



# An Overview into the Issue of Sustainability within Fashion Apparel

**Jamal Majid\***

*Senior Lecturer Fashion Business, Level Five Year Manager, Manchester Fashion Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK*

**\*Corresponding author:** Jamal Majid, Senior Lecturer Fashion Business, Level Five Year Manager, Manchester Fashion Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

**Received:** 📅 April 21, 2023

**Published:** 📅 May 08, 2023

## Abstract

In the context of planet damage and being at the cusp of irrevocable environmental decline the need for organizations to pursue a more sustainable agenda is arguable now a necessity for fashion brands rather than an indulgence. Exploration into the fashion industry reveals that some progression in relation to sustainability is certainly apparent and indeed heavily marketed. Emerging and Non-developed nations who are key manufacturers of apparel are the attributed to be to be the worst perpetrators and indeed most affected by unsustainable practice, but it maybe the direction of causality for this phenomenon could be attributed to more western demand driven economies who are not as incentivized by consumers to indulge in ethical and sustainable practice. The article infers that the universal stakeholder commitment assisted with technology is warranted in order for sustainability to be implemented with all area's incumbent within the formation of apparel for concept to carrier bag.

## Mini Review

The fashion industry is noted to be one of the biggest polluters in the planet which contributes to sustainability in many areas [1]. Fashion retailers are embarking on strategies in which to actively alleviate unsustainable practices [2]. But it can be argued that the rhetoric often contradicts the reality that is apparent in the business world, which could be attributed to the lack of clarity in relation to the actual concept of sustainability [3]. The meaning of sustainability remains elusive, such an instance has created a situation in which enterprises are interpreting in many different ways such as that of environmental stewardship whilst others equate it to corporate social responsibility (CSR) [4]. Nevertheless, it can be contended that 'sustainability' has three dimension (Environmental, Social and Economic) these are arguable required to be infused with in an organisation's DNA in order for it's impact to be truly effective [3]. However, it should be acknowledged that it is somewhat simplistic to assume that all three aspects of sustainability work in unison with one another as the tenuous balance of economic, social, and

economic objectives for sustainable development is often untenable for most organisation that exist in a profit driven environment [5]. This instance complemented with the practice of decentralised policies in non-developed nations within the textile manufacturing sector and the growth of small-scale labour-intensive industries often results in little attention being given to sustainable issues such as that of the protection of workers, the use of hazardous chemicals, investment into new fabrics and pollution [6].

## Environmental

The environmental aspect of sustainability considers the impact of organisational activities on natural resource depletion, pollution and emission management, waste/energy and resource management etc. Chapagain et al. [7] contends that the fundamental product used by all business is arguably that of cotton production accounts for a sixth of all pesticides used globally, is extremely water intensive, highly polluting and extremely cancerous (Figure 1). Indeed, the World Health Organisation (WHO) stipulates 20,000

individuals die of cancer and suffer miscarriages due to chemicals sprayed on cotton [8]. The growth of the cotton plant requires high levels of water and as sixty percent of all apparel is constructed by cotton, high yields are needed. Water is not only needed to cultivate the plant, but vast amounts are also needed for the process and dye the cotton so that the raw material is ready to be transported for manufacture into apparel [9]. Hence, the production of cotton which is predominately within non-developed countries is highly water intensive, hazardous and pollutive and has contributed to global decline of consumable river water [10]. The instance of global warming has heightened the instance of water scarcity and the need for greening to occur. Re-greening is devoted to the

promoting the sequestration of carbon which facilitates cooling soil, stimulating humidity and rainfall 2014 [11]. Emerging nations the likes of Pakistan are engaging in activities to combat climate change and improve water filtration by committing to plant ten billion trees, one billion of which has already been planted in 2014 [12]. The United Nations reports that governments of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan and Viet Nam have all collaborated in order to joined forces to reduce hazardous chemicals in their textile industries [13]. Further commitment by nations to such activities and exploration in more sustainable or alternative fibres to that of cotton could serve to alleviate environmental impact caused by the fashion industry [14].

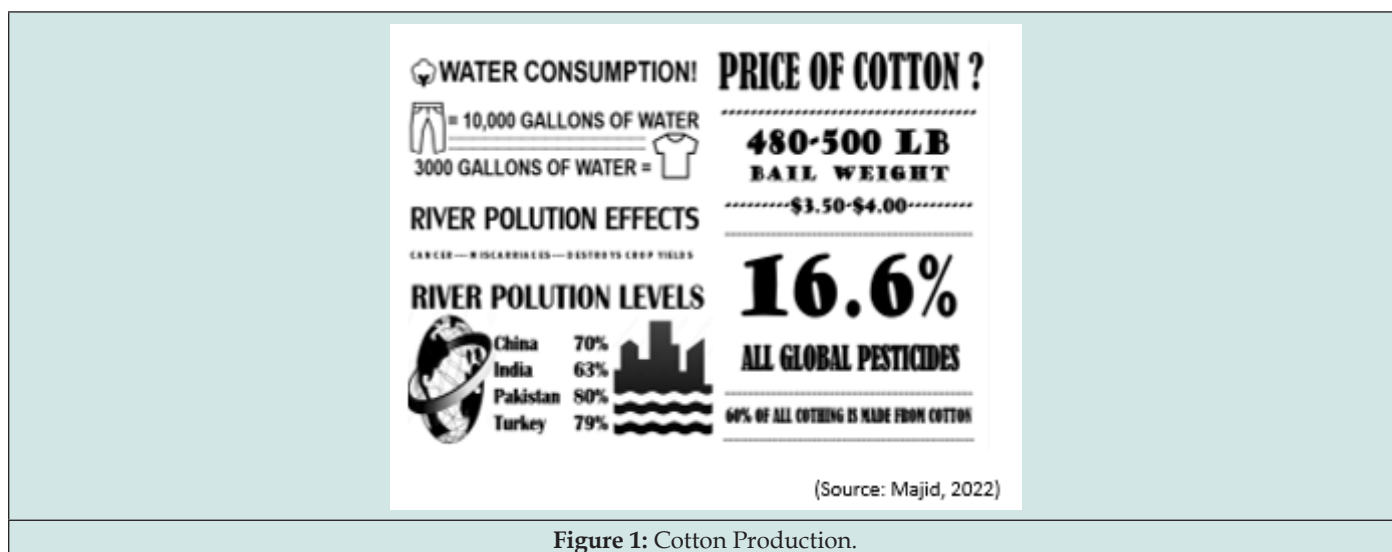


Figure 1: Cotton Production.

The ability to change to alternative fabric created from the production of cellulose fibers such as Hemp is often advocated to be the ideal replacement for the production of cotton [15]. However, it should be acknowledged that greater exploration into this reveals that this is also riddled with ambivalence, as sustainable hemp production is dependent on large scale financial investment in innovation and integration of the latest advances in fields of genomic, proteomic and metabolomics warranted to create uniform yields [16]. The commitment by business to embark on using other source material is often piecemeal and results in heightening other areas of sustainability but in order to curb greater environmental damage alternatives are warranted. Alternative fibres from oranges, mushrooms and pineapple are being developed but their full scale commercial is questionable. Premium apparels are exploring alternatives to some commercial success with the likes of Gucci being the first luxury brand to use 'ECONYL' which is a regenerated nylon yarn made from abandoned fishing nets and carpets. This raises the issue of whether it is the top-down approach that is warranted within the industry and if the custodians of real comprehensive sustainable practice should be the domain of premium apparel brands [17].

## Social

The social aspect of sustainability reflects on the social obligation of the organisation to the communities by managing issues such as that of poverty, orientation discrimination, clean water, education etc. Fast growing and large-scale apparel production have been attributed to the blame for labour exploitation and environmental damage [18]. The scarcity of water and the pollution of rivers as a consequence garment production usually in many developing nations has created a circumstance in which river pollution is rife accompanied with associated diseases such as cancer (Figure 1). Despite the rhetoric in relation to fair pay and treatment of staff, a real living wage is not still apparent in many developing nations and the commitment of apparel business to such was apparent in the complete abandonment of such concerns in the pandemic, within which the social consequence of poverty as a result of cancelling orders for workers involved in production was not even paid lip service to [19]. Further explorative analysis reveals it not apparent for any fashion brands irrespective of retail tier to illustrate that real living wages are being paid to any worker in supply chains outside headquarter located within the apparel retailer's countries of origin [20]. Such an issues illustrate the underpinning exploitative

capitalist framework within which western business often operates as well as the sporadic engagement in sustainable practice.

This is manifest in the Human right's violation are still arguably as prominent as ever within the fashion supply chain. Instances such as that of Myanmar in which fashion apparel companies the likes of H&M, Gap, Adidas, Muji, Uniqlo, Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein, etc. all being complicit in the purchase of cotton as a direct consequence of forced labour in concentration camps [21]. Irrespective of such

an instance, such organisations are still simultaneously advertising their sustainability credentials by virtues of having written policies such as that of adhering to the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) and elements of ranges made from sustainable materials [20]. Such an instance illustrates the inherent dichotomy in relation to issue of sustainability between rhetoric and reality of fashion apparel brands, with brands such as H&M being examples of such perpetrators [22].

## Economic

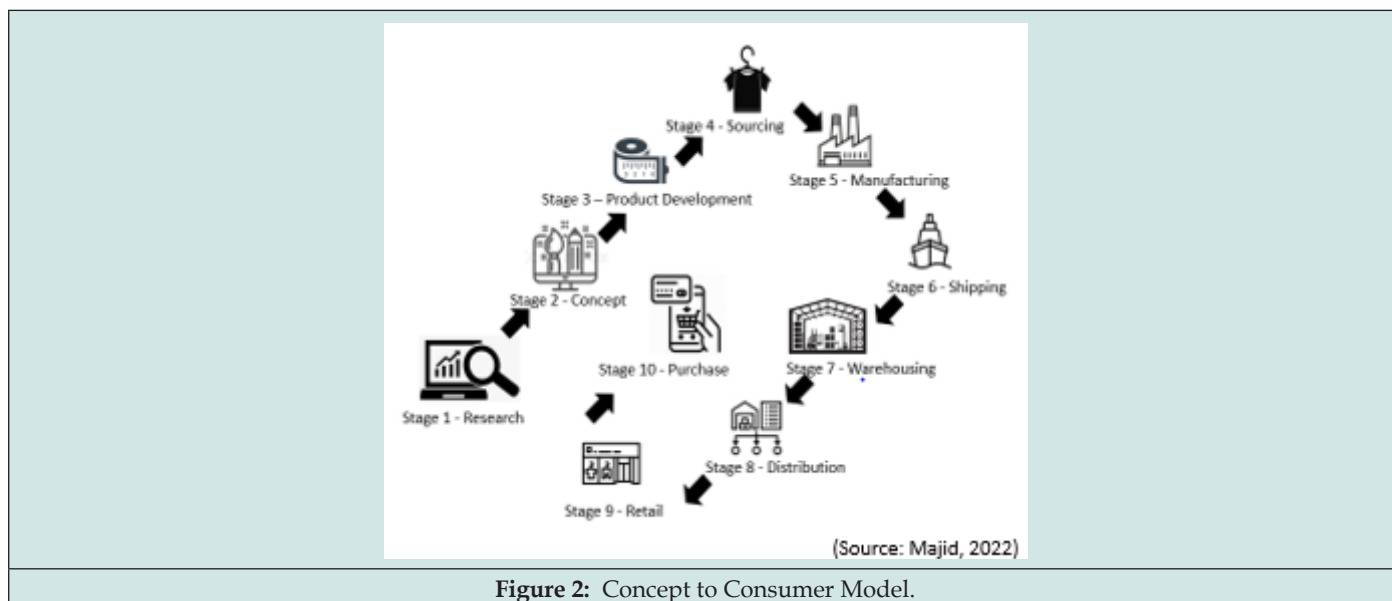


Figure 2: Concept to Consumer Model.

The economic aspect of sustainability is related to concerns on the viability of the organisation to survive financially thrive amidst a competitive marketplace and raises such as the ability of an organisation to obtain a return on investment (ROI) and indeed the ability to sustain CSR initiatives indefinitely. The likes of McKinsey [23] advocate that there is a financial advantage to the formation of a transparent fashion brands as it will be preferential for a new-aged, enlightened consumer. The beneficial aspects of pursuing a more sustainable agenda from the initial concept through to the actual consumer is riddled with potential benefit if only fashion brands were to actively pursue them (Figure 2). Businesses are discovering that sustainable pursuits can indeed aid he helps them reduce costs, thus effectively increasing their profits. This is apparent in using more computer systems to aid design and more effective pattern cutting in order to reduce waste and time in making costly and time prototypes which heighten ecological footprints [24]. The likes of Gucci after consultation and review of procedure by Gen Z task group reformed cutting procedures to reduce waste and make additional products from traditionally discarded leather [16].

The instance of sourcing and manufacturing from more ethical suppliers and producing brands more superior quality are appealing to consumers who are willing to pay a higher price points

for ethically produced apparel made from more sustainable fibres, fashion brands the likes of Patagaia, House of Sunny, SZ Blockprints and Bridsong are amidst the most successful (Sustainably Chic, 2022). However, it should be acknowledged that such truly sustainable fashion apparel enterprises only constitute a very small minority of all fashion enterprises within which there is an absence of the most affluent fashion apparel brands who can arguably afford to emulate and indeed be at the forefront of sustainable practice. The way in which more enterprises are, and indeed other brands can embark on the pursuit of more sustainable enterprise is by the successful development of more strategic innovative partnerships [25] with the inclusion of suppliers to appraise design aided with the introduction integrated computer systems has been proven create innovative new products, from design to merchandising and planning to sourcing and supply chain management [26]. The shift to a more agile and intelligent sourcing model has the potential to reduce waste foster efficiencies and produce apparel in quantities actually required rather than predicted inaccurately. Perhaps the digitisation of the fashion world and the onset of new technology could usher in an era of truly sustainable practice is indeed all stakeholders in fashion become truly committed to sustainability [27].

## Conclusion

The summation of some of the key factors entrenched within the three constituent elements of sustainability of (Environmental, Social and Economic) reveals that although there is some progression such developments are often piecemeal and warrant a lot more commitment in order to be more complicit to sustainable business practice. The reluctance of fashion apparel businesses to pursue of a sustainable agenda could be attributed to the absences of the prerequisites necessary, which are that of substantial economic, technological and financial support from developed countries and from the international community [28]. Furthermore, support is needed in order to compensate for the economic losses associated with the pursuit of a sustainability agenda especially in non-developed nations within Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asian countries within which the provision to pursue such initiatives is lacking. Within the context of global economic decline, the ability and indeed desire to pursue sustainable objectives let alone change the DNA of an organisation towards sustainability, is improbable unless there is holistic stakeholder involvement. One of the key attributes towards this is the necessity for government legislation and real sanctions against organisations who are lacking in sustainable credentials [29]. The EU Commission introduction of the possibility of trade sanctions on trade partners who breach the Paris Climate Agreement or the International Labour Organisation (ILO) fundamental principles and governments of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan and Viet Nam all collaborating in an attempt to reduce hazardous chemicals in their textile industries [13] is possible a step in the right direction. It is also important there is a true shift in consumer preference towards more sustainable practice rather than wavering commitment brought about as price difference. Hence, it becomes apparent that only with true stakeholder commitment can sustainability be a reality in the fashion industry [30-33].

## References

1. Le N (2002) The impact of fast fashion on the Environment. The Trustees of Princeton University.
2. Khandual A, Pradhan S (2018) Fast Fashion, Fashion Brands and Sustainable Consumption Publisher, Springer. Location USA.
3. Paziienza M, De Jong M, Schoemaker D (2022) Clarifying the Concept of Corporate Sustainability and Providing Convergence for Its Definition. *MDPI. Sustainability* 14(13): 7838.
4. Bergman MM, Bergman Z, Berger L (2017) An Empirical Exploration, Typology, and Definition of Corporate Sustainability. *Sustainability* 9(1): 753-762.
5. Jerónimo Silvestre W, Antunes P, Leal Filho W (2016) The corporate sustainability typology: analysing sustainability drivers and fostering sustainability at enterprises. *Technological and Economic Development of Economy* 24(2): 513-533.
6. Asmorjati AW, Nur M, Dewi IK, Hashim H. (2022) The Impact of COVID-19 on Challenges and Protection Practices of Migrant Workers' Rights. *Bestuur. UNS Universitas Seblas Maret* 10(1): 46-56.
7. Chapagain AY, Hoekstra B, Saveenije HHG, Gautam R (2006) The water footprint of cotton consumption: An assessment of the impact of worldwide consumption of cotton products on the water resources in the cotton producing countries. *Ecological Economics* 60: 187-203.
8. Khawani MP, Khatwani PA (2017) Indian Textiles: Its sustainability and global sourcing. *International Journal of Recent Innovation in Engineering and Research* 2(7): 26-29.
9. Gonzales J (2022) Blue Jeans: An iconic fashion item that's costing the planet dearly Mongabay Series: Covering the Commons, Planetary Boundaries 17.
10. Webber M, Barnett J, Chen Z, Finlayson B, Wang M, et al. (2008) The Yellow River in transition. *Environmental. Journal of Science Policy* 11: 406-418.
11. Metic J, Pigosso DCA (2022) Research avenues for uncovering the rebound effects of the circular economy: A systematic literature review. *The Journal of Cleaner Production* 368: 1-19.
12. Stockholm (2015) Pakistan's Ten Billion Tree Tsunami leading the way in ecosystem restoration decade.
13. UNEP (2022) Emissions Gap Report, United Nations Environment Programme.
14. Nabi G, Murad A, Khan S, Sunjeet K (2019) The crisis of water shortage and pollution in Pakistan: Risk to public health, biodiversity, and Ecosystem. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research* 26: 10443-10445.
15. Abdulla H (2022) Will hemp replace cotton as must-have fibre? The sustainability benefits of hemp are unquestionable. But will it replace cotton? *Just Style Online*.
16. Liberalato D (2003) Prospect of hemp utilization in the European Textile Industry. *Agro industria Journal* 3(2): 147-148.
17. Equilibrium (2021) Planet - Gucci of the Grid - A vision of circularity promoting the regeneration of materials and textiles.
18. Akhter S, Rutherford S, Chu C (2017) What makes pregnant workers sick: why, when, where and how? An exploratory study in the ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh. *Reproductive Health* 1(14): 142-147.
19. Cheek WK, Moore CE (2006) Apparel sweatshop at home and abroad: Global and ethical issues', in, *Journal of family and consumer Sciences* 95(1): 9-18.
20. Kim EH, Lyon TP (2015) Greenwash vs. Brownwash: Exaggeration and Undue Modesty in Corporate Sustainability Disclosure. *Organisation Science* 26(3): 705-723.
21. Kelly A (2020) The Guardian Newspaper Online.' Virtually entire' fashion industry complicit in Uighur forced labour.
22. Shen B (2014) Sustainable fashion supply chain: Lessons from H&M. *Sustainability* 6(9): 6236-6249.
23. McKinsey Co (2022) The State of Fashion 2022. The Business of Fashion.
24. Wackernagel M, Onisto L, Bello P, Linares AC, Falfan ISL, et al. (1999) National natural capital accounting with the ecological footprint concept. *Ecological. Economics* 29(3): 375-390.
25. Broman G, Robèrt KH, Basile G, Trygg L (2016) The new approach highlights the opportunity for novel business model design for future sustainable success. *The Journal of Cleaner Production* 140: 1-21.
26. Giunipero LC, Fiorito SS, Percy DH, Dandeo L (2001) The impact of vendor incentives of quick response', *International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research* 11(4): 359-376.
27. Steurer R, Langer ME, Konrad A, Martinuzzi A (2005) Corporations, Stakeholders and Sustainable Development I: A Theoretical Exploration of Business-Society Relations. *Journal of Business Ethics* 2005(61): 263-281.
28. Dahlbo H, Aalto K, Eskelinen H, Salmenperä H (2017) Increasing Textile Circulation - Consequences and Requirements. *Sustainable Production and Consumption* 9: 44-57.

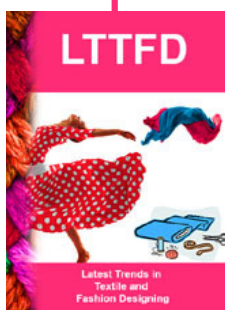
29. Rother S (2018) ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour: A space for civil society in migration governance at the regional level? Asia Pacific Viewpoint 59(3): 107-118.
30. Bick R, Halsey E, Ekenga CC (2018) The global environmental injustice of fast fashion. The Journal of Environmental Health 92(17).
31. Di Candilo M, P Ranalli, C Bozzi, B Foher, G Mastromei (2000) Preliminary results of test facing with the controlled retting of hemp. Industrial Crops Products 11: 197-203.
32. Ranalli Paolo, Venturi Gianpietro (2004) Hemp as a raw material for industrial applications. Euphytica 140: 1-6.
33. Sustainably Chic (2022) The most affordable and ethical brands.



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License

To Submit Your Article Click Here: [Submit Article](#)

DOI: [10.32474/LTTFD.2023.05.000221](https://doi.org/10.32474/LTTFD.2023.05.000221)



### Latest Trends in Textile and Fashion Designing

#### Assets of Publishing with us

- Global archiving of articles
- Immediate, unrestricted online access
- Rigorous Peer Review Process
- Authors Retain Copyrights
- Unique DOI for all articles