast fashion industry harms the environment



Come up with solutions to achieve eco-fashion





Focus questions

- 1. To what extent is the fashion industry unsustainable?**
- 2. Is it possible for fast fashion to co-exist with sustainable fashion?**





Hypotheses

- 1. Eco-fashion is not a big part of the fashion industry at the moment.**
 - 2. Consumerism plays a considerable part in fast fashion.**
 - 3. Sustainable fashion presents certain challenges that make it difficult to achieve eco-fashion (e.g. expensive)**
- 

Literature review





Literature review

1. Emergence of Fast Fashion

Traditional fashion:

- 9+ months for a garment to reach the market
- Predictions, trend analysis, designs, manufacturing etc.
- Risky: Do not know whether the prediction would meet with the consumer's expectations followed up by a financial loss

Fast fashion:

- Phenomenon started by the brand “Zara”, Amancio Ortega and Rosalía Mera as the founders
- Reduced the production process to 3-5 weeks
- By copying designs of the runways of high-end fashion brands, using cheap materials and labour to produce them
- By using “speed to market” approach to reduce the risks in prediction and and market demand





Literature review

2. Definition of sustainable fashion

- Vague and understood differently between different individuals
- 3 most common definitions are
 1. An activity that can be continued indefinitely without causing harm
 2. Doing unto others as you would have them do unto you
 3. Meeting a current generation's needs without compromising those of future generations
- Most customers associate sustainability with the production and sourcing processes but not with the social aspects like child labour, exploitation etc.
- Most customers usually think of eco-fashion as an altruistic act, assuming it doesn't do them much good
- Most customers also demand 100% sustainability when it comes to buying sustainable products, that includes clean production and dyeing of the fabrics, use of transport etc.
- Difficult when the turnover rate of brands is as high as 60 days
- Brands find it hard to fulfill the consumer demands and deal with the high cost of sustainable fashion
- Greenwashing occurs
- *Communication between brand and the consumers is very important*





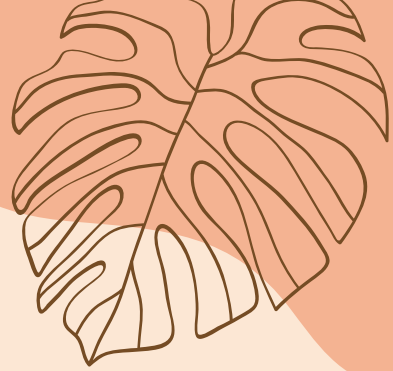
Literature review

3. Mindset of fashion consumers

- Fast fashion gave customers the “if you don’t buy it now, you won’t get it later mentality” and it is cheap
- Prioritise style and design a lot
- “Have a desire to have variety and instant gratification with price mavenism”
- They appreciate eco-fashion but will not necessarily go out of their way to do it
- Do not prioritise sustainable fashion
- Can be blamed on social conditioning since childhood
- Fashion consumption is based more on personal desire than practicality
- Reluctant to go against social norms
- Have apathy towards sustainable fashion mostly because it is not central to body and fast fashion causes no direct harm




Research methodology

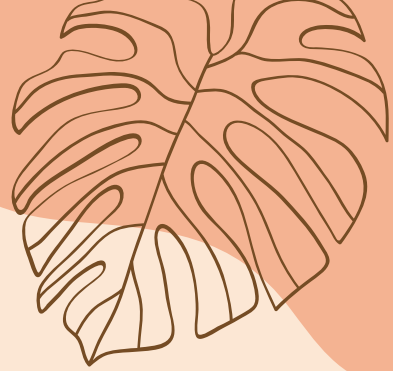




Research methodology

- Conducted 35 interviews in person/through Zoom in English
 - Divided into 4 Groups;
 - **Consumers**; young female adults in college, *focused on consumer behaviour*
 - **Fashion Students**; first year of study, *focused on the fashion curriculum and the future of fashion*
 - **Fashion professionals**; University professors, fashion photographers, fashion entrepreneur, *focused on the industry as a whole*
 - **Sustainable fashion professionals**; sustainable fashion designers (fresh vs almost retired), *focused on the sustainable fashion industry*
 - Semi-structured interview
 - Ranged from 20 minutes to 2 hours
 - Audio-recorded and transcribed
 - Grounded theory approach to guide the interviews
- 

Findings and discussion





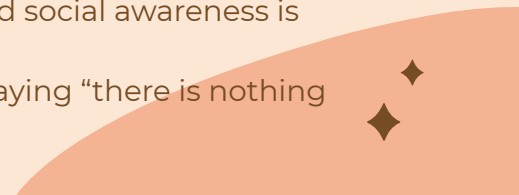
Findings & Discussion

Hypothesis 1: Eco-fashion is not a big part of the fashion industry at the moment

Complexity of the definition of fashion proposed by fashion professionals

- **“Can fashion be sustainable?” -Fashion professionals**
- Can be viewed from 2 perspective: business / scientific and sociological
- Business/ scientific: as long as the materials and the process are kept as eco-friendly as possible, it becomes eco-fashion
- Sociological: Fashion is a social phenomenon, an expression of one's identity with clothes
- If fashion=clothes, everyone can wear the same pieces of clothes to be sustainable but it isn't that simple

Fashion industry in the status quo

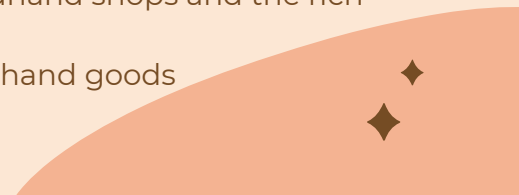
- Focus is on sustainability but also money according to **fashion professionals**
 - Pay attention to other indicators like creating shared value and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
 - Businesses want to appear as good as possible for investment opportunities
 - Sustainable fashion industry is improving; some agreements from the EU and social awareness is pushing it
 - **Some consumers** claimed sustainability is a trend now but defended it by saying “there is nothing wrong with sustainability being a trend as long as it gets the job done”
- 



Findings & Discussion

Hypothesis 2: Consumerism plays a considerable part in fast fashion

Consumer behaviour when it comes to fashion

- **Mostly consistent results with the previous research papers**
 - Prioritise price and style the most; Hong Kong people are price-sensitive
 - Sustainability is not their top concern, half of the **consumers** said they considered sustainability after explicitly asked
 - Sustainability is a by-product of their decision, they are aware (buy organic products for babies) but not willing to practice eco-fashion
 - Difficult to practice eco-fashion when you are not directly affected but only your potential future kids
 - Would not want to pay for a similar item which costs more
 - When confronted by people about the harms of fast fashion, most go into defense mode because of the guilt and exacerbate the situation: difficult to advocate for eco-fashion according to **fashion professionals**
 - It is the middle-class who buys the most fast fashion; the poor buy from secondhand shops and the rich buy from high-end brands
 - Don't feel guilty as long as they use the clothes they buy and purchase second-hand goods
 - Some extreme views about 100% sustainable fashion is also common
- 



Findings & Discussion


Hypothesis 3: Sustainable fashion presents a certain challenge that makes it difficult to achieve eco-fashion

Challenges in achieving sustainable fashion according to consumers and solutions proposed by professionals

1. High price

- “Sustainable fashion is not expensive, fast fashion is cheap”
- Professionals justified how the price is worth it due to high quality materials, no mass productions policy and clean transportation
- Hope technology in the future could help with the reduction in cost

2. Consumer mentality

- The need to follow trends, buying from fast fashion brands because it is cheap, not considering the harmful impacts of fast fashion
 - Professionals agreed it was a problem
 - Negative connotation with secondhand clothes
 - Suggested two different ways to solve this issue
 - Hard measure: impose tax (but it is hard because government needs solid evidence and measurement of the waste produced)
 - Soft measure: Education and the use of celebrities and influencers
- 




Findings & Discussion

Challenges in achieving sustainable fashion according to consumers and solutions proposed by professionals

3. The unattractive design of the sustainable clothes

- Assume it is plain and of dull colours
- Professionals suggests it is only a misconception, the design is greatly dependent of on the designers personal choice
- Possible explanation might be the fact that the technology is not advanced enough to dye sustainable clothes sustainably without wasting too much water or using harmful dyes
- Another possible explanation is to minimise business risk, simple is best as eco-fashion is already risky
- Solution is to ask consumers to educate themselves and widen their search along with the hope that technology can improve to allow more choices to eco fashion designers

4. Inaccessibility of eco-fashion in Hong Kong

- Defend; It is difficult to start a business in Hong Kong, harder for sustainable brands
 - Defend: Brands will not brand themselves as eco so consumers have to dig deeper
 - Consumers are ignorant and not aware of their surroundings
 - Thrifting is already better than Europe
 - Solution: go online
- 



Findings & Discussion

Other findings

People working in the sustainable fashion industry

- Why eco-fashion?
- Events that triggered, personal motivation, right thing to do, independence
- No negative feelings towards people who are not practicing eco-fashion
- Will not force people to practice ecoc-fashion, not hardcore advocate

From the perspective of fashion students

- Most of them wanted to work in fashion business than become designers
 - The curriculum revolves around technical skills and business in fashion
 - Studying fashion is expensive so taking part in eco-fashion is not something everyone can afford
 - When asked if they would work in sustainable fashion, they all said yes if they get a chance but it wasn't their first answer
- 




Findings & Discussion

Co-existence of fast fashion and eco-fashion

YES

- Gradually start by changing their transportation routes, to their fabric, to the soil they grow their cotton on
- Materialistically, it can work on the practical side of things like having a sustainable line in a fast fashion shop or have both kinds of brands existing together
- Every product has its own target customers
- Most interviewees go for this definition, even **sustainable fashion professionals**

NO

- Philosophically it does not work
 - Fast fashion promotes consumption and eco-fashion condones it
- 



Findings & Discussion

Solutions suggested by interviewees: To make eco fashion bigger

Science

- Consumers: Focused on production , Professionals: Focused on waste management (since we don't need clothes anymore)
- Use technology to style
- Used in marketing to persuade consumers to buy sustainable products (proof for trust)

Style

- Finding own style and experimenting/styling can reduce consumption
 - People who are into fashion and styling are usually prone to more consumption
 - People can have more than one style
 - Promotion
- 




Findings & Discussion

Solutions suggested by interviewees: To make eco fashion bigger

Use of marketing, media and celebrities

- Social media is a good tool (that is why people want to dress well)
- Celebrity influence in Asia is particularly prominent (be careful not to be a “fad”)
- Tell a story, build customer value

Government

- Education, not enough about ethical consumption is taught at school)
 - Subsidies to encourage designers and businesses get involved in sustainable fashion (e.g tax relief plan in Japan)
 - Make international standard for eco-friendly and safe clothes to make it center of health to people (not currently in Hong Kong)
 - Set up a committee with experts to tackle the issue
 - Tax but not very probable
 - Do have programmes like incubation programme
- 



Findings & Discussion

Solutions suggested by interviewees: Self-awareness

- Start with yourself
- It is okay to start slow
- It is okay to practicing sustainability for yourself more than an act of altruism toward the environment
- Be aware and educated on the issue to not get manipulated and make informed decisions
- Spread the awareness



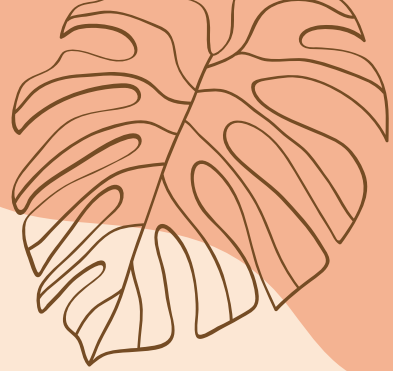


Limitations of the research

- Small sample size due to time constraints, small fashion market in Hong Kong and many categorisation of interview groups
- Generalisation of the sample group 2,3,4 (4-5 people in each category)
- Time constraints to have follow up interviews
- Potential sample biases :
Most consumer interviewees are college females due to convenience, as I am a university student and due to the initial impression that females would be more interested in fashion than men. Thus it does not represent the whole population of young adults consumers



Conclusion





Conclusion

Answer focus questions

- To what extent is the fashion industry unsustainable?
 - Is it possible for fast fashion to co-exist with sustainable fashion?
-
- The fashion industry is more about commerce than art since fast fashion
 - Status quo: Focusing on profit through sustainability
 - Sustainability in fashion is on the rise, maybe even a trend
 - Consumer mentality at the moment favours fast fashion over eco-fashion
 - Consumers are aware but unwilling to practice eco-fashion
 - Consumers recognise certain challenges but are not encouraged to look for a solution
 - High cost, lack of technological advancement in fashion production/waste management and lack of educated consumers is making it difficult to achieve eco-fashion
 - Coexistence of fast fashion and eco-fashion depends on how one defines fashion. Materialistically possible and philosophically impossible
- 