

## Ethical Fashion

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### Abstract

*Given the increasing interest in ethical brands, the paper identifies and analyses the key issues within the fashion industry regarding ethics in modern society and economy. What exactly makes researchers state that fashion is deadly, unsustainable and unethical? The article considers the issues on the basis of the human and animal rights, environmental impacts, governments' lack of regulation, fashion industry and its supply chain characteristics, and consumers' behavior. Globalization, outsourcing, geographically longer and extended supply chains and the lack of visibility and control, are some of the premises identified in causing ethical issues in fashion industry. Finally, it concludes with what are the features of ethical fashion in general. It uses secondary sources obtained mainly through the media and the literature to review the current debates within the industry.*

*Keywords: ethical fashion, fashion industry, supply chains, labour issues, animal rights, environment*

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### Introduction

Textiles and clothing are a fundamental part of everyday life. It is difficult to imagine a world without textiles. Clothing represents more than 60% of the total textiles used and is expected to remain the largest application (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). The textile industry is also a significant sector in the global economy, providing employment for hundreds of millions of people around the world. For instance, the production of cotton alone accounts for almost 7% of all employment in some low-income countries; the USD 1.3 trillion clothing industry employs more than 300 million people along the global value chain. In the last 15 years, clothing production has approximately doubled, driven by a growing middle-class population across the globe and increased per capita sales in mature economies (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). The global fashion merchandising sector is a \$3 trillion industry, accounts for two percent of the world's GDP, and employs some 33 million workers (Liua et al., 2020).

In the twenty-first century fashion becomes a means by which individuals shape their physical and social identities. Increased demand for large amounts of inexpensive clothing has resulted in (fast) fashion industry. Obviously, it is one of the most rapidly developing in the world. Only in Europe, fast fashion sale and profit rates are higher than in the whole of the remaining fashion retail taken together (Perchla-Włosik and Raciniewska, 2017). Some authors argue that fast fashion is not a new phenomenon, but a phenomenon that has nevertheless increased pressure on the fashion industry to produce in ways that jeopardise environment sustainable practises (McNeill and Moore, 2015).

As a significant employer, the global fashion industry also spurs economic growth, generates tax revenue, provides valuable skills and training, and delivers crucial foreign exchange. With complex buyer-driven global production networks and a labour-intensive manufacturing process, the fashion industry has become fiercely competitive. For decades, European and US apparel companies have profited from moving their manufacturing to low-cost countries in the Far East looking for minimum labour costs. Whether the system creates fast fashion collections (low-cost fashion) or luxury fashion (high-cost fashion), being international and global, it posits some ethical issues today. Exploitation of resources across globally dispersed supply chains often resulted in many environmental and social issues. Despite the benefits, the way clothing is designed, produced, and worn has certain drawbacks that are becoming all the more apparent. This is particularly relevant in the context of weak states, where negative externalities such as human rights

abuses, poor working conditions and low pay levels are often found. It is also the one that encourages purchasing and possessing garments in large numbers and changing, or disposing of them, quickly (Perchla-Włosik and Raciniewska, 2017).

The manufacturing of clothing includes many steps and processes that not only harm the environment, but also the people who make the garments and those who wear them. The social costs involved in the production of (fast) fashion include damages to the environment, human health, and human rights at each step along the production chain (Bick et al, 2018). The production steps include material production, garment manufacturing, transportation/distribution, consumer education, and retailing (Garcia-Torres et al., 2017).

The first anti-fur campaigns appeared in the 1980s. In 1984, when the Bhopal disaster killed thousands in India, the world heard for the first time about the sweatshop practices, unsafe working conditions, poor wages, unreasonable hours, physical and mental abuses by supervisors in factories and mines in Asia. Ever since then, numerous scandals surfaced and public concern regarding labour conditions under which garments and shoes are made has increased considerably. Brands like Gap and Nike have been scrutinized in the past decades for their ethical failures due to their use of sweatshop labour and various environmental offenses. Apparel companies became progressively more concerned about the negative exposure that they could face with a limited supply chain transparency. Recently, the Rana palace incident placed the fashion industry again under increasing public scrutiny and fashion companies felt the urgency of bridging the gap between economic sustainability and social and environmental performance in their operations (Arrigo, 2020). Criticisms over the global fashion industry intensified over time and it has evidenced the social and environmental implications of fast production cycles concomitant with overuse of resources, waste generation, environmental pollution and unethical labour conditions. It appears that the fashion industry, while endowed with enormous potential and responsibility related to the development of countries participating in its complex supply chains, is also associated with high-risk activities along social and environmental dimensions. As socioenvironmental issues became more prominent and companies became a target for public accusations, people started to pay increasing attention to the stories behind particular t-shirts, dresses or pairs of trousers.

Hereafter, ethical approach entered as a vital aspect of fashion management and as a result ethical fashion has begun to enter the debate of fashion's place in society. Growing consumer awareness regarding the impacts of fashion products has led to create a new marketplace for ethical products. According to reports, ethically made apparel only contribute to 1 per cent of the one trillion global fashion industry (Phau et al., 2015).

Given the increasing trend in public awareness of ethical issues in fashion the paper explores the ethical fashion paradox. How something unethical in its nature can change in just the opposite direction? The present study attempts to present the impact that fashion industry has on the environment, on humans, and on the world economy alongside the world of contemporary, excessive and unjustified consumption, and how it influences society. This paper examines ethical fashion while explaining the ethical issues within fashion industry and its possible solutions, stemming from the fact that manufacturers, contractors and consumers are interconnected.

### **1. Fundamental ethical issues in fashion industry**

Ethical concerns are very broad and in some way are applicable to every product and service. They include environmental, animal, societal and people issues (Shaw et al, 2006). As we already mentioned the fashion industry has been subject to enduring criticism about its negative impact over issues including sweatshops, worker exploitation and pollution. Some authors admit that these issues have generally been seen as among the most important ethical issues in international business (Azizul Islam and Wise, 2012). Other issues frequently raised relate to the employment of child labour, human rights abuses, poor working environments and inadequate factory health and safety measures resulting in frequent accidents and deaths. Nowadays, the

industry face many problems in the manufacturing and distribution process, including human and animal rights violations, low wages, and environmental pollution (Kim and Oh, 2020); the protection of biodiversity and ecological systems and finally the sustainable use of resources (Niinimäki, 2015).

Regarding this, the following ethical dimensions in fashion industry can be identified: animal rights, human rights and labour issues, social, economic, environmental and government issues.

Animal ethics are largely discussed in the fashion field. Such issues are related with large-scale industrial production and the concomitant animal husbandry that causes ethical problems through animals' living conditions. Animal issues were some of the first to raise public awareness as result of active campaigns against furs. Animal products are used in wool, silk, feather, leather and fur production for clothes, coats, bags, shoes etc. Fur farms are considered as unethical practices in many countries, and they raise much discussion and counterreactions among stakeholders because of the animal welfare. Another dimension is cruelty to animals through activities like cosmetics testing. Those issues became focal point and some luxury brands refuse to use genuine leather in their collections and goods or specifically note that products are not being tested on animals. It is morally wrong to harm animals, simultaneously arguing that animals deserve moral recognition. Contemporary intentional ethics points out that each individual, no matter human or animal, has rights that should not be violated (Niinimäki, 2015). Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that wool is a renewable material and leather generally come as leftover from food production. Clothes made from fur are expensive, valuable, durable and long-lasting, and they need little maintenance during use. Probably, the major problem still remains the conditions in which animals are being bred and the attitude towards them not as for living creatures but as a soulless objects.

The global shift of production to lower labour cost countries has been linked with worker exploitation in the outer tiers of the network. Human beings have been for decades subjected to ill-treatment. Sweatshops, child labour and worker's rights are pertinent issues in the industry. Sweatshop mostly refers to factory production in which employees are exploited by means of low wages, excessive working hours, under-age employees, or other exploitative practices (Shaw et al, 2006). Unlivable wages, modern slavery, migrant exploitation, gender discrimination and inequality (the majority of these workers are young females), verbal, sexual, and physical abuse, forced overtime are a common phenomenon in the outsourced manufacturing locations throughout the world. The consequences of sweatshop operations includes violations of labour law, drastic safety and health impact on the workers, labour abuses, impact on the industry (Phau et al., 2015). Brands such as H&M, Nike, Adidas were found to be utilising sweatshops to manufacture their apparel. Other luxury brands such as Hugo Boss, Calvin Klein, Armani Exchange, DKNY, Ralph Lauren, Victoria's Secret, Sports Direct, H&M, Pierre Cardin are just some of the luxury brands that have been reported for using sweatshops to manufacture their products (The Guardian, 2017a).

Workers in developing countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, India, Turkey, Malaysia or Indonesia are often desperate to accept any job in such places. On the other hand, to deal with the increasing demand for low-cost short-term orders, many manufacturers rely on sub-contracting (i.e., outsourcing temporary workers), which has resulted in instability in employment in many of the developing countries and increased their workers' overtime. As such, many workers are taken on and dismissed as and when their employers deem fit. In other words, required flexibility has exacerbated working conditions in garment factories (Park and Kim, 2016). The availability of abundant female labour, ready to work at low wages and often coming from labour-surplus rural areas, has created a beneficial situation for the growth of the sector. The malleable workforce, which is largely uneducated, is also able to work at lower-end products where only basic skills are required, a situation which incidentally also creates room for their exploitation (Sarpong, 2018).

For the majority of workers in the fashion industry, wages are so low that it leaves them, and their families, trapped in the cycle of poverty (Baptist World Aid, 2019). Many are forced to work 14-16 hours a day, seven days a week, with some workers finishing at 3 a.m. only to start again the same morning at 7.30 a.m. because they should keep the deadlines (Sarpong, 2018). For the apparel industry, wages for the workers has been reported to be \$1.70 for workers in Mexico, 86 cents for workers in China and 23 cents for workers in Pakistan as compared to \$12.17 per hour for the US workers (Phau et al., 2015). This implies that low wages and excessive working hours are endemic and persistent issues in global supply chains. To sum up, the fashion industry is a source of exploitation for millions.

It hardly can be considered ethical if workers in clothing factories often work in an inadequate health and safety environment, experience physical and verbal exploitation, societal vulnerability and face the threat of loss of employment (Azizul Islam and Wise, 2012). Working in unsafe and hazardous work conditions often leads to work injuries and factory fires. There have been numerous incidents of factory buildings collapsing leading to the death of many workers. The infamous Rana Plaza, which collapsed in 2013, leading to the deaths of over a thousand people, was not even built according to the plan that was submitted to the authorities. The building was found to have had illegal additions and unaddressed structural problems (Phau et al., 2015). Globally, whilst safety standards have improved, fire safety, structural defects within factories, and unsafe working conditions remain reasons for continued concern.

In common with the preceding discussion, child labour posits even deeper ethical problems. Nearly 1 in 10 children are subjected to child labour worldwide, with some forced into hazardous work through trafficking (UNICEF, 2020). Child labour is a particular issue for fashion because much of the supply chain requires low-skilled labour and some tasks are even better suited to children than adults. Employers prefer to hire children for their small fingers, which do not damage the crop or for beading, sequins and assembling (imitation) jewellery (The Guardian, 2018a). Child labour can result in extreme physical and mental harm, and even death (The Guardian, 2017c) in conditions of slavery and sexual or economic exploitation. The perception of child labor depends on cultural traditions, the level of economic development and social conditions. Implementing and complying with international child labor standards proves difficult and sometimes impossible due to the fact that most child labor takes place in the informal sector, agriculture, services and small-scale production, which are usually not adequately covered by national legislation. The ethical issue stems from the fact that children are deprived from their fundamental rights of joy and normal living in childhood, education, healthcare, and prosperous future.

Appalling working conditions for children and adults are not only related to long hours, low wages etc., but also with high use of chemicals, pesticides, toxins etc. in the process. Such substances result in respiratory hazards (due to poor ventilation, cotton dust, synthetic particles in air) and musculoskeletal hazards from repetitive motion tasks (Bick et al, 2018) with a serious impact on the health of workers. Health issues appear in the provision of the raw materials as well. For instance, cotton pickers experience related health problems like skin irritations, coughs, headaches. Bangladesh tannery workers are exposed to formaldehyde, sulphuric acid, heavy metals and chemicals like mercury, phthalates, acids and dioxins while making products and resulting in common chronic skin and lung diseases (The Guardian, 2017b).

Besides on workers, hazardous substances have impact on the environment as well. Due to fashion's global importance in terms of export volumes and number of employees, its environmental impact is significant (Rafi-UI-Shan et al., 2018). Negative impacts on nature are possible throughout the whole process. It starts with the raw materials used in fashion industry (cotton; wool; extraction and refining of crude oil for synthetic fibres, plastics, etc) and continues with textiles production (ginning, spinning, knitting, embroidery, weaving, dyeing, stamping, chemical finishing), leather tanning and plastic (processing, moulding). Moreover, it is associated as one of the industries with intensive consumption of natural resources (water, raw materials, energy) and

chemicals, and ranks among one of the most polluting sectors worldwide (Arrigo, 2020). At least 108 million tonnes of non-renewable resources are used each year to produce clothing. The fashion industry is a significant consumer of fresh water, using approximately 79 billion cubic metres per year ( Baptist World Aid, 2019) and it is forecasted a tripling of resource consumption by 2050 as compared to 2000 (Nature Climate Change, 2018). Industry requires significant freshwater withdrawal not only to grow fibres (cotton is a thirsty crop) but also for the dyeing and finishing process of fabrics. Textile production is one of the most polluting industries. Over 60 percent of textiles are used in the clothing industry and a large proportions of clothing manufacturing occurs in China and India, countries which rely on coal-fuelled power plants, increasing the footprint of each garment (Nature Climate Change, 2018).

It became clear that the fashion supply chain can cause significant environmental degradation, which affects the wellbeing of workers, the communities they live in, and their natural environment. It is important to note that most of the fashion industry's environmental impact occurs within its supply chains. Deliveries and transportation from globally dispersed offshore suppliers' factories to final markets generate additional negative environmental effects in terms of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (Arrigo, 2020). It has been stated that around 5% of total global emissions come from the fashion industry (Nature Climate Change, 2018). It is estimated that the textile industry will account for 25 percent of the global carbon budget by 2050 (Kalambura et al, 2020). Industry experts estimate, by the year 2025, there will be an increase of 77 percent of carbon dioxide emissions, 20 percent of water use, and 7 percent of land use (Liua et al., 2020).

In equal measure for impacted ecosystem quality through a range of forms of pollution, carbon emissions, resource depletion and water consumption, the breadth of environmental issues refers to waste concerns. Waste, when dumped in open areas, causes several environmental and health issues. Industrial waste and dyes used by the industry often contaminate watercourses. It has been estimated that during washing our clothes release close to half a million tonnes of plastic microfibers into the ocean every year. These fibres are ingested by fish and other marine animals entering the food chain (Kalambura et al, 2020). Textile waste can be found in the waste we throw away every day. Bento (Kalambura et al, 2020) points out that textile waste is actually a durable waste, although real market dynamics have made it a nondurable product. Estimates suggest that 95% of the clothes eliminated in conjunction with the urban waste could be used again, reused, recycled or modified and transformed to a better product (upcycling) (Kalambura et al, 2020). For instance, there are claims that more than 1 billion kg of textiles are being sent to landfill every year in the United Kingdom alone (Clarke and Holt, 2016). In addition, not only is this a massive waste of all the resources used to manufacture these items, but it creates even more pollution through emissions of hazardous chemicals and greenhouse gases due to incineration or deposits in landfills. From an ecological point of view, incineration should not be considered as a treatment strategy for textile waste given the direct (air pollution) and indirect (contamination of soils and aquifers) impacts that this practice may have (Kalambura et al, 2020).

The intensification of environmental impact is accompanied by the social impact of fashion supply chains. As result of globalization, an ethical issue stems from the social impact expressed by encouraging monoculture and disrupting local economies (Clarke and Holt, 2016).

## **2. Premises for ethical issues in fashion industry**

With the growth of a global economy alongside the fundamental ethical problems, ethical issues are further provoked by the societal characteristics, industry's features and supply chains characteristics as well as consumers' behaviour.

Globalization have significantly transformed the world's labour and production markets. Production and consumption patterns of the world's fashion have changed with retailing traditionally concentrated in Europe, but increasingly expanding to emerging markets (Rafi-Ul-Shan et al., 2018). Supply chains relations have become highly global with garment manufacturing

mostly fragmented across small- and medium-sized plants mainly in Asia. Garment assembly, employs 40 million workers around the world and low and middle-income countries produce 90% of the world's clothing ( Bick et al, 2018). Supply chains have become international, shifting the growth of fibers, the manufacturing of textiles, the construction of garments, manufacturing facilities to areas with cheaper labour. It has been hinted already that the structure of the apparel or garment industry fosters sweatshop production. The supposition is that it borders on exploitation, coercion and lack of freedoms (Sarpong, 2018).

The fashion industry is characterised by rapid changes in styles, novelty and mass consumption, high demand volatility, low predictability, high impulse buying (Rafi-Ul-Shan et al., 2018). Fashion brands have the attitude to create a feeling of tempting exclusivity where some brands do not produce large quantities of the same clothing, but small batches of new products. For many individuals the role of clothing is not confined to functional needs, rather needs for belongingness, self-esteem, gaining acceptance from peers and as a demonstration of social standing motivate individuals to seek fashionable clothing. Fashion and identity relationship stems from the fact they are grounded in two identical processes, which are to give the individual a sense of belonging to a given social group, while at the same time also reinforcing their conviction of being unique and distinguishable ( Perchla-Włosik and Raciniewska, 2017). As a response to the forementioned, the phenomenon of fast fashion can be described exactly as a specific business model that combines elements such as quick responses; frequent assortment changes; fashionable and fresh designs at affordable prices (Garcia-Torres et al., 2017); planned obsolescence of the products; mainly aimed at young consumers (Perchla-Włosik and Raciniewska, 2017). Fast fashion brands offer current fashion products almost every few weeks and consumers lack other alternatives offering similar benefits in the market.

This implies that the intention is to create the desire to buy, to make an artificial need that manipulates the consumer to go more often to their stores. The restriction of only a few pieces available in stores creates a sense of urgency. Should a customer decide to wait some time to think about the purchase, all pieces may have disappeared when he returns. Critics further argue that fashion fosters shallow, materialistic perspectives which result in a constant state of lifestyle and physical dissatisfaction (Shaw et al, 2006), encouraging in consumers a superficial sense of identity and the good life through apparel (Clarke and Holt, 2016). The euphoria around sales, lower prices and new collections often causes people to shop for clothes without thinking, generating in excessive and uncontrollable consumption. This vast availability allows premature disposal of fashion products. Due to its disposable nature, low prices and trendy styles have become more important decision criteria for purchasing fashion products instead of craftsmanship and durability (Park and Kim, 2016). Logically, fast fashion products are often criticized for being made with poor-quality materials and construction. It has been estimated that there are 20 new garments manufactured per person each year and we are buying 60 percent more than we were in 2000. Each garment is worn less before being disposed of and this shorter lifespan means higher relative manufacturing emissions (Nature Climate Change, 2018). Some garments are estimated to be discarded after just seven to ten wears (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017) or are thrown away within one year (Park and Kim, 2016). It is a system that is highly economically viable, although this comes at a high moral and ecological cost (Perchla-Włosik and Raciniewska, 2017).

If previous research literature exploring ethics in garment sourcing networks has focused on animal issues and labour issues, today the new direction is sustainable issues in manufacturing and distribution. The global industry started to pose many challenges for sustainability efforts as fashion has become a throw-away commodity, and rapid phase production of short-lived products have become a normality. This has come at a cost though, as companies now economize on safety measure and pay poor wages in order to increase their profit margins (Sarpong, 2018). Fashion supply chains must be simultaneously proactive in determining trends and sufficiently reactive to bring them to market in a proper time and stock. Otherwise, retailers may incur extra inventory

costs and unsold items may have to be marked down, affecting profit margin (Rafi-Ul-Shan et al., 2018).

Consequently, it has become challenging to identify the origin of a product since production processes are fragmented into several countries. The attribute “Made in” is today less relevant than the attribute “Made by”, which needs a lot of information gathering about the different stages in manufacturing and communicating these aspects not only to consumers but also to all stakeholders (Niinimäki, 2015). Outsourcing, off-shore manufacturing and globalisation turned supply chains into longer and complex networks which has increased supply chain vulnerability, fragility and frequent operational disruptions making its transparency an important issue and critical challenge.

At this point, it raises some questions. First, environmental regulations and social standards in lower labour cost countries, where production often takes place, are generally lower than the retailer's home market. This happens frequently but not exclusively in developing economies where labour laws and workers rights can be less rigorous (Shaw et al, 2006). In addition, outsourcing production is directed to low and middle-income countries with lower environmental awareness and looser regulatory systems (Phau et al., 2015; Liua et al., 2020; Bick et al, 2018) or if existed not applied. Occupational and safety standards in low and middle-income countries are often not enforced due to poor political infrastructure and organizational management (Bick et al, 2018). High income countries can promote occupational safety and environmental health through trade policy and regulations (Bick et al, 2018). Although government officials often pledge to improve health and safety measures at workplaces, they have been skittish also about taking steps that would increase production costs and potentially result in the garment industry moving somewhere else (Sarpong, 2018). Government is basically responsible for establishing an environment appropriate not only for investors and business, but also for its subjects that are employed in different enterprises. In addition, the lack of global sustainability standards, indicators and regulations makes sustainability integration especially challenging in global supply chain networks (Rafi-Ul-Shan et al., 2018).

Second, as multinational companies are becoming increasingly dependent on suppliers from developing nations, the ethical pressure on multinational companies from various stakeholder groups has also grown significantly. It posits renewed questions over whether international retailers should be held accountable for lax safety standards in the factories where their products are made. How far can multinational companies exert influence on all their contractors which, in this case, even comprises of subcontractors they might not even know of? To what extent are retail companies responsible for the mishaps within the supply chain in front of consumers and public? Moreover, are all parties, including subcontractors, adhering to the principles enacted by the multinational company's headquarters or divisions? Unfortunately, the only time the issue of sufficient control might be brought to the attention of the multinational company would be when a disaster occurs.

Such incidents posit the issues of greenwashing. It refers to cases when companies decided to demonstrate ethical behaviour after some negative publicity because of consumers and public awareness but actually they are just misleading them in relation to the company's environmental practices or the environmental benefits of products or services (Kim and Oh, 2020). Niinimäki argues that because Western consumers' environmental interest is rising, companies may be tempted to use sustainable and environmental arguments merely to increase sales (Niinimäki, 2015). If a fast-fashion company uses eco-labels on some of its products or one product line, it does not truly change the fashion system or the economic logic behind it; the company's environmental load is still huge since it produces too much stuff in extremely fast cycles. A similar example is where a fast fashion company uses paper bags instead of plastic ones (Niinimäki, 2015). Therefore, the approach to sustainability taken by fast fashion brands (H&M, Zara) is fundamentally different from that of sustainable fashion brands (Patagonia, Eileen Fisher, TOMS) such that the former is reactive in their sustainability initiative while the latter is proactive by taking a sustainability leadership in the entire fashion industry. Given that environmental and sustainability issues are

complex, it is also easy to mislead consumers. But from an ethical point view it is lying indeed. Usually consumers answer with boycotts to certain products and even brands (GAP, NIKE). But one must consider that further dilemmas arise when consumers consider the impact of boycotting child labour, which could force children into more dangerous employment as already mentioned (Shaw et al, 2006).

Considering the power of media, one can observe a second reaction by it. It can be argued that any serious questioning of the accelerated consumption has more or less disappeared from discourses in mass media. They still embrace the concerns of activist-consumers or even ethical consumers but are not investigating the issues enough as reliant on advertising revenue (Clarke and Holt, 2016).

Being the other side of ethical equation, consumers are not always seen innocent. In other words, not only manufacturers can be blamed for ethical issues in the industry. It is a paradox that consumers, despite their awareness of sustainability and ethical challenges facing in the current society, still develop a positive attitude toward fast fashion brands. The reasons can emanate from the fact that consumers may perceive that the benefits offered by fast fashion brands outweigh the mentioned negative impacts of fast fashion business (Park and Kim, 2016). Similarly, there is a general lack of understanding among consumers about the impact of unethical production and consumption created by fast fashion products. It is important to state that although the media covering of the mentioned unethical aspects of fashion industry have increased awareness among consumers and public in general, the supply chains structure makes it extremely difficult for average consumers to understand the cause and effect of fast fashion brands' businesses. Even those consumers who express strong concern about environmental and social issues admit that they continuously engage in the consumption of fast fashion products due to their desire for updated fashion ( Park and Kim, 2016).

Globalization, nature of fashion industry, fashion supply chains, manufacturers and retailers, and consumers have been analyzed as they predetermine the ethical issues in fashion industry according to us. Some substantial ethical issues originate in their specifics and evoke the patterns of overconsumption, lack of transparency, control, responsibility and sustainability in supply chains, underuse of clothing, lying the public and consumers, establishing a false identity.

### **3. Solutions for ethical fashion**

The breadth and depth of social and environmental abuses in fashion warrant its classification as unethical. After presenting the ethical issues in fashion industry, the following section examines what exactly is ethical fashion. How an industry so detrimental to environment, making poor even more vulnerable in society, predetermined to be unsustainable can become ethical?

To start with, there is no singular definition. Presumably, ethical fashion is fashion, free of resource depletion, environmental degradation, and labour problems. This general definition examines ethical fashion as opposing directly to the fashion business described in previous sections (unethical one). Most of the authors use sustainable, ethical, green etc to describe the same issues. In instance, clothes manufactured according to fair trade principles with sweatshopfree labour conditions while not harming the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton can be seen as an ethical fashion as well as green fashion (Lundblad and Davies, 2016).

It can be assumed that ethical fashion is fashion that aims to reduce the negative impact on people, animals, and the planet. Ethical fashion takes into consideration the rights of both the people who make the clothing and the animals from which some materials may be taken, and the environmental impacts the creation of the clothing may have on the environment. It is fashion that is kind to the planet and people every step of the way: from seed to garment. Ethical fashion refers to garments that have been produced in an environment that is conscious and engaged in the many social issues the fashion industry affects.



In this sense, ethical fashion encompasses high-quality and well-designed products that are environmentally sustainable, help disadvantaged groups and reflect good working conditions (Manchiraju and Sadachar, 2014). For example, the International Trade Centre initiated the Ethical Fashion Programme, which goal is to reduce poverty in disadvantaged African communities by acting as an intermediary to connect marginalized artisans (the majority of them women) to international markets through collaboration with high-end fashion houses (e.g. Marni, Stella McCartney, Vivienne Westwood) and retailers.

If we elaborate the concept, we can accept that ethical fashion represents an approach to clothes design, supply and production that seeks to maximise the profit for individuals and communities, while also minimizing its adverse impact on the environment. To this end, the ethical aspect goes beyond mere idleness and refraining from causing harm, instead focusing on being actively engaged in fighting poverty, providing people with sustainable livelihood, and bringing adverse effects on the natural environment to the minimum (Perchla-Włosik and Raciniewska, 2017). Considered in this way, ethical fashion should be promoting the ideas of fair trade, responsible consumption, corporate social responsibility, improved working conditions and building social support for sustainable growth in the clothing industry. Lundblad and Davies argue that some aspects of consumption process, not just the process of manufacturing and distribution, such as laundering, use, reuse and disposal that can have a substantial impact on the sustainability of a garment, should not be excluded from the definition of ethical fashion (Lundblad and Davies, 2016). In other words, a “truly ethical” company not only ensures that its supply chain empowers workers and pays them a living wage, it also understands its impact on the environment and manages its footprint to keep waterways, the earth, and the atmosphere healthy (Baptist World Aid, 2019).

The key features of ethical fashion are countering fast, cheap fashion and damaging patterns of fashion consumption; defending fair wages, working conditions and workers’ rights; supporting sustainable livelihoods with traditional methods and fabrics; addressing toxic pesticide and chemical use; using and/or developing eco-friendly fabrics and components; minimizing water use; recycling and addressing energy efficiency and waste; developing or promoting sustainability standards for fashion; resources, training and/or awareness-raising initiatives; and promoting animal rights (Perchla-Włosik and Raciniewska, 2017). How it can be accomplished?

First, workers have basic rights that should not be violated, notwithstanding the geographical location of their workplace, whether they are in either the developed or developing countries. Labour issues can be resolved by fair wages, health and safety standards to implement and keep strictly. Some of them can be resolved by the consumers and the others by manufacturers. Ethical fashion promotes the adoption of a living wage that will meet a workers’ basic needs and allow them to maintain a safe and decent standard of living (one that covers the cost of housing, food education, health and sanitation, transport, other needs (clothing etc.). It is well recognised that attaining a living wage requires a multi-stakeholder approach, that includes companies and their brands, government, civil society, consumers, factory management, and workers (Baptist World Aid, 2019).

Ethical fashion should cope with employee empowerment and companies’ systems or policies are required in place to rehabilitate child or forced labourers if discovered. Related with discrimination and migration issues, it matters whether the company has a functioning grievance mechanism which workers can access anonymously and in their native language.

Second, ethical fashion considers animal issues as well as human rights. The matter expands from do fashion companies use animal materials and if so, how do manufacturers or their suppliers treat the animals (e.g. silk and wool). For instance, regarding the materials down has become a prominently used material in the outdoor apparel sector. There are many challenges in ensuring ethically sourced down. Patagonia have been pioneers in the tracing of down products used in their

garments. Designers and fashion companies, such as Stella McCartney and Nike, have been introducing production of faux fur and environmentally sustainable fashion items.

Labour and animal issues usually fall within the scope of codes of conduct. It has to be noted, in order to lead up to ethical fashion indeed, that the codes must apply to multiple levels of the supply chain, including the raw materials level; use of regular and excessive overtime; addressing gender inequality in the supply chain as strategy to address discrimination faced by women in the apparel industry. In order to be efficient, codes of conduct in fashion industry need as well not just to be accepted, but also revised regularly and applied permanently in greater extent. Standards like SA 8000, ISO 14001 and Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) help companies when considering environmental and social aspects in design and manufacturing practices. Additionally, the UN has defined ten principles called the “Global Compact” to set standards for subcontractors regarding human rights, labour issues, environment initiatives and issues in anti-corruption. Codes that address the ILO Four Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work are universally accepted and applied too, especially the part about child labour.

Construction and implementation of minimum standards in business as an opportunity for manufacturers and contractors is associated with ethical trade. Some researches oppose ethical trade to the developmental projects of fair trade (Sarpong, 2018). Fair trade represents an ethical approach to product manufacturing and to alleviate poverty in the global south while building enduring and direct relationships with overseas buyers and removes profit-oriented intermediaries from the supply chain. Key aspects provided by fair trade are community improvement, women empowerment and mitigation of environmental impact of the production process.

Third, ethical fashion should consider the environmental impacts of fashion firms’ various sourcing decisions along the value chain. The type and severity of impact that an item of clothing will have depends significantly on the material that it is made from. Most of the clothes we buy are made from cotton or polyester, and both are associated with significant impacts on health through its production process and fabrics. Companies can assess how much of their final products are made from sustainable fibres. The sustainability of a fiber refers to the practices and policies that reduce environmental pollution and minimize the exploitation of people or natural resources in meeting lifestyle needs. Fabrics from natural cellulosic and protein fibers, such as Lyocell<sup>1</sup> or Tencel<sup>2</sup>, are thought to be better for the environment and for human health. Finding suitable eco-materials that can be ordered in small amounts can be most challenging for small companies (Niinimäki, 2015). To promote their social and environmental performance, companies make use of social and green certifications and ecolabels such as Global Organic Textile Standards, Ecolabel, Global Reporting Initiative.

Another important issue to address is data about water use for all water intensive facilities. For example, the global fastening manufacturer YKK adopts a new solution in production process to reduce water usage (Shen and Li, 2019). Likewise, it is worthy to note does the brand make available to customers a take-back and/ or repair program. The approach of extended producer responsibility (EPR), which has gained a lot of attention the EU, requires the original manufacturer or producer to take back the product after its use. The idea is that still in the design phase producers think about and plan how they can reduce environmental impact of the product after its use. France is one exception. There producers, distributors and importers of clothes, linen and footwear have had to take back old products since 2008 ( Niinimäki, 2015).

Forth, supply chains relations and issues regarding the nature of fashion industry have to be considered. The companies need to ensure that there is either no subcontracting or that all subcontracted production adheres to code standards at the final stage of production. Does the

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<sup>1</sup> Made from the cellulose of bamboo in a closed loop production cycle in which 99% of the chemicals used to develop fabric fibers are recycled.

<sup>2</sup> A fibre produced in a closed circuit that reuses 100% of the water and proceeds from forest timber managed in a controlled manner, guaranteeing their reforestation.

company invest in training buyers and suppliers/factory managers, in order to increase awareness of human rights and health and safety risks? Matters of where the textiles are made and by whom should be discussed, including revealing the fair work policies and factory locations, as well public list for suppliers' facilities. New order and relationships in the chain can be established through rebuilding brand-supplier relations, moving from transactional toward long-term, actively improve leverage and relationships with suppliers, with common sustainability goals and joint investments. Substantial change is required in direction to using more sustainable packaging and transportation methods. Here issues for traceability and transparency are referred, namely to what extent companies are open and transparent about other aspects of their supply chain. Similarly, auditing results need to be publicly announced.

Fifth, the need to alleviate environmental and social impacts should not only be demanded from fashion companies, but from consumers as well. The impulsive way we buy clothes in large quantities through excessive consumption, without realising the origin of this linear model, has consequently contributed to a negative environmental impact (Kalambura et al, 2020). Extending the life span of garments is one of the most critical issues for ethical fashion. Ethical use of consumers comprises from offering experiences through sharing, swapping, lending, updating or do-it-yourself fashion; purchasing fewer garments, using them more frequently, to washing less, letting garments rest and air between use. To slow down consumption, it is important to invest in high quality and durability as well as in aesthetically ageing materials, more classical style and high quality. In this respect, consumers awareness plays an important role for more sustainable consumption, for clothing to be worn longer, as well as for its potential reuse and appropriate disposal at the end of life.

Within the textile industry, only 13% of the total material input is recycled by some means after clothing wear. To oppose this trend, ethical fashion today directs towards a circular economy, where the value of products and materials is maintained for as long as possible and waste and resource use is minimised. It represents a distinct and yet complementary vision for the ongoing efforts to make the textiles system more sustainable by minimising its negative impacts, one that is restorative and regenerative by design and provides benefits for business, society, and the environment (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). In such a new textiles economy, clothes, fabric, and fibres are kept at their highest value during use, and re-enter the economy after use, never ending up as waste. Technology and transparency present opportunities for resilient, sustainable and ethical fashion industry. Transparency and trustworthiness to the public are increased by partnering with NGOs (Liua et al., 2020).

In summary, ethical fashion is a term used to define companies that operate with ethical (does not include abuse or exploitation of any kind at any stages within the supply chain) and sustainable processes (resource provision, manufacturing, supply chain and consumption). Ethical fashion signifies an appetite for products with high quality, that are well-designed and environmentally and socially sustainable. A growing body of consumers wants to invest in high-quality, well-designed products that are environmentally sustainable, help disadvantaged groups and reflect good working conditions. Traditional, solid, and conservative fabrics and traditional techniques present an option for that. They evoke longevity, credibility, quality and a sense of being within a collectively anchored cultural field. Ethical fashion allows developing countries to utilize their traditions and culture, deliver finished products rather than supply raw materials. Ethical fashion re/presents an innovative way to reduce poverty as it has real development potential to build sustainable new jobs and industries among poor communities.

### **Conclusion**

The fashion industry compels firms to race to produce the latest trends as quickly as possible. In order to keep up with consumer demand and increase profit margins, companies compromise their ethical standards to stay competitive in the industry. Fashion industry has long

been under the microscope for irresponsible behaviors such as environmental harms, labour exploitation, and inferior product quality. Human health issues and animal rights need to be considered as well throughout production and consumption process. The paper found out that problems within the fashion industry could be rectified if people at all stages of the supply chain take responsibility for their actions and inactions, starting from the occupied in resource provision and manufacturing process, retailers, consumers and authorities.

A systemic shift is needed to reach fundamental change, but transition faces resistance and it takes time to emerge. Achieving ethical practices in the fashion and textile industries is difficult since they are made up of long supply chains, persistent consumers and fragmented national moral standards and ethical practices. But fashion brands are gradually striving to create ethical fashion that promote sustainable use of resources and emphasize renewable and recyclable materials; contribute to greater product satisfaction and happiness through less materialistic consumption; and finally, highlight social justice and awareness.

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