

Communicating customer value in sustainable fashion: Strategies and implications review for ethical consumerism

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ABSTRACT

The fast fashion industry, with its penchant for consumerism, trash, and greenhouse gas emissions, is primarily responsible for environmental damage. Slow fashion is a movement that aims to promote more responsible consumerism through its emphasis on sustainable practices, ethical manufacture, and long-lasting design. In order to express sustainable ideals to consumers in the fashion industry, this study examines successful sustainability communication tactics. As a result of being impacted by honesty, equity, and repurposed goods, slow fashion customers place a premium on ethical business methods, environmental consciousness, and classic style. Constructal level theory, meanwhile, shows that while abstract messages reach more people, sustainability-conscious consumers are more receptive to concrete ones. However, despite the continued ineffectiveness of organisational green marketing, attitudes towards green products among Generation Z are driving sustainable behaviour. The environmental problems caused by rapid fashion necessitate more stringent regulations and consumer education, particularly in Vietnam. The findings of this study can help fashion industry stakeholders and policymakers tackle sustainability issues.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry is one of the sectors that has a major impact on the environment, both socially and ecologically [1-3]. The "fast fashion" paradigm has exploded in popularity in the last several decades, with mass production of garments contributing to both overconsumption and trash that is difficult to control [4, 5]. In contrast, this problem gave rise to the "slow fashion" movement, which places an emphasis on long-term viability, ethical manufacturing, and high-quality materials. The goal of this movement is to encourage more sustainable and ethical consumption habits among the general public [6].

More and more people realise that sustainability is important. Environmental friendliness is a factor for many contemporary buyers [7-9], although fashion, personal identity, and emotional connection are still more important when making a purchase. A problem for fashion firms is to link sustainability goals with customer wants, and this phenomenon highlights the difference between ethical intentions and actual behaviour [10-12]. Sustainability communication is a major obstacle for the fashion business [13]. The lack of clarity and specificity in this messaging undermines consumers' faith in sustainability claims [14]. This study, employing the Construal Level Theory (CLT), reveals that the psychological distance between customers and companies influences sustainability representations [15]. Sending an abstract message to a customer who is physically far away is less successful than sending a concrete one to someone who is psychologically closer to you [16].

There are three primary methods of sustainability communication: amplification, subtle activism, and populist integration [17]. In contrast to silent activism's emphasis on philosophical narratives regarding the worth of sustainability, amplification places an emphasis on production transparency [18]. Combining the two methods, the populist incorporation strategy aims to appeal to a larger demographic. Particularly in the intricate setting of the fashion sector, this highlights the significance of adaptable communication tactics [19].

A key tenet of the slow fashion movement is a commitment to sustainability and openness across the whole production process [20, 21]. The slow fashion movement encourages more thoughtful and conscientious consumption, according to a literature study on the topic [22]. Slowfashion approaches include organic material use, recycling, and waste management; these also support the principles of exclusivity, fairness, and localisation [23].

In contrast, millennials and Gen Zers are quite conscientious about environmental and social issues, yet they frequently find themselves caught between competing priorities, such as pricing and ethics [24]. A new strategy for encouraging more conscientious purchasing habits is known as "green marketing" (GMk) [25]. Particularly among the youth of today, GMk helps promote improved consumption habits via eco-friendly advertising, sustainable packaging, and effective distribution [26, 27]. Both as a producer and a consumer market, Vietnam is seeing the fast fashion phenomenon expand at a rapid pace [28]. International brands like Zara and H&M are flocking to the country to take advantage of its low labour costs and easy access to technology. But there are major environmental costs to this expansion as well, such as more textile trash and carbon emissions. The issue becomes even more complex due to the lack of openness in the global supply chain [29]. Vietnam has a lot of fast fashion businesses, so it's not simple for them to control their environmental effect. Despite efforts to reduce carbon emissions, there are no rules that apply to specific industries [30]. Consumers' lack of knowledge about the effects of their purchasing habits on the environment is a major contributor to textile waste, as is the practice of buying inexpensive apparel in bulk [28].

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Consumer behavior, sustainability communication, and the fashion industry's legal responsibilities are the core topics of this study's components. The primary objective is to learn how to successfully convey fashion-related customer value in a way that encourages sustainable behaviour and advances sustainability development objectives. To give a comprehensive view of sustainability in the fashion business, this review integrates multiple methodological techniques. The trends, obstacles, and opportunities surrounding the shift to more environmentally friendly fashion methods can be better understood with the help of a comprehensive literature evaluation of 105 papers. To further our understanding of the dynamics of young consumers, we present the results of a quantitative study that used structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to analyze data from 784 Vietnamese college students in Generation Z. This study reveals their consumption patterns, product preferences, and sustainable behaviours.

Exploring sustainable communication through the lens of Construal Level Theory, this qualitative study interviews fashion industry managers and customers. The research shows that different stakeholders have varying ways of receiving and processing sustainability messages. Reviewing legislative legislation and industry practices, on the other hand, allows for an examination of the worldwide environmental impact of fast fashion, including its consequences in Vietnam. This method emphasises the significance of rules that encourage greener activities. Additional research that delves into consumer behaviour in relation to the Slow Fashion Movement, including sustainable design choices, ethical ideals, and motivations, supplements the analysis. The findings highlight the importance of consumers' ethical consciousness and design choices in promoting eco-friendly product sales. This study gives a thorough overview of the prospects and threats to sustainability in the fashion industry by combining qualitative and quantitative methods with literature reviews. It also helps industry participants in developing policies and strategies.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A study of the relevant literature reveals that ethical principles, sustainability consciousness, consumer motivation, sustainable consumption, and consumer attitudes are the primary determinants

of slow fashion purchasing behaviour. Supporters of slow fashion value locally sourced goods and classic designs, are worried about the fashion industry's effect on workers' rights and the environment, and shop nearby whenever possible. Slow fashion products attract consumers due to their fair manufacturing practices and exclusivity [1]. From a business point of view, timeless designs, recyclable products, and openness in company procedures are essential components that affect slow fashion consumer choices. Keywords like "sustainability," "ethical values," and "slow fashion" were also abundant in the literature, suggesting that this topic is significant when considering global sustainability, according to the study. Because it forms the backbone of developing a more personal connection between brands and their customers, this sustainability principle is gaining prominence in its implementation [13].

An intriguing use of construal level theory is sustainability communication. Managers that score high on the construal scale often tell philosophical and abstract stories, while those who score low prefer to communicate in a more tangible, open way. Visually appealing, abstract communications more effectively influence less engaged consumers, while consumers with high sustainability awareness place a higher value on tangible messaging. In order to effectively communicate sustainability themes to diverse audiences, this study emphasises the significance of using personal communication tactics. People often frame slow fashion as a social movement that prioritises product quality, conscious consumerism, and social justice, rather than just a business model. The paper acknowledged academics from nations such as Sweden, Brazil, and the US for their valuable contributions to this issue. For a more in-depth look at how this sustainable fashion movement has developed, most research has relied on exploratory and qualitative methods like surveys and case studies [20].

Attitudes towards environmental protection and inclinations for purchasing green products were discovered to have a substantial positive association with consumption behaviour in Generation Z's sustainable behaviour. People from Generation Z are more likely to use energy-efficient appliances and buy products with recyclable or compostable packaging. Nonetheless, people's actions are unaffected by the public's knowledge of environmental problems like climate change. According to the study, sustainable behaviour boosts both consumer happiness and the desire to participate in sustainability initiatives. Organisational green marketing (GMk) initiatives have failed to influence millennials' spending habits. Even though GMk is not a novel concept, it has yet to fully motivate individuals to embrace more sustainable lifestyles. A more creative strategy is required to include sustainability ideas into marketing plans, according to these results [24].

However, without a dedicated legislative framework to control the sector, the problem of fast fashion in Vietnam has come to light. Despite the existence of environmental protection rules, their enforcement is inadequate, especially when it comes to managing textile waste and carbon emissions. Raw material processing accounts for over half of the emissions produced by Vietnam's apparel sector. More than 69% of customers will purchase clothing online in 2022 [28], which is a strong indicator of fast fashion's rising popularity. Even though Vietnam has a higher rate of garment recycling than its neighbours, few Vietnamese consumers are aware of the negative effects of fast fashion on the environment. But there's still a big problem with textile waste. Stronger regulations and greater consumer engagement in favour of sustainability are necessary since growing demand for fast fashion items is worsening environmental problems. Figures 1, 2, and 3 show the bigger picture of the sustainable fashion system and its structures.

Figure 1 is a diagram that shows how cultural, social, technological, and market issues interact to affect fashion industry strategy and sustainability. Factors such as society, culture, and geography influence "fashion," the key aspect under consideration. Factors like time, energy, and ability are all associated with this aspect, and they all contribute to the formation of regional fashion trends.

In the fashion business, the idea of "sustainability" is rising to prominence as a key component that unites social and environmental concerns. Sustainable methods, as seen in the graphic, have their origins in eco-friendly initiatives like "Green Fashion" and ethical supply chain management. Social media and social marketplaces amplify this bond by raising customer consciousness about the need for honesty and environmental responsibility. You might think of "fast fashion" and "slow fashion" as two extremes of this process. Slow fashion prioritises long-term value, quality, and sustainability over quick manufacturing and mass consumption. This graphic illustrates how industry-wide and sustainability-focused methods can work together to achieve a middle ground.

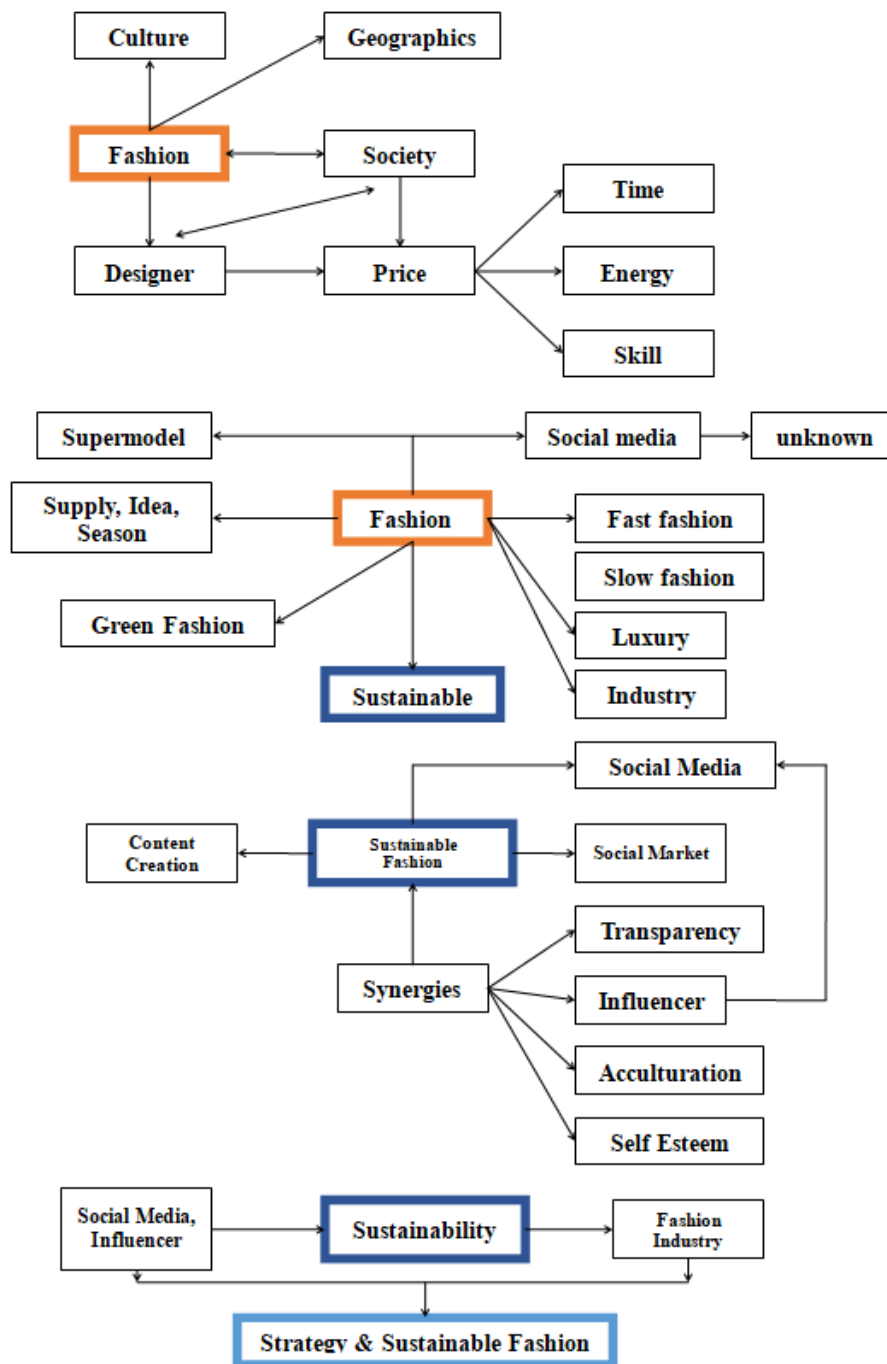


Figure 1. Fashion interaction diagram.

Building a story around sustainability relies heavily on influencers and social media. They play a crucial role in spreading the word about sustainability, changing people's perspectives, and getting them to make more ethical fashion choices. Integrating sustainability ideals into customers' identities is influenced by acculturation and self-esteem, as seen in the diagram. Sustainability strategies in the fashion industry necessitate collaboration across many sectors, as seen in the overall diagram. The fashion industry has the potential to create lasting positive effects on society and the environment by integrating cultural awareness, technical innovation, and transparency into a more socially and environmentally responsible mode.

Figure 2 depicts sustainable fashion, social media influencers, and sustainability promotion strategies in relation to trust, affordability, and consumer behaviours. The primary emphasis is on the role of social media in moulding public views of sustainable fashion, specifically how elements such as trust, style, and consumer demand impact the uptake of eco-friendly goods. The power of social

media influencers to spread messages about sustainability, financial success, and campaigns grounded in scholarly research is the central focus of this graphic. Through their interactions, influencers not only have an impact on consumers' purchasing behaviours, but they also foster symbolic relationships with them, leading to greater trust and more environmentally conscious choices. Important components addressed in their strategy include client demographics and community involvement. The diagram also shows how to measure an influencer's performance. Digital activity, the number of followers, and community involvement are some of the factors displayed. Attracting the audience is mostly dependent on the visuals used in the content, which include imaginative images and design. Influencers can more precisely target their messages by connecting this part with the demographic section.

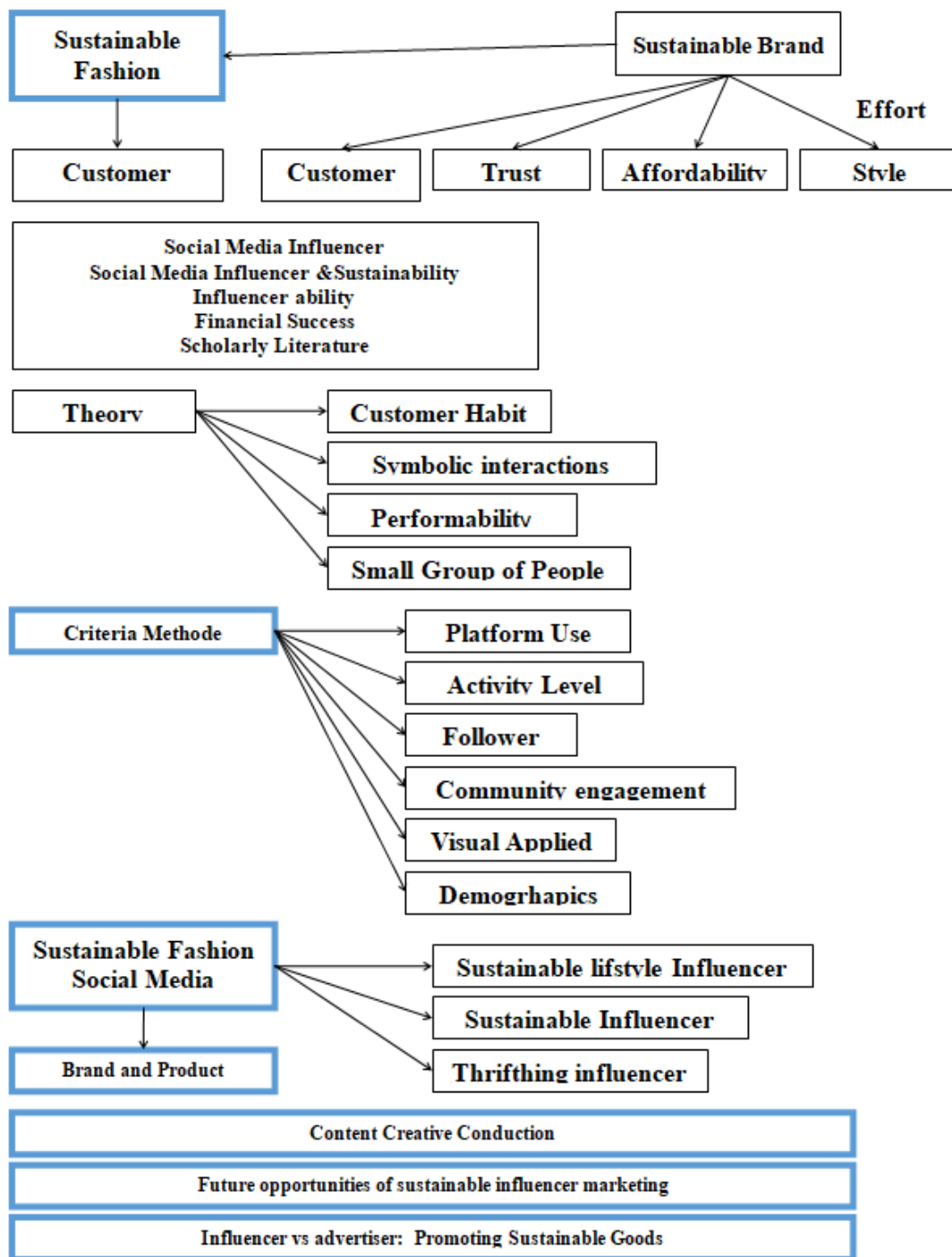


Figure 2. Fashion effect diagram.

The graphic illustrates three categories of sustainable fashion influencers: those who promote eco-friendly lifestyles, those who advocate for sustainable fashion in general, and those who promote thrifting in particular. Each of these three categories takes a somewhat different tack when it comes to spreading messages about sustainability, be it via lifestyle choices, advocacy for environmentally friendly products, or the value of thrift store finds. This highlights the significance of using a broad approach to cater to audiences with varying needs. The graphic shows potential avenues for influencer marketing to promote eco-friendly products in the future. An important factor that can encourage consumers to make more eco-friendly purchases is the rivalry between influencers and conventional marketers to promote sustainable fashion. The secret to creating a long-lasting brand is a mix of engaging content, active community participation, and trustworthy customers.

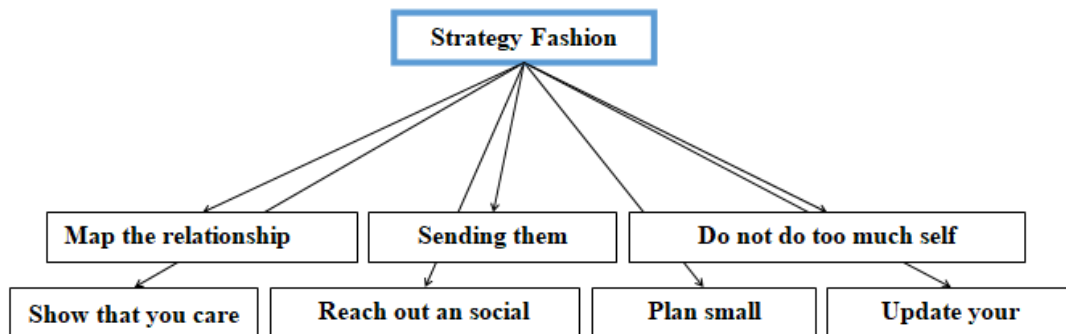


Figure 3. Fashion strategy.

"Map the relationship level" and "Show that you care" are two of the tactics displayed in Figure 3, which highlight the significance of knowing the audience's or customer's level of relationship and demonstrating real caring. A strong foundation for understanding and empathising with the needs of others is frequently the first step in establishing fruitful professional or commercial partnerships, according to this tactic. One can have a more personal and effective influence by adjusting the strategy based on the level of relationship.

Points three through five, which are "Sending them email," "Reach not on social media," and "Don't do too much self-promotion," revolve around balanced and smart communication. While utilising social media appropriately and avoiding excessive self-promotion helps make a great impression in the eyes of the audience, sending emails demonstrates a more formal and concentrated approach. This method stresses the significance of making connections in a meaningful and not overbearing manner in order to keep relationships healthy. Sixth and seventh, "Plan small projects" and "Update your contacts," respectively, highlight the importance of taking tangible steps and keeping in touch. Collaborating on smaller projects with an audience or partner can lead to more in-depth engagement and future partnership possibilities. Furthermore, being proactive about updating your contact information demonstrates your eagerness to stay connected and establish a lasting relationship. This approach guarantees that the partnership will continue to be useful and fruitful.

4. CONCLUSION

Achieving a balance between profit and environmental responsibility is a formidable obstacle for the fashion industry. Adequate marketing and public relations campaigns highlighting the importance of sustainability are necessary to alter consumption habits influenced by quick fashion. Businesses should pay attention to customer tastes, particularly those of the eco-conscious millennial generation, while simultaneously taking pricing and fashion into account. Openness and genuineness ought to be the focal points of sustainability messaging. To gain customer confidence, it's important to provide them with concrete information on eco-friendly activities. This encompasses aspects such as the carbon footprint and the use of recycled materials. Attracting customers who are more conscientious of their influence on the environment is another goal of narrative techniques that highlight ethical principles and worker welfare. Stricter regulation and the creation of a circular economy market are two urgent measures needed to address the environmental implications of fast

fashion. We can do our part to reduce textile waste by enacting policies like energy labelling, providing tax breaks to environmentally conscious companies, and encouraging people to shop for used clothing. It is crucial for the Vietnamese government to educate the public and implement sustainable policies in order to promote green production and alter people's consumption patterns. This article concludes by stressing the significance of communicating value to customers as a means of encouraging sustainable consumption within the fashion sector. Businesses may help lessen their negative effects on the environment and live up to the expectations of today's consumers by being open, honest, and strategic. To achieve sustainable development goals in the era of global fashion, it is vital for stakeholders like governments, manufacturers, and consumers to work together.

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