

## The Hearth Lecture Series

### Trendspotting: Why Things Matter

#### Session 5

##### **Annotated Bibliography: Fashion's Metamorphosis: From Fast to Ethical**

Within the fashion industry, the concept of sustainability has become contentious, so much so that a few brands have decided to eschew the term from their vocabulary altogether. Moreover, studies have shown that even our genuine efforts to embrace sustainability have had an insignificant, if any, impact on the industry's greenhouse gas emissions.

So, what comes next? Alerting consumers of the ever-increasing dangers of fast fashion and relying on them to pay more for products claiming to be "sustainable" while simultaneously pursuing relentless growth and perpetuating constant trends hasn't worked. It's clear that a different approach is needed. The question, however, remains- is it possible to move away from fast fashion without incurring the drastic economic and social costs of slowing down an industry as vast and prolific as the fashion industry.

The annotated bibliography below provides references to key sources that highlight crucial facts, figures, and discussions around the economic, social, and environmental dynamics of fast fashion. These sources offer foundational insights into the state of the fashion industry concerning ethics, growth, and sustainability in 2024.

#### Sources

1. Granskog, Anna, et al. "Biodiversity: The Next Frontier in Sustainable Fashion." *McKinsey & Company*, McKinsey & Company, 23 July 2020,

[www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/biodiversity-the-next-frontier-in-sustainable-fashion.](https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/biodiversity-the-next-frontier-in-sustainable-fashion)

In "Biodiversity: The Next Frontier in Sustainable Fashion," Granskog et al. underscore the overlooked dimension of biodiversity in the discourse on sustainability within the fashion industry. While climate change and sustainability have garnered attention, biodiversity loss due to fashion's impact on ecosystems remains largely unaddressed.

The article elucidates how the apparel sector significantly contributes to biodiversity loss through soil degradation, natural habitat conversion, and waterway pollution along its supply chains. Through quantitative analysis and expert insights, the authors identify key areas within the apparel value chain that notably affect biodiversity: raw-material production, material preparation and processing, and end-of-life disposal.

The authors urge bold leadership within the industry to integrate biodiversity management, engage with suppliers, invest in innovation, advocate for change, and collaborate with policymakers. They predict a growing concern for biodiversity among consumers and investors, emphasising the need for the apparel industry to shift towards ecological preservation.

**2. McKinsey & Company. (2019, September 13). *When you pick that pre-worn jacket, the environment wins too.* McKinsey & Company.**

<https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/sustainability/our-insights/when-you-pick-that-pre-worn-jacket-the-environment-wins-too>

In a conversation with Andy Ruben of Trove, the focus shifts towards entering the circular economy and its implications for sustainable fashion. Ruben, CEO of Trove (formerly Yerdle), advocates for a platform that enables companies to buy and sell used goods, thereby fostering deeper customer engagement while benefiting the environment through item repurposing.

Ruben emphasises the shift in consumer behaviour towards preferring high-quality used items over new ones, prompting retailers to adapt to this trend. Initially, Yerdle experimented with a marketplace for exchanging used items but encountered challenges due to user friction and concerns about product quality.

The interview delves into the business opportunities stemming from the disruption of traditional retail models by used or rented goods. Ruben highlights the potential \$50 billion shift in sales over the next three years if consumers opt for used or rented items instead of new purchases. He underscores the importance of circular models where customers can return items for resale after use, fostering sustainability and ethical leadership in alignment with customer values.

Ruben's insights underscore the necessity for brands to innovate their business models towards circular reuse, not merely as a sustainability gesture but as a strategic move towards true sustainability and ethical leadership in the fashion industry.

- 3. Williams, E. (2022a). Appalling or advantageous? exploring the impacts of fast fashion from environmental, social, and Economic Perspectives. *Journal for Global Business and Community*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.56020/001c.36873>**

*In the realm of consumer culture, fast fashion emerges as a dominant force, promising accessibility to ever-changing trends at remarkably low prices. However, beneath its glossy exterior lies a nuanced landscape of ethical dilemmas and environmental concerns. This paper endeavours to unravel the multifaceted nature of fast fashion, shedding light on both its positive impacts and detrimental consequences.*

*Fast fashion, characterised by its rapid production cycles and affordability, initially appears as a boon for consumers seeking to stay abreast of the latest styles. Yet, a closer examination reveals a stark reality: the industry's reliance on cheap labour and materials in developing countries often perpetuates exploitative working conditions and environmental degradation.*

*Despite these challenges, proponents argue that fast fashion facilitates greater inclusivity in fashion, democratising style for individuals across socioeconomic strata. Moreover, the industry's expansion has spurred economic development in regions traditionally marginalised within the global economy.*

*Through a comprehensive analysis encompassing environmental, social, and economic perspectives, this paper aims to provide a nuanced understanding of fast fashion's impact on society. By weighing its benefits against its drawbacks, we seek to navigate a path towards sustainable and equitable fashion practices, fostering dialogue and awareness within the fashion industry and beyond.*

4. Pucker, K. (2022, January 13). *The myth of sustainable fashion*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2022/01/the-myth-of-sustainable-fashion>

In "The Myth of Sustainable Fashion," K. Pucker challenges the prevalent narrative surrounding sustainability in the fashion industry. Despite the proliferation of eco-friendly marketing tactics and innovative business models like recycling, resale, and rental, the industry's environmental impact continues to soar.

Pucker reveals the harsh reality: the fashion market's growth over the past 25 years has intensified its planetary toll, with a significant portion of clothing ending up in landfills. Estimates of the industry's carbon footprint vary, highlighting the lack of transparency and complexity within the sector.

Efforts such as recycling, next-gen materials, and rental services fall short of truly mitigating environmental harm due to high costs, resistance to change, and limited effectiveness. Pucker argues that the industry's relentless pursuit of growth, particularly in low-cost synthetic fibres, undermines any progress made through sustainable initiatives.

To address this, Pucker advocates for systemic changes including the retirement of the term "sustainability," governmental intervention to price negative externalities, and extended producer responsibility legislation. After decades of voluntary efforts, Pucker contends that the fashion industry must undergo a fundamental shift towards authentic sustainability, recognizing its role in both reflecting and shaping cultural values.

5. Bringé, A. (2023, September 12). *The State of Sustainability in the fashion industry (and what it means for brands)*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2023/01/02/t>

[he-state-of-sustainability-in-the-fashion-industry-and-what-it-means-for-brands/?sh=edf1631c827d](#)

In "The State of Sustainability in the Fashion Industry," Bringé delves into the burgeoning demand for sustainable fashion and its transformative impact on brands. As sustainability takes centre stage, brands find themselves compelled to reassess their approaches.

Consumer attitudes are evolving, with a notable shift towards prioritising sustainable products and supporting brands with ethical values. Levi's and Patagonia stand out as pioneers, integrating sustainability into their campaigns and advocating for repair initiatives.

The fashion industry is undergoing a significant shift towards sustainability, challenging brands to prioritise authentic change and transparency. Despite inherent challenges, the industry's willingness to adapt signals promising prospects for long-term growth and sustainability solutions.

In essence, Bringé emphasises the critical importance of industry responsibility and transparency, highlighting the potential for sustainable practices to catalyse positive shifts in both consumer behaviour and industry norms.

6. **Powell, B., & Mahmood, T. I. (2023). No sweat? living standards and sweatshop wages in developing countries. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4449216>**

In the realm of global labour practices, the debate surrounding sweatshop conditions in developing countries remains contentious. Powell and Mahmood's paper, "No Sweat? Living Standards and Sweatshop Wages in Developing Countries," offers a rigorous examination of this multifaceted issue. As advocates push for reforms such as higher minimum wages and improved working conditions, concerns arise about potential job displacement and economic impacts, prompting a critical inquiry into the effects of anti-sweatshop activism.

Through meticulous research and analysis, Powell and Mahmood investigate the living standards and wages within sweatshops, providing valuable

insights into the realities faced by workers in these environments. Their study draws from reported sweatshop wages across 14 countries, predominantly in Asia and Latin America, to assess how these earnings compare to local poverty thresholds and alternative employment options.

One of the key findings of their research is the comparative analysis of sweatshop wages against poverty living standards. Despite the often-dire conditions and low wages associated with sweatshop labour, Powell and Mahmood's study reveals that these earnings frequently exceed common poverty thresholds in the countries where they operate. This finding challenges conventional narratives and underscores the complexity of the issue.

Moreover, Powell and Mahmood navigate the nuances of anti-sweatshop activism, highlighting the potential trade-offs associated with policy interventions aimed at improving labour conditions.

**7. *Measuring Sustainability in Cotton Farming Systems | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Fao.org. (n.d.).***  
<https://www.fao.org/3/i4170e/i4170e.pdf>

The "Measuring Sustainability in Cotton Farming Systems" report by the ICAC Expert Panel underscores the challenge of defining and measuring sustainability in the cotton industry. The report aims to establish common definitions and indicators for evaluating sustainability, recognizing the importance of a shared understanding among stakeholders.

Through a rigorous process, the report outlines a core set of indicators for sustainable cotton production, emphasising the need for consensus and dialogue within the industry. These indicators cover environmental, economic, and social aspects, aligning with the pillars of sustainable development.

The report emphasises the importance of standardisation in measuring the global cotton industry's performance, providing a framework for understanding and improving social, environmental, and economic outcomes. While not intended as a one-size-fits-all solution, the

recommended indicators serve as a reference for benchmarking and tracking progress at the national and international levels.

Additionally, the report encourages pilot testing of the framework in diverse farming systems to enhance its applicability and effectiveness. Ultimately, the goal is to foster meaningful dialogue and collaboration within the cotton sector to advance sustainability objectives and ensure the industry's long-term viability.

8. **Balchandani, A., Barrelet, D., Berg, A. et al. (2023, November 29). *The state of fashion 2024: Finding pockets of growth as uncertainty reigns*. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/state-of-fashion>**

In "The State of Fashion 2024" by McKinsey & Company, the fashion industry faces economic challenges and evolving consumer priorities. Despite headwinds, the industry showed resilience in 2022, nearly matching the record economic profit of 2021. Luxury sectors outperformed others, buoyed by strong margin performance.

Globally, the fashion segment is forecast to grow by 3 to 5 percent, down from 5 to 7 percent in 2023, as consumers tighten spending post-pandemic. Concerns include geopolitical instability, economic volatility, and inflation, with climate change increasingly influencing industry priorities.

Fashion leaders seek to balance uncertainty and opportunity, focusing on new pricing strategies and sustainability initiatives. Consumer spending trends favour trusted brands, luxury goods, and outdoor experiences. The report identifies key themes for 2024, including shifts in consumer demand and the intersection of sustainability and commercial imperatives. As challenges loom, companies prioritise contingency planning and adaptability to navigate the complex year ahead.

9. ***Environmental sustainability in the fashion industry*. Geneva Environment Network. (2023, November 29).**

<https://www.genevaenvironmentnetwork.org/resources/updates/sustainable-fashion/>

The report underscores the staggering environmental and social toll of fast fashion, highlighting its role in pollution, water depletion, carbon emissions, and human rights abuses. With alarming statistics revealing the extent of the fashion industry's impact, there's a growing urgency for a shift towards sustainable practices. Organisations in Geneva and beyond are rallying efforts to transform the fashion economy and promote international collaboration.

Key environmental footprints of fast fashion include the disposal of one garbage truck full of clothes per second, with approximately 60% of materials being plastic-based. Moreover, the industry releases 500,000 tons of microfibers into the ocean annually, equivalent to 50 billion plastic bottles. Contributing to 8-10% of global carbon emissions, the fashion sector's trajectory could escalate this figure to 26% by 2050. Water usage, industrial wastewater pollution, and human rights violations, particularly against textile workers in developing countries, further exacerbate the industry's impact.

The report also provides valuable insights into global fashion sustainability initiatives, resources, and standards. It serves as a crucial resource for stakeholders striving to navigate the complex landscape of sustainable fashion while balancing economic, social, and environmental interests.

**10. Sustainability in fashion: A guide to ESG regulations - plan A academy.**  
(n.d.). <https://plana.earth/academy/sustainability-fashion-guide-esg-regulations>

The guide delves into the detrimental impact of unsustainable fast-fashion trends on the environment and outlines key regulations aimed at fostering a low-carbon fashion economy. Fast fashion's exponential growth has intensified the industry's carbon footprint, with annual garment production doubling since 2000. This surge in production, fueled by cheap, short-lived clothing, contributes significantly to global plastic production and microplastic pollution.

The guide highlights pivotal EU regulations, including Extended Producer Responsibility on Textiles and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence



Directive, which aim to hold brands accountable for their environmental impact and ensure sustainability across supply chains. Similarly, in the United States, recent ESG regulations like the Fashion Sustainability and Social Accountability Act and the FABRIC Act focus on enhancing worker protections and supply chain transparency.

To comply with these regulations, fashion businesses are urged to embrace sustainability measures and reshape existing business models. Given the industry's resource-intensive nature, the implementation of such legislation is crucial for steering fashion towards a more sustainable trajectory.

**11. Ro, C. (2022, February 24). *Can fashion ever be sustainable?*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200310-sustainable-fashion-how-to-buy-clothes-good-for-the-climate>**

The article explores the complex challenge of how consumers can make their fashion choices sustainable in the face of its significant environmental impact. Fashion currently contributes to about 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions and consumes substantial amounts of energy and water. While switching to recycled polyester can mitigate emissions, it's not a long-term solution due to its slow decomposition and potential for microfiber pollution. Natural materials like organic cotton also pose sustainability challenges due to water and dye requirements.

However, innovative approaches are emerging, such as biocouture and the use of alternative materials from natural waste. Companies are exploring ways to reduce emissions throughout the lifecycle of clothing, from production to disposal. The article highlights the importance of consumer behaviour in driving sustainability, emphasising the value of wearing clothes longer, swapping with friends, and reducing online shopping impulsivity.

Ultimately, while significant changes must come from fashion manufacturers and corporations, individual consumer choices can collectively influence industry practices. Being mindful consumers can contribute to a more sustainable fashion industry, prompting companies to adopt more environmentally friendly practices.

**12. Mateen, Z. (2023, November 15). *Indian fashion designers face eco-chic dilemma*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-67142530>**

The article explores the eco-chic dilemma confronting Indian fashion designers amid the industry's rapid growth and environmental concerns. Despite efforts to adopt eco-friendly practices and reusable materials, experts stress the need for more significant changes given the sector's expansion.

India's fashion industry, expected to reach \$115-125 billion by 2025, faces criticism for its contribution to environmental degradation, especially in fast fashion and luxury segments. Critics accuse designers of promoting sustainability without meaningful action, while concerns persist regarding labour exploitation.

The complexity of sustainability extends beyond environmental concerns to include labour conditions. While eco-friendly fabrics offer alternatives, their production may involve environmental costs like deforestation.

Despite challenges, the industry shows signs of change, with some designers embracing sustainability and advocating for "slow luxury" emphasizing craftsmanship and longevity. Figures like Abraham and Thakore exemplify this trend.

In essence, the article highlights the evolving landscape of Indian fashion, urging for a comprehensive approach to sustainability encompassing environmental, social, and economic factors.

**13. *The Future of Fashion: Sustainable Brands and "Circular" Business Models*. McKinsey & Company. (n.d.). <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/the-next-normal/fashion>**

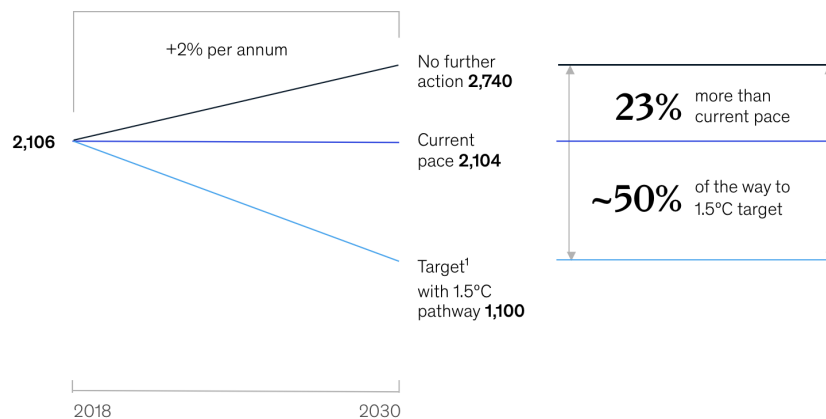
This report visually depicts the impact of the fashion industry and serves as a database for a series of articles on sustainable fashion.

The fashion industry emits about the same quantity of greenhouse gases per year as the entire economies of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom combined. By 2030, it will need to cut its emissions by about half—or else it

will exceed the 1.5 degree pathway to mitigate climate change, set out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and ratified in the 2015 Paris agreement.

**Under the current trajectory, the fashion industry misses the 1.5°C pathway by 50 percent and abates only emissions from incremental growth.**

Emissions abatement assuming the industry decarbonization continues at current pace, million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent



14. Amed, I., Balchandani, A., Beltrami, M., Berg, A., Hedrich, S. (2019, February 11). *The end of ownership for fashion products?*. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/the-end-of-ownership-for-fashion-products>

The article delves into the emergence of new ownership models in the fashion industry, driven by consumer demand for variety, sustainability, and affordability. It explores the growing popularity of rental, resale, and refurbishment platforms, highlighting their potential to reshape the market.

As consumer preferences evolve, propelled by a desire for newness and sustainability, traditional ownership models are being challenged. Start-ups and established brands alike are tapping into the rental and pre owned markets to cater to shifting consumer behaviours.

Beyond resale and rental, brands are venturing into refurbishment initiatives, promoting sustainability and prolonging product life cycles. Examples include Eileen Fisher's "Renew" program and Patagonia's repair and resale model, reflecting a growing emphasis on environmental responsibility.

Looking ahead, the article predicts increased participation in alternative ownership models, with more brands entering the rental, resale, and refurbishment sectors. The rise of "rental native" brands and a shift towards pre owned or rented products signal a fundamental transformation in consumer ownership patterns.

**15. A Zero Waste Vision for Fashion. Zero Waste Europe. (2023, May 25).**

[https://zerowasteurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/zwe\\_sep23\\_policybrief\\_ZWE-TextilesVisionchapter1.pdf](https://zerowasteurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/zwe_sep23_policybrief_ZWE-TextilesVisionchapter1.pdf)

The report by Zero Waste Europe reveals the alarming scale of overproduction and consumption in the fashion industry, with Europeans annually buying 26 kg of textiles per person and generating 11 kg of textile waste. Despite efforts, only half of used clothes are collected for reuse or recycling, with a mere 1% being recycled into new garments.

Proposed EU strategies include banning the destruction of unsold goods and establishing waste prevention targets. France has already introduced such a ban but allows for product destruction in certain cases, blurring the lines between reuse and recycling

The report advocates for a sufficiency culture that disincentivizes overconsumption, promotes repair and reuse, and addresses the overproduction inherent in fast fashion business models.

Achieving a zero waste fashion industry requires bold policy interventions, including legal boundaries, financial incentives, and a cultural shift towards sufficiency. Zero Waste Europe proposes a comprehensive approach to tackle the root causes of overconsumption and waste in the fashion industry.