



The Influence of Sustainable Fashion to Encourage Conscious Consumption

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Abstract. The fashion industry has been highlighted for its overconsumption, motivated by the current production model: the fast fashion. From another perspective, green fashion gains attention from the market and from consumers concerned with environmental issues. Taking this scenario into consideration, this study aims to have from Portuguese sustainable fashion brands perspective, how their relationship with consumers is encouraging them towards conscious consumption and if they are including in their strategies the use of experiential marketing to generate meaningful connections as to positively influence your audience.

Keywords: Communication · Experiential marketing · Sustainable fashion · Conscious consumption

1 Introduction

This study brings a reflection on the influence of the fashion market on the overconsumption promoted by the fast fashion production model. The textile industry is considered the largest pollutant, during the period between 2015 and 2030 it is estimated an increase around 60% of textile waste, representing an annual total of 148 million tons (Dean 2020). It is also noted that in the last two decades, there were a growth in global consumption, which reached the textile consumption of 100 million tons (Shirvanimoghaddam et al. 2020). Taking those facts into consideration, consumer and industry have an important role to minimize the environmental impacts.

Sustainability is gaining attention and it is seen as a global trend. In this scenario, consumers are getting more involved and this reflects on their interest in quality, since they give higher importance to know about the production process and if materials are organic or recyclable, their choices become more conscious. This change impacts the market, new and established brands must adapt their business model to one that meets the demand for sustainable clothing and environmental policy requirements (Muthu 2019).

There is a relevant mindset between Millennials in which they expect brands to be active and provide information that educate and encourage them to be more sustainable (Bernardes et al. 2020). For green brands to be able to transform the vision that consumers have of them, they must be structured to a communication that enhances functional and emotional appeal (Kim and Hall 2015).

Therefore, the fashion industry plays a role that can positively influence and encourage more sustainable practices.

2 State of Art

2.1 The Consume in Fashion

Fashion is used as a way of creating meaning for self-identity and for defining the individual, it involves a dynamic social process that creates cultural and interaction meanings. Consumers' buying process are usually directed to irrational choices, because emotional issues reflect on how they are accepted, fashion has as its symbolic meaning of enabling them to differentiate themselves and be part of social groups. Consumption in fashion is related to social identity and self-concept (Niinimäki 2010).

The fact that self-image and social status have a special value in the society, this mindset take consumers to believe that happiness is associated with shopping. The current production model lead by fast fashion encourages individuals to materialistic needs, it has transformed the way clothes are made. Companies aim competitive prices to attract their audience and the advertisements are strategically directed to generate the idea of achieving happiness through purchase. Brands consider the benefits of social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) to create interactions that encourage consumers to share their acquisitions, as an association of social status and belonging. Consequently this communication strategy lead society to overconsumption (Muthu 2019a).

2.2 Sustainable Fashion and Conscious Consumption

In order to have a long-term growth in the fashion industry, sustainable practices become a necessity, as well as a concern throughout its chain: giving the importance of the raw materials used, the design of the product, the way it is produced and even the role of consumers through their intentions, behaviors and habits (Iran 2018).

Sustainable fashion, whether in its different synonyms, eco-fashion, green fashion, or slow fashion, encourage companies to offer products with durability and quality. On the other hand, consumers can find alternatives to increase the use of clothes (Muthu 2019b). The consume in fashion gains a new perspective, a garment has besides the meaning of promoting the individual's self-esteem, the importance of how consumers do their choices, as their choices impacts the environment (Pal et al. 2019).

As considering that human beings are part of nature and they need to understand that there is a limitation of natural resources, changes to a sustainable production model is necessary (Pires 2018), a change that encourage them to consume consciously. According to the United Nations Program, conscious consumption includes improving the quality of life, efficiency in the process in order to minimize waste and having a life cycle perspective in which environmental damage and risk to human health are constantly reduced. (Rodrigues 2021).

2.3 Communication and Experiential Marketing

A successful business involves the intelligent relationship between the creation, communication and delivery, each element has its importance, if one of them fails, it can

affect the result. From the creation of the product, its engaging ad, the service experience, whether online or in person, must meet the level of quality expected by potential customers, otherwise it has no value for the consumer and it does not generate results for the business (Posner 2015).

Human beings have the need to socialize and share their stories. According to Smith and Hanover (2016), experiential marketing understands this reality of consumers and it adapts to brands be part of their lives. Specialists in behavior and psychologists have studied that the human mind assimilate experiences in particular ways, in order to process information and emotions, making it possible to create more relevant experiences and build connections by facing a specific behavioral outcome.

A brand must pay attention to their relationship to its audience, in such a way as to reflect and contribute to the consumer's experience. For (Vasconcelos Aronne et al. 2009) companies are encouraged to change and to start having consumers as partners, now they have access to information that allows them to contribute to decisions. In this new concept, to build a strong brand, must be considered commitment, emotional support and manage experiences to attract consumers.

Fashion has its own language, therefore, consumers in this market expect a communication that includes a visual language. Thus, it is important that the message is created from the combination of visual, verbal and non-verbal codes to be consistent with brands' objective and, at the same time, understandable so that the target audience is able to decode the content (Mitterfellner 2020).

3 Methods

In the direction to study sustainable fashion brands in Portugal in relation to their use of Experiential Marketing with a sustainable concept, the methodology considered for data collection was through individual interviews. The research starts from a qualitative approach, with questions directed to have a descriptive analysis of the interviewed brands to have their perception in relation to the current consumption behavior and how their communication practices is encouraging conscious consumption.

The selection of the sample was based on convenience, given the availability of brands' owners to contribute spontaneously to the interviews. The study starts from the representation of a part of the totality of the universe with the participation of 5 fashion brands that are at least 2 years established in the market, operate throughout Portugal and have sustainability as one of their values.

The brands were selected based on research through the online platform *Marca Portuguesa*, which is a reference in sustainable fashion in Portugal. The following companies were elected:

CUSCUZ is a Portuguese brand of handcraft accessories, among its specialties, the production of sunglasses made from wood waste. It emerged in 2015, from the initiative of father and daughter, Amâncio Neves and Ana Mendes.

FRAMBOOESAS is a women's clothing brand (bikinis and pajamas) that supports the concept of slow fashion and production entirely made in Portugal. It was conceived in 2015 by co-founders Teresa Vila Mendes and Marta Tavares.

SIZ Brand was created in 2017 by co-founders and Fashion Designers, Raquel Rodrigues and Sofia Rodrigues. It is a Portuguese brand that produces women's clothing in an ethical, organic and sustainable way.

NÜWA emerged in 2019 by the founder and Creative Director, Catarina Lopes. It is a Portuguese sportswear fashion brand, which is recognized for its social nature and mission to preserve the planet and make a positive impact on the world.

A WAYZ is a 100% Portuguese sneaker brand, created at the end of 2018 by co-founders Pedro Maçana and Daniel Gonçalves, with the aim of offering sneakers produced locally, in an ethical and transparent way.

4 Results and Discussions

4.1 Consumer Behavior

Legere and Kang (2020) realize that even with the convenience of fast fashion, there is a more frequent demand for sustainable products, as people have become increasingly informed. For Jung and Jin (2016) there is a movement in fashion consumption, there is an audience interested in slow fashion, guided by a purchase that values quality. The interviewed brands realize in their market, the presence of a new behavior, the consumer is moving to a more conscious purchase. SIZ reports that its customers recognize the higher prices as consequence of the material quality and the way it is produced. The FRAMBOESAS' customers praise the durability of the brand's bikinis and pajamas. WAYZ observes in its own customers that buying by price involves a greater interest in knowing the brand, also understanding the price breakdown and the value of quality of the raw material and the production process.

Table 1. The consumer perception regarding sustainable brands

The consumer perception regarding sustainable brands	
CUSCUZ	Audiences see unique value in sustainable brands There is a change in behavior, consumer is starting to look for sustainable brands in special occasions
FRAMBOESAS	More and more consumers value sustainable brands, also in different areas, such as in food level. The lifestyle is changing a lot, the consumer is more focused on green practices
NÜWA	Price is still a barrier, people may want it or may even like it, however sometimes they do not purchase because they still did not change their mindset and continue to act according to fast fashion influence
SIZ	In Europe and in the United States, they are increasingly interested in sustainable brands, however in Portugal, not so much In Portugal there is a small niche which talk about it, but there are few people who wants to invest and buy it Outside Portugal there is a sustainable lifestyle that invest more in green fashion
WAYZ	Brand believes that people are looking for alternatives to fast fashion brands, and whenever they can, they end up paying the extra that sustainable brands ask for, given the different costs required for their production

Source: Author, 2022

Considering the responses obtained by the participating brands (Table 1), it appears that the interest in sustainable fashion and the appreciation for such products is increasing, CUSCUZ realizes that there is a greater demand for sustainable articles on special dates as a way of to honor the occasion. Despite this interest, there is a timid public in Portugal, according to SIZ brand, there is currently only a small niche that is involved and engaged in eco-fashion. As per NÜWA point of view, there are still some barriers regarding price, consumer behavior still prefers the low pricing offered by the fast fashion chain.

4.2 Communication and Experiential Marketing in Sustainable Fashion

Communication is a tool that has the power to encourage and direct the market towards sustainable production, as it promotes the benefits of slow fashion (Legere and Kang 2020). The market has an interested consumer, he wants companies to educate him and share information on how to properly use and dispose of products (Kim and Hall 2015).

Table 2. The power of communication in encouraging sustainable consumption

The power of communication in encouraging sustainable consumption	
CUSCUZ	Brand aims to have a sustainable, contemporary product that does not have the expected aspect of a sustainable product There is an intention to promote, through its products, a change in consumer behavior. Brand realizes that its audience is more careful when handling handcrafted glasses as a way of valuing and increasing their durability
FRAMBOOESAS	The brand proposes that when publishing about a product, it should explain how the product was made, what was the process used and the fabric used
NÜWA	The brand's strategy is a not-so-aggressive communication, in which it encourages impulsive purchases. Two to three collections are launched a year and products are always available in the store, they do not promote the urgent need of: "see now, buy it now"
SIZ	The brand likes to create content to try to raise awareness and change to audience mindset. SIZ has blogs and create some informative contents
WAYZ	The brand directs its communication to show the way they produce, they try to be transparent about the manufacturing process, the materials they use

Source: Author, 2022

In this scenario, it was possible to analyze through the interviews with the brands (Table 2), the relevance of their communication actions. It can be seen that from the answers obtained, transparent communication prevails in all of them and the concern not to promote impulse purchases - none of them claims to offer sales, as the collections are permanently available. SIZ comments that it seeks to encourage sustainable purchases by sharing informative content on its Newsletter channel and on its Blog (Fig. 1).

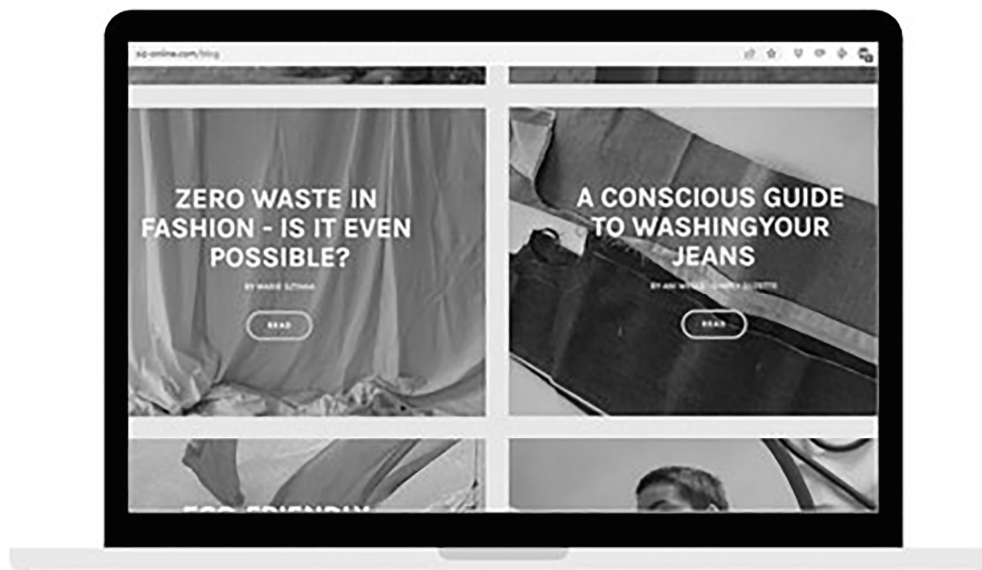


Fig. 1. Blog SIZ Source: SIZ 2022a 2022b

Ana Mendes from CUSCUZ explains that the brand has the habit of promoting sustainable consumption by offering a repair service for situations in which the product suffers some damage and in order to avoid or reduce disposal.

The interaction of brands including consumer experience generates a different relationship with the public, a message is created to stimulate emotion and action, and turn on affective memories. During the interview, the brands were asked about the knowledge and use of experiential marketing, in 100% of the responses it was noticed that none of them has heard about this tool. Considering that are small businesses, the structure is more limited, generally constituted only by the owners, so the marketing and communication strategies are more often based on instinct. Raquel Rodrigues, co-founder of SIZ, reported that she has no graduation or experience in marketing.

A deepen research and further questions during the interview was conducted to be able to assess if in some way the experiential marketing was present in the brands' promotion actions. It was observed that in all of them include some practices with emotional and sensorial appeal directed to conscious consumption.

CUSCUZ reported during the interview that on their participation in Portugal Fashion SS20, they had the idea of taking their Atelier to the event, where the father and co-founder, Amâncio, was producing the handcraft wooden sunglasses in the same way he manufactures it in his place in Coimbra. Whoever was participating the event was also invited to have the experience of producing a sunglass with him. This action, named as a surprise experience (Smith and Hanover 2016) created a spontaneous connection that generate an affective memory. Participants were also able to be involved and get to know how a sustainable production process works by upcycling wasted wood.

Analyzing through previous brands' research and during the interview, SIZ and WAYZ have on their institutional website a partnership with the "Sell 1, Buy 1" platform, which promotes the circularity of fashion items through the exchange of used products for new ones. Users can find out the value of their unused clothes, sell them and have access to discounts on new purchases. This action promotes the incentive connection which connect



Fig. 2. Stories Cuscuz – Portugal Fashion SS20, Source: Cuscuz (2019)

it with the brand (Smith and Hanover 2016). Such a connection encourages people to increase the use of clothing by other stakeholders and the possibility of purchasing a sustainable product through the benefit of the bonus received. Consumers have a responsibility to reduce their consumption in fashion and the practice of the circular economy allows to increase the life cycle of a product, having its maximum use. A purchase made in a second-hand store can motivate consumers in three dimensions: economic, critical – ecological and ethical and hedonic (Pal et al. 2019).

NÜWA and FRAMBOOESAS reported in the interview the interest and concern of being engaged in social or environmental causes in reference to brands' purpose. Both businesses generate a movement connection with their audience. NÜWA communicates on its institutional website that 1% of profits are to support AMURT, a Non-Governmental Organization that aims to improve the quality of life and access to basic needs such as water, in Mozambique.

The co-founder of FRAMBOOESAS, Teresa Mendes, shared that every year they research different causes that brand can associate and contribute, such as the collaboration with Move, a Non-Governmental Organization that aims to fight poverty in Africa with entrepreneurship. The action was linked to offering work with decent remuneration to women seamstresses who were victims of domestic violence. They had the opportunity to produce a special edition of FRAMBOOESAS scrunchies (hair accessories) to be sold on the brand's platform.

For Smith and Hanover (2016), the movement connection is considered to be the most organic and genuine experience. It creates lasting bonds in communities and also promotes relevant connections between the brand and its audience. Marketing campaigns



Fig. 3. “Sell 1, Buy 1” Platform – SIZ Source: SIZ (2022a, 2022b)

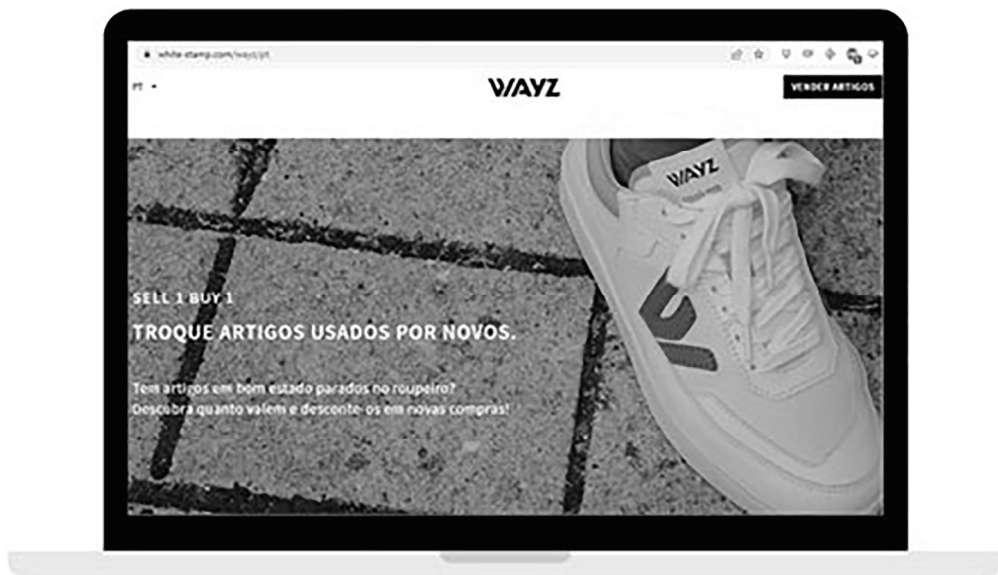


Fig. 4. “Sell 1, Buy 1” Platform – WAYZ Source: Wayz (2022).

that are directed to a cause and to clothing products, influence purchasing decisions and, in this case, also encourage consumer awareness (Kim and Hall 2015).

Based on the collected data during the brands’ interview, in resume, all of them generate an emotional connection based on their values and sustainable concepts in order to encourage a more conscious consumption. For Smith and Hanover (2016), when developing experiences that cause transference, such as provoking feelings for something, this influences the interest, attention and the willingness to interact and store information.

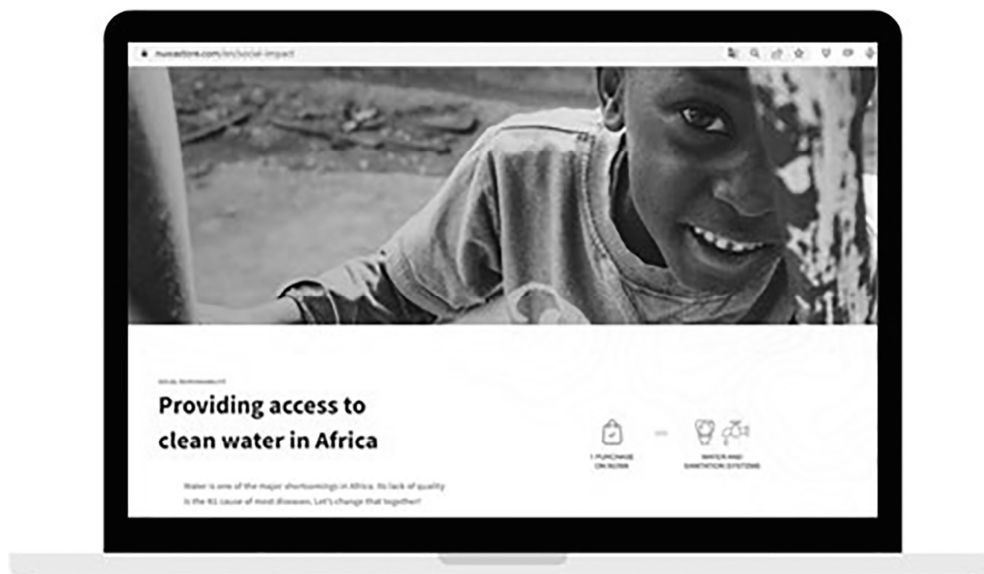


Fig. 5. Nüwa Social Impact Source: Nüwa (2022)



Fig. 6. Framboesas and Move association Source: Framboesas (2019)

5 Final Considerations

Through this study, it was possible to observe relevant contributions carried out with the interviewed brands, since they all have sustainable concept, their practices are influenced to provide experiences and significant connections to engage their audience for a more conscious consumption.

Based on the state of art and considering the brands responses, it is shown that the market is increasingly receptive to sustainability, even if faced with the price barrier and behaviors from fast fashion, the interest of having more information lead consumers to be critical to their own purchases.

There is still a lack of studies focused on this topic and further research is possible to a broader analysis beyond the sustainable fashion market, but for the entire industry.

This paper aims to be relevant for further studies to identify opportunities for sustainability to be part of the entire fashion industry. Through the benefits of experiential marketing be able to generate connections that encourage a consumption that soften the environmental impacts.

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