



COMMUNICATION IN SUSTAINABLE FASHION BRANDS

MARIANA ARAÚJO¹, ANA CRISTINA BROEGA², SILVANA MOTA-RIBEIRO³

¹Universidade do Minho, mbmaraujo@gmail.com

²Universidade do Minho, cbroega@det.uminho.pt

³Universidade do Minho, silvanamotaribeiro@gmail.com

Abstract: *This article aims to analyze the relationship between communication and sustainable fashion brands observing the importance of communication in the visibility of the brand and its relationship with the consumer. This paper will address the sustainability and how environmental issues have become a global concern, including in fashion, that has to incorporate it, thinking of products in a more conscious way. In this context, we observe the emergence of a conscious consumption and simultaneously the growing of sustainable fashion brands. We also address the issue of brand communication and its importance.*

Key words: *Fashion, Sustainability, Communication, Consumption, Brands.*

1. Introduction

This paper aims to present a research project that is being developed under the Master in Fashion Communication Design at the University of Minho. The work aims to develop a study with emphasis on communicating sustainable fashion brands, in order to show how they communicate and the strategies they use. Firstly, we define what are the main characteristics of sustainable fashion brands; secondly, sustainability and sustainable fashion are explored. Finally, issues about communication of these brands are addressed.

As a result of climate change and environmental degradation, sustainability issues gained visibility in recent decades, eventually becoming a concern not only for governments, but also for social actors. In this context, many companies are aware of the changing consciousness of society, which demands social responsibility of them, and seek to adapt and develop forms of production that are not as harmful to the environment, including companies in the field of fashion.

Although the fashion system is characterized by the ephemerality of products' life cycle, aiming at production and consumption unrestrained, a new paradigm begins to appear; it is characterized by concerns for environmental issues and the wellbeing, and try to produce more environmentally correct pieces. We observe the incorporation of sustainable development in fashion, both in the choice of textile material, or through the recycling process of the parts. Fashion began to use various ways to address the issue of sustainability throughout the production process. Here we highlight the emergence of brands specialized in working with sustainability and environmentally correct pieces and environmental responsibility.

Environmental issues have now a significant role in consumer preferences; a more environment-conscious consumer begins to emerge, someone who prefers to consume goods produced by environmentally responsible companies, but often does not know exactly what that means, or simply does not know fashion brands sustainable. Therefore, we note that, although there is a market for sustainable fashion brands, what we see is that these brands do not have an efficient communication strategy, and often fail to pass the concept of sustainability to the public or simply are not disclosed effectively.

In this sense, this work is the result of an initial literature review of scientific articles and books on the topic to theoretically support this study. During the research for the dissertation, we intend to go deeper into the subject. The empirical part of the study will include an analysis of how sustainable fashion brands are making their communication and what can be improved. Thus, this paper discusses the issue of sustainability and fashion, in addition to the importance of communication for brands.

2. Sustainability

One of the great debates of our time is the environmental issue. In a world where climate change is increasingly being perceived, it is urgent to find ways to avoid irreparable damage to the environment. The theme has been constantly discussed and it is possible to note the importance of the subject. Therefore, as opposed to rampant economic development and social practices that increasingly degrade the environment, the concept of sustainable development appears, which first appears in 1987 by the Brundtland Report created by the committee with the same name, formed by the UN with the aim of analysing social and environmental issues. According to the report, sustainable development is development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987).

From this first definition, others appear. T. Bellen, for example, the "concept of sustainable development is specifically about a new way for society to relate to their environment in order to ensure its own continuity and to its external environment" (Bellen 2005, p.22). Sachs discusses the "harmonization of social, environmental and economic objectives" (Sachs 2002, p.54).

In sustainable development "we have the necessity to rethink economic development in a new way, taking into account equality between generations. Until then, economic development had a slightly more restricted optical and usually considered the fundamental determinants of economic growth without regard to the environment" (Diniz e Bermann 2012, p.323).

In this context, it is noticeable that environmental issues have become part of the political agenda, but that they are not only a concern for governments, but also to several organizations and to the civil society. In other words, it becomes a matter of interest to the whole society within the scope of a growing concern with the future and the wellbeing. Environmental degradation and unrestrained consumption that affect the world today end up resulting in a greater global concern and sustainability becomes more and more relevant; urgent responses are needed, and this must be worked in several areas of knowledge and practice, including in the context of fashion.

3. Sustainable Fashion

Fashion and sustainability is binary that, at first sight, seems to entail some incompatibility. The fashion system is characterized by ephemerality and encouragement to unbridled consumption; each season we are swamped by new proposals, new fabrics, shapes and colours, all based on the short lifecycle in order to make room for the pieces of the new collection.

This fashion industry ultimately instils consumption, by encouraging consumers to follow the latest trends, and therefore creating a need for them to replace pieces (often in great condition) every new season. This is the price to pay to be "be trendy". Once this industry relies upon the so-called fast fashion, a phenomenon in which reckless fast production and consumption prevails, beyond affordable prices, it is hard to think of it as having something to do with sustainability. Even so, simultaneously, a paradoxically, new approaches that show a concern with environmental issues begin to emerge and show that it is possible to associate fashion and sustainability.

"Indeed, we found that fashion can actually adopt sustainable practices creating products that demonstrate their awareness on social and environmental issues that present themselves on our planet today and can at the same time expressing the anxieties and desires of those who consumes" (Berlim 2012, p. 13). In this

case, actions such as reducing, reusing and recycling are some of the examples of how to incorporate sustainability in fashion. In addition, it is vital that the whole product cycle is thought sustainably, from creation to disposal.

Although incorporating sustainability in fashion is still a challenge, it is possible to think and act according to a sustainable fashion, where the role of the fashion designer is essential. "It is increasingly necessary the intervention of the designer to achieve a better balanced product - environment - society and this can be achieved initially with the formation of a culture of conscious designers of social problems and environmental impacts" (Pazmino 2007, p. 02).

In parallel a more informed and conscious consumer begins to emerge, concerned about environmental and social issues, that seeks to know how and where the garments were made, what kind of labour and materials was used, in other words, if the brands are eco friends, if they have social responsibility. The brands also realize that behaviour change and consumer awareness, thus begin to emerge sustainable fashion brands, or just an incorporation of sustainability principles in some existing brands in the market.

4. Brand Communication

Communication is a vital component to the success of any brand, and in particular for sustainable fashion brands. Communication plays a key role in fashion, either in disclosing collections, coverage of fashion shows, events, new product launches and many other activities. It can be stated that fashion needs to communicate to reach consumers.

With the advent of mass communications, in the 50s, there was a transformation in the relationship between brands, communication and influence on consumption. Brands are using the media as a means of promotion, advertising and information (Semprini 2010, pp.69-73).

During the 90s, noted the statement of communication as something indispensable in everyday life of people. We observe the emergence of schools in the area, the appearance of several television networks and radio stations, noted the expansion of broadcasting, which will have direct impact on a country's economy by creating jobs. In this context, communication agencies develop, "communication << conquered society>>, has become an indispensable protagonist, from economic point of view, but mainly sociocultural" (Semprini 2010, p.71).

The media develop a fundamental role in fashion communication, functioning as a mechanism for dissemination of the latest trends, but also the spread of lifestyles. "In fact, advertising has gone from a communication around the product campaigns that disseminate values and a vision that emphasizes the spectacular, emotion, not literal sense. No longer sells the product, but a vision, a concept, a lifestyle associated with the brand." (Valente 2008, p.4).

We live in an increasingly media society and the survival of brands is linked to the success of communication policies which are adopted. "The media is one of the largest organizers of fashion trends, not only through advertising, but also by news coverage of major sporting and artistic events" (Freitas 2005, p.126). Therefore, communication is essential for brands to disseminate their concepts and identities, and reach audiences. It is through thoughtful communication strategies that fashion brands are recognized globally.

In this context, one may speak about sustainable fashion brands, that despite already having a considerable reliable public, need to work to get better communication with consumers, which often are uninformed and do not know exactly what is a sustainable brand. Another issue that begins to appear are fashion brands that are not sustainable, but use the question to promote, since the topic is trendy and increasingly people require corporate responsibility. Can be cited the example of Diesel, Italian jeans brand, which launched in 2007 the campaign "*Global Warming Ready*", joins the environmentalist theme and received several criticisms, being accused of wanting to join a new strand of conscious consumption and sustainable (Lindemann 2011).

5. Conclusion

Based on what was said, we can see some important concepts for the development of this research project. In this case, to understand what sustainable development is, as the term emerged, and the importance that sustainability has nowadays. In addition, to understand how the issue is also being addressed in fashion and how more sustainable actions are taking place. Another point is the emergence of a more aware, responsible, consumer, who demands greater social responsibility from companies.

In this sense, the emergence of sustainable fashion brands needs to be analysed, as well as how communication might contribute to the survival and development of these brands in the market. Therefore, the research work intends to further deepen the issue of sustainability in fashion and, in parallel, its communication strategies, by trying to understand and discuss how sustainable fashion brands communicate, whether they are or not effectively communicating, the types of strategies used and what can be improved. These are some of the questions we intend to answer by the end of this research.

References

- Anciet, A, P Bessa, and A Broega. 2011. Ações na área da moda em busca de um design sustentável. *In: VII Colóquio de Moda*. Maringá.
- Bellen, H M. 2005. Indicadores de sustentabilidade uma análise comparativa. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV.
- Berlim, L. 2012. Moda e Sustentabilidade uma reflexão necessária. São Paulo: Estação das letras e cores.
- Diniz, E. M e Bermann, C. 2012. Economia verde e sustentabilidade. *Estudos Avançados*. **26**(74).
- Freitas, R. 2005. Comunicação, Consumo e moda: entre os roteiros das aparências. *Comunicação, mídia e consumo*. vol. 3, no.4, pp. 125-136. Consultado 13 de outubro de 2013, disponível em <http://www.revistas.univerciencia.org/index.php/comunicacaomidiaconsumo/article/viewFile/5160/4788>
- Lindemann, E. 2011. As Marcas nas Feiras Internacionais. Dissertação de Mestrado de Design de Comunicação de Moda, Universidade do Minho.
- Pazmino, A. 2007. Uma reflexão sobre design social, eco design e design sustentável. *In: I Simpósio Brasileiro de Design Sustentável*.
- Sachs, I. 2002. Caminhos para o desenvolvimento sustentável. Rio de Janeiro.
- Semprini, A. 2010. A marca pós-moderna poder e fragilidade da marca na sociedade contemporânea, 2ª edição, Estação das letras e cores, São Paulo.
- Valente, S. 2008. Luxo sustentável: a nova estratégia do mercado premium?, *X Congresso de Ciências da Comunicação na Região Nordeste*, Consultado 15 de janeiro de 2014, disponível em <<http://www.intercom.org.br/papers/regionais/nordeste2008/resumos/R12-0714-1.pdf>>
- World commission on environment an development. 1987. *Our Common Future*. Consultado 20 de junho de 2014, disponível em: <<http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf> >