



The Vital Role of Artisans: Cultural Sustainability, Ethics and the Communication Crisis in Fashion

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Abstract. This article critically reflects on the systemic marginalisation of artisans who produce for fashion brands, highlighting the tensions between ethical practices, cultural sustainability, and the imperative need for transparent and effective communication strategies within the sector. Grounded in a critical analysis based on academic literature and an interdisciplinary approach, the study examines how opaque communication strategies contribute to the perpetuation of a system marked by cultural appropriation and socioeconomic inequalities. The analysis identifies ethical gaps in the relationship between the fashion industry and artisans' gaps that not only reinforce the marginalisation of these cultural agents but also pose a threat to the preservation of traditional cultures. Accordingly, the article positions communication as a central axis in the construction of a more ethical fashion sector and proposes six communication strategies aimed at promoting transparency, cultural sustainability through authentic narratives and collaborative partnerships, the ethical use of impact data, and economic equity through co-creation practices. Drawing on real-world examples, it illustrates successful practices and institutional initiatives that reveal the potential for ethically and culturally sustainable change. The article concludes with practical recommendations and future research directions, reinforcing the urgency of institutionalising ethical and cultural practices as a standard within the fashion industry.

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Keywords: Fashion Design · Artisanal Creativity · Sustainability · Craft Heritage · Co-Creation practices

1 Introduction

The approaches of cultural sustainability and ethics in fashion design, alongside the promotion of artisanal practices and the recognition of artisans, have become pressing concerns in contemporary fashion industry discourse. These themes constitute part of the response to the transformations currently reshaping global society, encompassing behavioural, economic, climatic, and social trends. Although not new, these approaches have been permeating the creative and industrial sectors for decades. However, they are frequently accompanied by criticism, particularly regarding cultural appropriation, the lack of respect for certain cultures, and the absence of ethical considerations in acknowledging creative and labour authorship.

This article critically examines the ethical challenges inherent in the communication practices between fashion designers, fashion brands, and artisans. Centring on the concept of cultural sustainability, it seeks to reflect upon the importance of recognising the distinct creative identities and heritage of communities that are often rendered invisible within industrial fashion processes. Considering the tensions arising from cultural appropriation and the devaluation of manual and ancestral knowledge, we pose the following question: in what ways might fashion communication contribute to the development of more ethical and respectful relationships concerning cultural sustainability and the dialogue between artisans, designers, and brands?

To address this question, the article is structured around four main axes. In Sect. 2, we begin with a critical review of the literature, followed by a discussion of emblematic real-world cases that expose ethical contradictions within the fashion industry. Section 3 examines the paradoxes of creativity through an ethical perspective, referencing cases that advocate for more equitable and sustainable approaches. In Sect. 4, we focus on communication as a strategic tool for enhancing the visibility and cultural value of artisanal work, suggesting pathways consistent with the principles of cultural sustainability. Finally, in Sect. 5, we offer a critical conclusion and outline future perspectives, acknowledging the complexities and contradictions within the dialogues between brands, designers, and artisans. We advocate for the construction of more ethical and sustainable relationships through the recognition of cultural authorship and the reconfiguration of communicative strategies adopted by brands and creators.

The literature reviewed offers a critical reflection on the ethical conditions governing the relationships between designers and artisans. Among the main issues raised are the problems of artisan recognition, the limited understanding of cultural aspects, and the fragility of foundational concepts such as cultural sustainability, ethics in fashion, craftsmanship, and cultural appropriation. Overall, in our view, much of the literature still prioritises environmental sustainability, primarily relating to raw materials or consumer responsibility. There is comparatively little discussion on approaches to cultural and ethical sustainability connected to creative processes in fashion.

Throughout the article, we propose communication approaches that are more sensitive, contextualised, and ethically guided, employing tools and methodologies originating from the design field itself and readily recognisable by brands and designers. In doing so, we aim to contribute effectively to the construction of more equitable relationships, founded on the recognition and valorisation of ancestral knowledge and cultural authorship as pillars of a creative and sustainable fashion industry.

2 Context: Investigate the Past

As outlined in the introduction, reflecting on the past is fundamental for critically analysing the current ethical challenges in the relationships between designers, fashion brands, and artisans. To this end, we critically discuss some of the theoretical foundations underpinning the discourse on ethics and cultural sustainability in design.

In initiating this discussion, it is important to recall and revisit the principles proposed by Papanek [1] regarding sustainability and ethics in design. Since the 1970s, the author has highlighted the necessity for design to be human-centred, ecological, and

ethical, openly advocating that designers must adopt an ethical social stance focused on human relationships. According to him, sustainable design is intrinsically linked to moral considerations, where alternative technologies, material cultures, and local productions should be at the forefront, with designers bearing the responsibility to contribute positively to society and their environment.

Regarding the ethical context within fashion design, marked by numerous cases of cultural appropriation in recent decades, it is vital to revisit the fundamental concept underlying this phenomenon. This becomes particularly relevant given its recurrence within the artistic and creative processes of fashion, which are often directly linked to designers' search for cultural, artistic, and historical references. The concept of cultural appropriation, which originates in art history, refers specifically to the phenomenon of 'art theft' historically documented through the conquests of emperors, the appropriation of Indigenous peoples' cultures, and the colonisation of countries [2]. It is through this historically grounded yet ethically flawed process, devoid of sustainable values, that crafts and cultures are stripped of their value, history, and meaning. Pozzo [3], drawing on dialogue with other scholars, clarifies that cultural appropriation involves the theft of intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artefacts from a culture, without proper consent or recognition. According to the author, the issue of cultural appropriation is multifaceted, extending beyond questions of cultural property and intersecting with issues of identity. When such practices are embedded within industrial logic, they exacerbate the risk of craft extinction and lead to reductive and stereotypical representations of the cultures portrayed [4]. Although not a recent phenomenon, cultural appropriation continues to marginalise artisan communities, whose members remain on the peripheries of society, while their intellectual and creative work and their cultures gain prestige through the creative representation of others.

Emblematic examples of this logic have accumulated over the past few decades. Among the most frequently cited cases, we highlight several from the last 50 years [3]: in 2018 and 2019, accusations were made against the fashion house Carolina Herrera [5] for culturally appropriating the textile crafts and traditions of the Guatemalan people. Similarly, the Maasai tribes were subject to appropriation by brands such as Louis Vuitton and Diane von Furstenberg [6]. Another case involves the French brand Isabel Marant, which, in its Spring/Summer 2015 collection, used patterns belonging to the Indigenous community of Oaxaca, Mexico, without proper recognition of the culture concerned [7]. This is not only a historical issue but also a contemporary one. In 2021, the American brand Tory Burch was accused of cultural appropriation involving the Camisola Poveira, a cultural symbol of the Portuguese city of Póvoa de Varzim for over 150 years. The same brand had previously faced similar accusations in 2017, concerning the appropriation of a traditional Romanian coat [8].

The cases cited underscore the critical and unsustainable complexity that characterises the fashion system and its so-called "creative" model, revealing the urgent need for change. This scenario is further exacerbated by indiscriminate access to information often misinterpreted and the accelerated circulation of cultural references in a globalised world, which, in the absence of critical mediation, reduces symbolic richness to aesthetic exploitation.

In this regard, as noted by d'Oliveira Martins [9], it is essential to promote inter-cultural dialogue, mutual respect, and the valorisation of territorial cultural resources, understood as enduring, symbolic, and identity-forming elements. According to the author, it is through sensitive communicative practices centred on the expression of value and recognition that younger generations come to recognise craft and its makers as expressions of memory, movement, tradition, and creativity.

In this way, it becomes evident that ethical conflicts in fashion are not isolated incidents, but rather the result of a historically exclusionary and appropriative system. Building on this discussion, we now examine how such gaps might be addressed through ethical proposals committed to cultural sustainability and the recognition of the authorship involved.

3 The Ethics Paradox of Artisanal Fashion Creativity

The debate surrounding the relationships between craft, ethics, and creativity in fashion exposes the structural contradictions of a system that commodifies traditional knowledge while marginalising its holders, the artisans. The fetishisation of craft by the fashion market, expressed through labels such as “handmade”, “heritage”, “cultural”, “sustainable”, or “social”, reveals a perverse paradox. Cultural techniques are celebrated as markers of authenticity and luxury, yet their creators are denied credit, reduced to mere labour, deprived of creative, cultural, and identity-based recognition, and condemned to social and economic invisibility. This phenomenon, referred to as craft fetishism [10], describes the symbolic valorisation of craft as a consumer object, detached from its human and cultural context. By reducing traditional knowledge to disposable “trends”, fetishism not only empties such practices of their original meanings but also reinforces their appropriation by global brands. This dynamic subverts the very notion of culture as intellectual property embedded with specific values and practices rooted in community. Hegemonic design systems convert such knowledge into the unilateral property of brands [11], disconnecting it from its socio-cultural origins. While many luxury brands describe themselves as sustainable, the reality is far more complex, marked by ethical, social, and cultural dilemmas that challenge the reconciliation of luxury with sustainable practices [12]. The impact of haute couture in terms of sustainability remains rather limited, as the topic, although frequently referenced in the media, is still scarcely enacted within the luxury market [12]. This scenario largely reflects the structural tensions within the sector, particularly about recurrent cases of cultural appropriation and the difficulty of aligning ethical practices with the symbolic and commercial values of luxury.

Moreover, the issue of sustainability becomes even more challenging when considering the decentralised structure of the fashion supply chain, which accounts for approximately 60% of global garment production [13]. According to the authors, this figure highlights both the significance of this segment and the difficulty in effectively integrating the social and economic dimensions of sustainability within the sector [13]. In their analysis of seven different sustainability indices, the authors identify disparities in the metrics and concepts adopted, revealing a lack of clarity regarding the parameters used. This methodological complexity contributes to the lack of transparency on the part of brands, thereby reinforcing the urgency of clearer, more ethical, and culturally

sensitive approaches spanning from the design process to the communication strategies adopted by fashion brands and designers.

Despite this ongoing appropriation, global campaigns and policy initiatives, such as those promoted by UNESCO regarding the safeguarding of cultural heritage [14], have advocated for greater recognition of craft as a form of cultural expression and a tool for sustainability. However, this institutional rhetoric often contrasts with the realities of the sector. Studies reveal the consistent omission by brands in communicating the origins of craftwork, frequently employing labels such as “handmade” without crediting the artisans or their communities [3, 8, 12, 15], thereby perpetuating the very invisibility they publicly claim to denounce.

The recurring practices of appropriation and intellectual devaluation within the realm of craft reinforce the notion that such techniques are essential components of contemporary fashion and textile production, particularly in products associated with sustainability. While many brands continue to perpetuate exploitative logics, some have adopted alternative approaches, employing craft not merely to construct brand identity, but to re-signify products by creating narratives that foster emotional connections between consumers and cultures of origin. Within this context, partnerships based on consent, attribution, and mutual benefit, although still rare in terms of authenticity and ethics, demonstrate that alternative models are indeed possible. Zbucheá [4] notes that one of the key challenges in bridging craft and industry lies in developing creative projects that value traditional craftsmanship within sustainable economies and promote recognition of the artisans’ cultural contributions. A promising example is the work of the Brazilian brand Catarina Mina [16], which, in its 2023 impact report, highlighted collaboration with 450 female artisans across 12 craft typologies. All the brand’s products identify the artisan authorship and include a geographical indication of origin. Similar initiatives can be observed in the Portuguese brand Marita Moreno [17], which not only employs nationally sourced and certified natural materials, such as cork, wood, linen, and wool, but also collaborates with certified artisans through the UPA (Handcrafted Production Unity). In its footwear line, the “Azores Collection”, the brand partners with weavers from Terceira Island – Azores, promoting not only their names but also the historical significance of weaving, deeply rooted in Azorean cultural traditions. These practices stand in stark contrast to the previously discussed critical omissions, demonstrating how design methodologies that centre the value of craftsmanship can contribute to the preservation of tangible cultural heritage and the strengthening of sustainable alternatives.

In the luxury sector, the British brand Stella McCartney [18] stands out as a globally recognised pioneer of sustainable luxury. The brand adopts approaches aligned with the principles of veganism, opposition to animal cruelty, and environmental responsibility. Its ethical positioning is demonstrated through transparent practices, particularly concerning its supply chain and occasional collaborations with artisan communities. Beyond this, the brand has developed educational campaigns aimed at consumers, seeking to reinforce coherence between discourse and practice. Although it does not place significant emphasis on the use of traditional craftsmanship, its consistency in aligning environmental discourse with practice suggests possible pathways towards a more ethically and socially sustainable restructuring of the luxury sector.

Despite these examples, the reality faced by most artisans remains critical, revealing a systemic divide. Many are unable to sustain themselves through the sale of their crafts, due to a lack of fair remuneration and limited market access [19]. This contradiction exposes the ethical crisis within fashion design, which, rather than contributing to poverty alleviation and cultural empowerment, as advocated by Papanek [1], often reproduces structural inequalities. In the Portuguese context, for instance, numerous artisans possess expertise in traditional techniques such as basketry, textiles, and pottery, yet remain marginalised within the productive system. While initiatives such as CEARTE - Centre for Vocational Training in Craft and Heritage [20] seek to promote professional development and formal recognition through the Artisan Card, many artisans are unable to access such resources due to financial, geographical, or informational constraints. This institutional gap reinforces the urgency of developing more inclusive systems that provide genuine opportunities for visibility and income.

This debate around income generation, often approached in aspirational and hopeful terms, proves largely unfeasible for the majority. Only a small minority of artisans are involved in visible partnerships or can afford the costs associated with trade fairs, specialist markets, or the promotion of their work [19]. At the heart of this lies the paradox between ethical fashion and artisanal labour. It is therefore necessary to go beyond the recognition of exceptional cases and to pursue structural transformation of the system. Partnerships with brands and designers must include not only symbolic credit but also material conditions that allow craftsmanship to become a viable source of livelihood and cultural preservation. Overcoming this paradox requires acknowledging communication as a strategic tool, one that, through authentic and transparent narratives, can legitimise artisanal and cultural knowledge, increase its visibility in the market, and foster genuinely ethical and sustainable partnerships between fashion and artisans.

4 Communication as a Tool for Visibility and Cultural Sustainability of Artisans in the Fashion Industry

The critical rhetoric previously outlined exposes a fashion system which, while appropriating artisanal knowledge as markers of authenticity, fails to ensure visibility and fair remuneration for artisans. Considering this paradox, communication emerges not merely as a marketing tool but as a strategic axis capable of deconstructing entrenched hierarchies. A transparent approach is required—one that can translate the symbolic value of craftsmanship into both material and cultural recognition, moving beyond the superficial logic of labels such as “handmade” or “sustainable”, and the systematic omission of artisan authorship. Sustainability and ethical practices demand that the fashion industry undertake a critical examination of the role of artisans and the cultural contexts embedded in their work. Particular attention must be paid to communication and information transparency, as the absence of accurate communication perpetuates sociocultural inequality [21]. A lack of transparency regarding supply data and production chains sustains exploitative labour conditions, facilitates the misuse of artisanal knowledge, and contributes to environmental degradation, cultural erasure, and community impoverishment [22]. The fashion industry must move beyond political and legal compliance and strive towards more human-centred working models. This involves articulating clear

engagement narratives, fostering active partnerships with artisan associations, initiating open and equitable dialogues with these cultural and social actors, collaborating with sustainable suppliers, engaging in educational initiatives with vulnerable groups, and promoting consumer awareness.

A study published in 2022 [23], based on interviews conducted with five fashion brands oriented towards social sustainability, revealed that all the brands perceived consumers to be more concerned with environmental sustainability than with social aspects, including working conditions. The study also highlights the need for brands to educate their consumers through their platforms, informing them about social sustainability practices, product traceability, and, above all, promoting transparency.

In light of the scenarios presented and the ethical and responsible solutions discussed, our focus turns to strategic communication approaches that can contribute to enhancing the visibility of artisans while simultaneously promoting cultural, sociocultural, and economic sustainability in a meaningful way [24]. This proposal challenges the romanticised narratives employed by many brands, which are often shaped by strategically crafted language and imagery designed to captivate consumers.

Building upon this understanding, we synthesise in Fig. 1 a set of six strategic communication approaches: radical transparency, cultural narratives, verifiable practical tools, ethical partnerships, participatory communication, and data-driven impact marketing. These strategies not only aim to enhance the symbolic and material visibility of artisans but also contribute to the construction of a more equitable, ethical, and sustainable fashion system. The approaches presented emerge from the critical readings undertaken throughout the development of this article, bridging theory and practice [3, 11, 12, 14, 15, 19, 21, 23–25]. Each strategy is accompanied by a conceptual framework, practical examples for real-world application, and reference brands to inspire and support new initiatives.

The six tools presented in Fig. 1 constitute a coherent set of design approaches aimed at transforming fashion communication practices into instruments that contribute to cultural sustainability, while ensuring appropriate ethical standards and symbolic and social visibility.

The “Radical Transparency” (1) tool stands out for advocating the direct disclosure of authorship and collaborations through the explicit naming of artisans, geographic recognition, and cultural narratives. This practice challenges the logic of invisibility frequently adopted by global brands [4], as discussed in Sect. 3 of this article. A key element of this approach lies in its direct opposition to cultural and symbolic erasure, by enabling consumers to identify those behind the product. However, its effectiveness depends not only on the willingness of brands to provide space, credit, and authorship but also on their ability to accurately communicate their actions and meaningfully contribute to social sustainability indicators, as outlined by Baneliene et al. [13]. Complementing this first tool, “Cultural Narratives” (2) emphasises the educational dimension of communication by proposing the development of sensitive narratives concerning techniques, territories, and life histories. Unlike the previous tool, this approach requires interpretative and collaborative skills aimed at producing content that respects sociocultural contexts and avoids the bias of “craft fetishism”, as referenced by McGuirk [10]. By proposing

contemporary creative dynamics, it fosters feelings of pride and belonging to cultural heritage, while also supporting pathways for sustainable economic development [4].

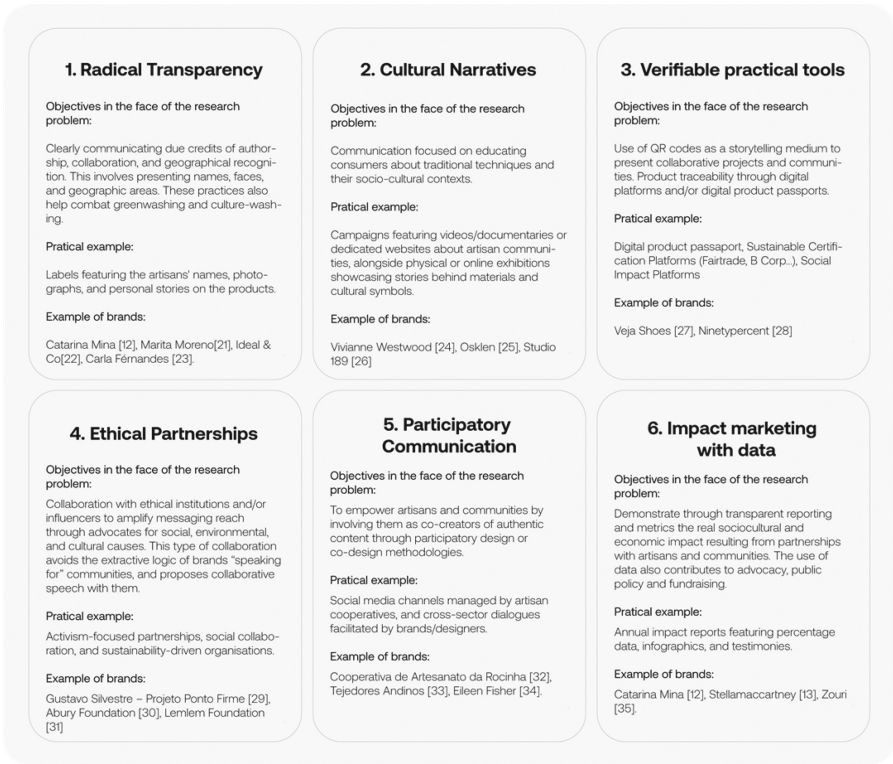


Fig. 1. Communication strategies for the practice of cultural and ethical sustainability.

With a technological focus, the “Verifiable Practical Tools” (3) strategy distinguishes itself by proposing the use of QR codes, digital passports, and certifications as instruments to ensure traceability, authenticity, and transparency. These tools gain relevance within the current fashion system, as the adoption of verifiable practices—such as the digital product passport—will become mandatory within the EU from 2027 onwards [26]. It is also important to note that this approach directly supports the development of the previously outlined strategies (1 and 2) by enabling their traceability and reinforcing transparency.

Corroborating the debates on social justice and ethics mentioned in Sects. 2 and 3, “Ethical Partnerships” (4) is articulated through the proposal of ethical and community-based collaborations, exemplified by brands such as Catarina Mina [16] and Marita Moreno [17]. This tool breaks with the extractive logic of brands and the romanticised discourses surrounding culture by fostering dynamics of dialogue and attentive listening. Expanding on this logic and proposing the direct engagement of artisans in communication processes, “Participatory Communication” (5) not only supports strategy 4 by

enabling artisans to tell their stories through their crafts [27], but also allows them to be recognised as co-authors of content and strategies. By proposing more democratic communication channels, this approach challenges traditional branding models by diluting the authorial control typically exerted by brands. Participatory communication experiences, such as those promoted by the Capuchinhas Project, demonstrate that designers and artisans can elevate ancestral practices ethically and sustainably [28], within open dialogues where artisans not only enjoy creative freedom but also feel empowered to express themselves publicly, sharing their stories and cultures.

Finally, “Impact Marketing with Data” (6) advocates for the use of concrete and verifiable data as a means of engagement and accountability. This is a strategic approach that directly aligns with “Radical Transparency” (1) and responds to the growing demand for clarity in sustainability metrics. By incorporating data such as transparency indices within sustainability frameworks, or by presenting verifiable certifications such as those issued by B Lab Global [29], this strategy offers consumers not only an educational tool but also a demonstration of brand responsibility and commitment to ethical standards.

With these six scenarios grounded in ethical and responsible practices, we emphasise that well-structured communication approaches can serve as a vector for the valorisation of craftsmanship and its associated communities. However, these tools should not be regarded as isolated solutions, but rather as components of a broader communicational ecosystem, within which fashion communication should not be treated merely as a sales-enhancing mechanism, but as a structural pillar capable of addressing and reversing the systemic marginalisation of artisans.

When globally assessing the proposed strategies, as well as the narratives discussed throughout this article, it becomes clear that “radical transparency” (1) emerges as the foundational pillar for transforming the communicational paradigm of ethical and sustainable fashion. By articulating authentic narratives about culture, communities, and techniques, the fashion industry holds the potential to reconfigure historically unequal relationships, contributing to the recognition of artisans and their knowledge as creative and sociocultural symbols. In this context, it is essential to emphasise that transparent communication requires facilitated access to information regarding brands’ ethical and sustainable values, as well as visibility of the partnerships underpinning such commitments. However, it is frequently observed that brand communication channels operate through carefully constructed narratives that, rather than revealing, ultimately obscure reality, creating layers that hinder both access to information and the authentic understanding of adopted practices. The challenge, therefore, lies in moving beyond isolated initiatives, institutionalising such practices as structural elements within the fashion system, a system which has historically fetishised cultural labour through empty “trends” and symbolic falsifications that devalue and reduce human-cultural worth.

5 Future Perspectives and Critical Conclusion

This article has sought to demonstrate how cultural sustainability, ethics, and, above all, communication play central roles in the construction of a fashion system that is truly just, diverse, and committed to the artisans and communities involved in creative processes. The analysis revealed that, although brands and initiatives are striving to establish more

equitable relationships with artisans, the fashion industry largely continues to operate under a logic of symbolic and cultural appropriation, often erasing the true authorship of artisanal work.

When approached as a structural axis rather than merely a marketing tool, communication proves to be an effective means of reversing this critical scenario. Communication strategies focused on radical transparency, geographical recognition, and explicit authorship are fundamental mechanisms for repositioning artisans as active agents and legitimate creators within the fashion value chain. Ethical practices—such as participatory partnerships, impact-driven data marketing, and traceability tools—must cease to be exceptions and become standard within a fashion system that is genuinely committed to cultural and social justice.

As a practical solution to the problems discussed, the implementation of verifiable labels for artisanal authorship is proposed, like existing certifications for products with designation of origin, alongside the formal inclusion of artisans in decision-making stages of creative processes and the adoption of co-authorship design methodologies and cultural narratives within brand communication channels. These actions hold the potential to transform not only how craft is perceived, but also the economic and symbolic relationships inherent in its production. Well-structured, creative and communicative frameworks developed by fashion brands can effectively contribute to the economic development of communities and the survival of cultural traditions. In this regard, initiatives such as the Fair Wear Foundation [30], which operates through independent audits, corporate education, and partnerships with trade unions and NGOs, demonstrate that it is indeed possible to promote dignified working conditions and ethical traceability within global supply chains. Aiming to address the ethical challenges prevalent in the textile and apparel industries, the Fair Wear Foundation adopts a strategic approach to critical issues such as living wages and gender-based violence, fostering dialogue and education as tools to resolve these and other systemic problems. Complementarily, programmes such as Fairtrade Ibérica [31], which certify textiles produced under principles of fair and transparent trade, provide consumers with the opportunity to make informed choices and support more equitable supply chains. Both examples demonstrate that generating positive and measurable impact is a realistic and necessary goal for the structural transformation of the sector. This broader landscape also includes brands such as Vivienne Westwood [32], which incorporates craft as a central value in its sustainability policy, associating manual techniques with longevity, authorship, and cultural resistance. Through clear communication of its commitment to handmade processes and the transmission of creative heritage, the brand reinforces that it is indeed possible to align legacy, ethics, and innovation, even within the luxury segment.

It is equally important to highlight that in countries often categorised as ‘underdeveloped’, such as those in Latin America, the African continent, and South Asia, there is often a more robust structure in place for the preservation of cultural traditions and artisanal knowledge. This strengthening is largely a response to recurring experiences of plagiarism, cultural appropriation, and the lack of creative and intellectual recognition within the context of global fashion supply chains. Faced with these exclusionary dynamics, cultural resistance initiatives have emerged, aiming to assert identity and protect against exploitative practices. Among the notable examples is the strengthening of

indigenous textile collectives in Mexico, such as the “*Cooperative Mujeres Sembrando la Vida*”, composed of 200 women from the Zinacantán community who engage in a variety of artisanal practices [33]. In Africa, the safeguarding of kente cloth in Ghana was recognised as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in December 2024 [34]. In India, efforts to protect kantha embroidery have led to sustainable practices that promote the preservation of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, for example, the initiative “*House of Wandering Silk*”, which collaborates with local craftswomen to create pieces that fuse traditional techniques with contemporary design [35]. In Brazil, the Parakanã Indigenous people, located in southern Pará, have been investing, supported by technical expertise, in the preservation of their cultural traditions and the strengthening of their craft production and commercialisation [36]. In Peru, the “*Project TUI Colourful Cultures Peru*” [37], launched in 2022, supports 135 craftswomen from various Indigenous communities to empower women, promoting the economic sustainability of these communities, and creating conditions that enable the sale of textile artworks within fashion markets.

Moreover, despite the increasing use of ethical and cultural rhetoric by many brands in their communication channels, the invisibility of artisans remains a persistent reality. It is rare for the names and communities of artisans to be explicitly acknowledged, which highlights the enduring structures of power and appropriation within the current fashion system. One notable exception is the Portuguese brand Marita Moreno [17], which includes the name, location, and context of the artisans directly in its communications and on the products themselves. This demonstrates that an alternative approach is indeed possible, though it remains far removed from the norm.

It is acknowledged that this study has limitations, as it is based on specific case selections and does not comprehensively encompass all geographic contexts or sectors within the fashion industry. Therefore, future research is encouraged to undertake broader investigations into fashion brands associated with the concepts of ethical and cultural sustainability, through more extensive studies that allow for a critical assessment of the relationship between communicational discourse and actual practices. Along similar lines, it is recommended that the proposed communication strategies be empirically tested across different cultural contexts and fashion segments to evaluate their practical feasibility, real impact on artisans, and structural transformative potential within the industry, beyond the illustrative cases cited here.

The adoption of more complex and interactive methodologies is also suggested, such as action research with artisan communities and qualitative studies on consumer perceptions, better to understand the communicational impacts and behavioural shifts in purchasing. It is understood that fostering attentive listening at both ends of the fashion system contributes to building solid foundations for addressing the complexities inherent in cultural sustainability.

The application of the strategies presented herein may also be extended to the academic field, contributing to the ethical and sensitive education of designers, while enabling educational institutions to test and refine these practices. Furthermore, providing learning environments rooted in historical and creative knowledge within socio-cultural contexts fosters in designers a sense of respect and critical awareness of the

power dynamics embedded in creative processes, thereby helping to prevent cultural appropriation [2].

Finally, it is important to emphasise that ethically communicated and culturally committed fashion must be underpinned by methodological structures and practices capable of breaking with extractive logics, by proposing viable, sustainable, and equitable alternatives for all actors involved.

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