Ethical Fashion Branding
Multiple Case Studies of Mission Statements and Fashion Films

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Title: Ethical Fashion Branding: Multiple Case Studies of Mission Statements and Fashion Films
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Date: 20-02-2017

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to identify new ways to improve consumer’s response to ethical fashion branding through written mission statements and fashion films. It examines material by three fashion brands: H&M, Stella McCartney and People Tree. Additionally, it reviews and summarizes findings of previous literature in the field of ethical and sustainable fashion branding and builds a list of principal factors that play in the success of ethical fashion branding. The paper concludes with providing recommendations to improve the branding of each case study.

Keywords: Ethical fashion branding, mission statements, fashion films, ethical consumption, sensorial value, H&M, Stella McCartney, People Tree
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1. Introduction

Out of a feeling of responsibility for the damage caused by the fashion industry — and specifically fast fashion — to the people and the planet, I decided to research ways in which the situation can be improved. Since the hope for legislation putting a stop to large corporations from destroying people's lives and the environment is not visible in the near future, the logical conclusion is to empower those who are willingly advocating for change, equality and protection of the planet. Consumers’ awareness of slow fashion, eco fashion, sustainable fashion or ethical fashion is increasing everyday — even if very slowly. The question that this paper is asking is: How do we increase this awareness further? Ethical consumption has proven its ability to impact the food market. In order to have it arrive in fashion as well, we need to rely on the findings of previous studies while keeping an open mind and an eye on the future.

1.1. Purpose and Question

This paper will examine sustainable identities seen through the brand image of three fashion companies as constructed online in their mission statements and fashion films. The three companies vary in size, design focus, market segment, and each offer differing definitions of sustainability. Next, the paper will explore the most effective ways to brand ethical fashion through these mediums and generate positive consumer response in both the short and long run. The aim of this study is to envision a potential brand image that balances the allure and the values of an ethical fashion brand. The research questions that structure this study are as follows:

- What does ethical fashion branding look like today?
- How do issues hindering ethical consumption manifest themselves in branding?
- Is it possible for ethical fashion branding to be more effective and how?

This study will pursue answers to these questions in the following process. First, I will carry out a descriptive analysis of each brand, which will be followed by a discourse analysis of previous
literature. This will help us to answer the first question. The results of those two steps shall be discussed in order to reach practical findings that will answer the second and third questions.

1.2. Empirical Sources

The material intended for this research is sourced from the websites and YouTube channels of H&M, Stella McCartney and People Tree. My focus will be on written mission statements, visual mission statements and sustainable collections’ campaigns in the form of fashion films. As it will be further discussed, fashion films are argued to be one of the most effective ways in creating brand identity and reaching to consumers and that is why they were chosen as material for this paper. The three brands are very different from each other: H&M is a massive fast fashion brand and has a sustainable fashion line branded as “Conscious”; Stella McCartney identifies as a luxury fashion brand with sustainability in mind; and People Tree is branded as entirely fair trade and sustainable fashion. Though their websites vary in form and content, the goal of this paper is to focus on the communication of ethical value. Therefore I will be looking for written mission statements under titles such as “about us”, “our mission”, and “sustainability” or “social responsibility” when available, depending on each brand’s approach. Equally, their fashion films are different in quantity, production, style, reach and reception. For that reason I will analyze two fashion films by each brand. One will be the visual mission and/or sustainability statement and the other will be a fashion film advertising for a seasonal sustainable collection.

The reason behind this choice of brands is that they each deal with sustainability and ethical fashion questions in various ways. They are also a sample of three different forms of fashion companies: fast fashion, slow fashion and luxury. The multiple forms will provide larger material for comparison and result in a more rounded view of brand image as sustainable/ethical catering for diverse consumer groups. This will help identify the issues and advantages in current ethical fashion branding.
1.2.1. Hennes & Mauritz

Hennes was founded in 1947 in Västerås, Sweden by Erling Persson and developed over the past 70 years to become the H&M Group with six fashion brands and more than 4200 stores in 64 markets. H&M group is expanding at an annual rate 10 to 15 percent in the numbers of stores around the world, and is increasing its online sales worldwide every year.¹ With its large supply chain, continuous expansion, quick response to the market demand and constantly changing styles, H&M is also one of the top leading companies in the global apparel retail industry.² Its business idea started as “fashion at prices that will suit everyone” and was one of the first companies to replace locally produced garments in Sweden by garments produced abroad for a lower cost.³ In 2011 H&M introduced the label “Conscious”, which according to their website, is “a range of products with an added sustainability value” and since 2012 H&M produces a sustainable collection annually independent from its seasonal collections, entitled “Conscious Exclusive Collection”. The latest update to H&M’s business idea from last year was “fashion and quality at the best price in a sustainable way”.⁴ Attaching sustainability to its original business idea is both a significant change that impacts the construction and reception of their brand image. Therefore it is important to analyze their written mission statement as it conveys how the company wishes to be perceived and provide a clearer background to their visual mission statement in a linguistic form. Their latest visual mission statement to the date of this paper is a music video advertising their world recycle week campaign, featuring M.I.A and a number of young artists and influencers from various countries and ethnic backgrounds. The campaign seeks to encourage consumers to bring their old clothes to H&M stores to be recycled. Analyzing the video will help understand H&M’s way of translating its mission, brand identity and sustainability efforts into a visual narrative. Also, I will be analyzing the fashion film of the latest Conscious Collection from 2016.

1.2.2. Stella McCartney

Stella McCartney, the daughter of the famed Beatle Paul McCartney, is a fashion designer who launched her first collection in 2001 in fifty-fifty partnership with Gucci (now re-established as the luxury holding company Kering). Her company Stella McCartney is a luxury fashion brand that has 51 stores and is distributed in 77 countries through 600 plus wholesale accounts, and it is available online in 100 countries.³ Stella McCartney identifies itself as a vegetarian (the first and only vegetarian luxury brand⁴), responsible, and modern business. It defines its sustainability views through these concepts⁷. However, McCartney the designer stated in an interview that in spite of her passion for protecting the environment and her aspiration to become a fully sustainable brand, she is “most and foremost a fashion designer.”⁸ The importance of Stella McCartney’s example comes from the company’s interest in sustainability along with the notable absence of any advertisement for its sustainability outside of the designer’s public speaking and personal involvement in sustainable initiatives. The sustainable brand is more attached to the designer’s persona as a celebrity vouching for sustainability, rather than to the brand identity itself. I will be analyzing the written mission statement under “About Stella” and “sustainability”, in addition to a recent fashion film titled “Deforestation” which promotes the company’s usage of responsibly sourced viscose, and the fashion film of the latest collection to the date of this paper which is winter 2016.

1.2.3. People Tree

People Tree was founded by Safia Minney following the foundation of Global Village NGO in Tokyo, Japan in 1995. Its first fair trade fashion collection was launched in 1996-1997.⁹ It defines itself as “sustainable and fair trade fashion” and aims to be 100 percent fair trade through its entire supply chain. Its mission is to support producers in developing countries and help them use environmental methods and gain economic independence. It also states that it aspires to

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⁴ Ibid.
Díaz used to describe ethical value and matters related to it. 

The fashion film analysis is partly borrowed from an approach identified and used by Paloma Díaz Soloaga and Leticia García Guerrero in their study. It helps uncover the most important features of a fashion film, and it includes and summarizes elements from previous literature, such as

11 People Tree “Our Credentials”: http://www.peopletree.co.uk/about-us/our-credentials
13 The paper will use solely the first step of this approach since the second step of this method is a qualitative study of five aspects that they identified which define fashion films features and goals related to traditional fashion branding: a) a strong connection with experiential marketing; b) a new way to interact with the new digital consumers; c) storytelling and serialization; d) seek of aesthetic delight; e) dematerialization of the products. The term “traditional” here refers to Simonetta Carbonaro’s differentiation between traditional fashion branding and sustainable fashion branding where she rejects branding methods old and new and suggests a fundamental change from root to end. See: Simonetta Carbonaro and David Goldsmith, Routledge Handbook of Sustainability and Fashion, in Branding Sustainability: Business Models in Search of Clarity, Ed Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham (New York: Routledge, 2015): 160-170
as Nikola Mijovic’s article *Narrative Form And The Rhetoric Of Fashion In The Promotional Fashion Film.*\(^\text{15}\) It consists of a descriptive analysis of the film. This study will carry out this analysis through six categories, as described by Soloaga and Guerrero:

1. Definition of the type of fashion film, e.g. narrative, non-narrative, or organic narrative;\(^\text{16}\)
2. Main objective of the fashion film, e.g. building a brand, presenting a new product, collection or series, connecting with a consumer, or improving sales;
3. How the film achieves aesthetic delight, whether through beauty or ugliness;
4. On what platforms the film is released, e.g. YouTube, Vimeo, Twitter or Facebook;
5. Presence of the ethical values or products in the film and whether that presence is intrusive, manifest, delitescent, or non-existent;

The information from these six categories will then be discussed and evaluated through the findings of previous literature on ethical fashion branding.

**1.4. Theoretical Perspective**

As the purpose of this study is to explore ethical fashion branding, it is founded on theories of consumption that view the relationship between consumers and products to be interdependent on its social and cultural context. This study sees branding as a key player in all public conversations and particularly those concerning environmental and social awareness, and acknowledges branding’s potential in influencing the relationship between product and consumer. These theories will be illustrated based on literature on consumer culture by Celia Lury and Roberta Sassatelli, and sustainable fashion branding by Simonetta Carbonaro and Goldsmith. Since I will be using fashion films as my main material it is necessary to establish a background of fashion film theory and that will be founded on literature such as *100 Years of the* 

\(^{15}\) Nikola Mijovic, *Narrative Form And The Rhetoric Of Fashion In The Promotional Fashion Film*, *Film, Fashion & Consumption* 2:2 (2013): 175–186

\(^{16}\) The term “Organic Narrative” refers to films describing a process such as production in a documentary-like manner. See previous footnote.
In this section I will present several key concepts that are the basis for this paper: consumer culture as material culture, branding, consumption ethics and consumer responsibility, cultural representations of consumption, and fashion film. Roberta Sassatelli who have produced a book with the same title that also explores theories surrounding consumer culture and offers strong arguments supporting the ideological role of advertising in society.

Consumer Culture as Material Culture

In her book *Consumer Culture*, Celia Lury addresses a number of concepts concerning consumer culture theory. She offers a dynamic and flexible view of consumption culture and its interacting elements and which opens new possibilities for change. Lury explores previous consumer culture and consumption theories in order to build comprehensive findings and reformulations. According to Lury things are carriers of meanings in culture, and have a role in the making of culture. Things and people come to have a social life through the rituals of consumption. Meanings constructed in things consumed include materialized identities and lifestyles, materialized abstracts such as happiness, love, friendship (amongst many others), and materialized communication such as expressing meanings by gifting. Marketing strategies and advertising campaigns have been employing this notion successfully for decades by attaching fictional values to all kinds of products. An example might be convincing consumers that if they put a bag of pre-prepared salad in a beautiful plate, their salad will taste better.

Branding

17 Marketa Uhlirova, “100 Years of the Fashion Film: Frameworks and Histories”, *Fashion Theory* 17:2 (2013): 137–158
22 Ibid. 9-24
This paper is looking at a specific type of branding, and therefore it is necessary to consider a broader concept of branding as a starting point. According to Carbonaro and Goldsmith branding is everything a brand is. It begins at the business idea and values of a brand, and extends to its design and brand communication. Additionally, Lury has shown that branding has “multiple levels of existence” that are beyond brand image and advertising and has developed the extension of branding on the various aspects of a brand and different types of business models and institutions. Branding is no longer exclusive to commercial organizations but also to public, governmental, political organizations and thus the brand as a new media object is contributing to a global conversation; and consumption systems are ever more open not only to affect but also be affected by external environment.

Consumption Ethics and Consumer Responsibility
Lury points out the delicacy and nuance in which the speech of consumption ethics should be addressed. She suggests that there is a fine line between presenting consumption as an empowering tool in the hands of consumers, and presenting it as a generator of decision making anxiety and feelings of guilt. Lury’s understanding of this concept is important when we look at what forms of branding are more effective when it comes to encouraging ethical consumption and generating true brand loyalty.

Cultural Representations of Consumption
Roberta Sassatelli has produced a book with the same title as Lury (Consumer Culture) that also explores theories surrounding consumer culture and offers strong arguments supporting the ideological role of advertising in society. According to Sassatelli, “advertising industries occupy an important mediating position between consumption and production, art and commodities, materiality and symbolic forms.” She also points out that by achieving its commercial function, advertising also plays an ideological function. She lays out contrasting

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24 Lury, Consumer Culture, 151
25 Ibid. 146
26 Ibid. 166-167
27 Sassatelli, Consumer Culture, 117-138
views of aggressive anti-consumerism and apologetic anti-consumerism only to confirm the important role that advertising plays in the construction of social and cultural as well as personal sphere. Without taking a stand with or against advertising as a function of consumerism, she sees it as a tool that can work in any direction, whether it is feeding the consumerism machine or exposing the debated nature of commercialization.

Fashion Film

Digital media and the transition from iconic images - the fashion photograph - to symbolic representation in digital fashion film have changed fashion’s relationship with time. Digital fashion films are capable of carrying meanings that never die and that can be re-lived at anytime, unlike the fashion photograph that only captures a moment that is now passed. In addition to digital fashion films’ unique relation to time, they have offered accessibility to both brands and consumers. Digital fashion film can reach an inconceivable number of people compared to traditional fashion editorials. It also introduces consumers to brand identities that are outside of their financial reach. Marketa Uhlirova revealed that fashion films, in spite of their commercial nature, have stood at times as an independent and genuine form of artistic expression. Fundamentally, digital fashion films have more potential at relating compelling cultural identifies, and therefore more effective at communicating with consumers. According to Guerrero and Soloaga, fashion films’ extraordinary communication abilities through connecting with human desires and behaviors and creating experiences with narrative tools, offer a great opportunity for brand and brand identity construction.

1.5. Previous Research

Hazel Clark, with a background in art and design history, identified three basic foundations of a slow fashion system: (1) local resources and distributed economy; (2) transparency and less intermediation between producer and consumer; and (3) sustainable and sensorial products.

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28 Ibid.
29 Khan, “Cutting The Fashion Body”, 235-249
30 Uhlirova, “100 Years of the Fashion Film”, 137–158
31 Díaz Soloaga and García Guerrero, “Fashion films as a new communication format to build fashion brands”, 45-61
32 Hazel Clark, "SLOW + FASHION—an Oxymoron—or a Promise for the Future …?", Fashion Theory 12:4 (2008): 427-446
Kate Fletcher, a pioneer in sustainable fashion design and theory also made the same three points through her book *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys* and expanded on those “sensorial” aspect of sustainable products. Fletcher noted the ways in which a consumer’s psychological needs could be satisfied through fashion, such as the need for identity, creation and participation. She differentiated between marketing strategies that tie psychological need and material objects, and creating innovative designs that have aesthetic and personal values, and that can allow the user to connect with a product and keep it for longer period of time.\(^33\)

The conversations about sustainable and ethical fashion have been changing constantly in the past decade. Catrin Joergens, an academic and current professional in fashion marketing, found that consumers believed the responsibility for ethical consumption fell on the consumers themselves, rather than on companies. And moreover, the majority of the participants were not willing to spend more on ethical fashion. The key factors in their decision making were price, style and availability, and easily accessed information. Consumers’ concerns were directed foremost towards immediate health dangers of products and animal rights.\(^34\) Deirdre Shaw and other scholars from a business management and marketing background have conducted interviews exploring “the impact of fair trade concerns on clothing choice” and argued that ethical fashion brands in the making need to find ways to reach to more consumers through mainstream culture and high street department stores. They argued that codes of conduct are not sufficient to build an ethical image for existing fashion brands, if only because they are simply not available at points of sale. They concluded that the absence of reliable fair trade labeling for clothing hinders consumers from making confident purchase decisions.\(^35\) In his article “*The Branding of Ethical Fashion and the Consumer: A Luxury Niche or Mass-market Reality?*” Nathaniel Beard shared the views of Shaw et al. on the issue of unreliable confusing codes of conduct. He called for accurate promoting, reformation of practices and careful choice of

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celebrity ambassadors. But Beard stayed in the realm of traditional fashion branding where he supports the use of the same aesthetics, and to avoid any strong political expression.36

Bray et al made an attempt to organise a list of key factors affecting consumers decision making and purchase behaviour. Bray et al. admit that existing literature on the topic have varied findings and conclusions. However, they have incorporated previous perceptions of consumer behaviour into their process and were able to distinguish seven factors: price sensitivity, personal experience, ethical obligation, lack of information, quality, inertia and cynicism. In addition, they noted guilt as a post purchase factor has a limited effect on future purchase decisions.37

Shen et al. confirmed the prices of ethical products to be a factor in purchasing behaviors similarly to Joergens38 and Bray et al.,39 but they found also that other factors play into the consumer's willingness to pay more for ethical products. Concern over social and environmental responsibility plays a part in consumers’ efforts to look for information, and the result of this knowledge are convictions that define their purchase behaviour later on. One key difference is that according to their findings, the social impact is prioritized over environmental impact on purchase behaviour.40

Markkula and Moisander identified a “knowledge to action” gap in the consumer policy literature on sustainable consumption and they attributed the gap to discursive confusion. They argue that an important component of sustainable development and consumption is how we talk about it: The different approaches to the concept of sustainability in the global discourse also impacts how consumers think about sustainability as well. They identified three challenges that face the consumers when making a purchase decision:

38 Joergens, “Ethical Fashion: Myth or Future Trend”, 360-37
39 Bray et al, “An Exploratory Study into the Factors Impeding Ethical Consumption”, 597-608
the economic trade-off between material prosperity and sustainable development; (2) the political debate on the respective responsibilities and possibilities of individual versus institutional actors in sustainable development; and (3) the aesthetic dilemma that arises from the conflicting aesthetic norms of the world of fast fashion and sustainable consumption.41

They also point out that it is possible for new discourses and discursive practices to rise in response to consumers’ actions in search of ethical products and positive identity.42

McDonagh and Prothero conducted a literature review of sustainability marketing between the years 1998 and 2013 in order to evaluate existing studies and suggest future topics and methods in sustainability marketing research. They suggest that new forms of consumption need to be further studied and mainstreamed such as bartering, sharing and communal consumption, because of their value in shifting consumption notions and practices towards sustainability: “…we need to further explore what conditions are required for society to engage with the ‘less is more’ philosophy.” They insist on the importance changing mentalities in marketing by adopting new methods, posing new questions and conducting interdisciplinary studies.43

1.6. Definitions

Kate Fletcher has defined “slow fashion”, a concept in opposition to the fashion system today in general, as being quality-based rather than time-based. She noted that it has found its inspiration in the slow food movement. Among the goals of slow food is to improve people’s quality of life. 44 Maegan Zarley Watson and Ruoh-Nan Yan defined slow fashion’s relation with time as “seasonless”: clothes intended to be worn throughout the year. They also defined fast fashion as styles that take around one month to go “from design stage to the store shelf” and gave examples such as H&M and Zara.45

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41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
44 Fletcher. Sustainable Fashion and Textiles.188-192
Fletcher has also given an insight on the “eco chic” or eco-fashion trend. She explains how natural-looking colors and fibres, and clean and simple designs that suggest “naturalness”, have replaced actual sustainable values in many collections. On the other hand, Theresa M. Winge sees the style of eco-fashion as an important component: the natural face of hippie-styles and hemp fibres were signifiers of sustainability, and so functioned as advertisements for sustainability itself. Winge believes that by changing the simplistic, anti-fashion look of eco-dress would only weaken its sustainable identity. The conflict between these views suggests confusion caused by the narratives behind the usage of the term eco-fashion. “Green fashion” is another vague term that may signal positive identification with the environment. It had a moment of popularity in the general media and has been used in a simplistic manner and resulted in the emergence of the term of “greenwashing”, a play on the concept of whitewashing. Alice Myers defines greenwashing as false or misleading representation of “the environmental benefits and friendliness of products, services, policies or practices.”

The *Salem Encyclopedia* defines sustainability as leaving earth in the same or better condition as we came to it. According to Kate Fletcher (2008) sustainable fashion and textile design have to consider sustainable systems of production that answer to a number of issues descending from harm to the environment and labour abuses caused by the fashion industry. In their study “Fast Fashion, Sustainability, and the Ethical Appeal of Luxury Brands” Annamma Joy et al. pointed out that luxury products are often perceived as sustainable because they represent quality and heritage and craftsmanship, notions that contradict unsustainable fast fashion. The reality however is not compatible with these perceptions. Most luxury brands do not offer information about their sourcing of materials and energy, and there has been allegations made against brands sourcing unfinished products from developing countries and labelling them as made in Europe.

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46 Fletcher. *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*. 118  
48 Ibid  
51 Fletcher. *Sustainable Fashion and Design*. 42-73  
after finishing. On the other hand, Joy Annamma et al. suggested that it is easier for luxury brands to become sustainable than fast fashion brands because of their limited production and longer seasons. Annamma notes that such transformations in luxury brands could encourage the rest of fashion industry to follow their example.

Fletcher defines “ethically made fashion” as environmentally and socially responsible. Sue Thomas notes that ethical fashion refers to “the positive impact of a designer, a consumer choice, or method of production as experienced by workers, consumers, animals, society and the environment.” However Thomas finds the term problematic and polarizing because of its potentially “judgmental” tone, and its relation to the word “morals” and the suggestion of other clothing being unethical. The term was chosen for the title of the present paper in spite of these associations rises from the necessity to change the conversation about sustainability as an optional added value and to consider the fundamental human rights of the workers in supply chains - including agriculture, farming, tanneries, garment factories, and whomever is touched by the fashion industry, as mandatory.

2. Analysis

The analysis is organized in two steps. It begins with a description of the material in order to examine how each brand is communicating its ethical values through the written and visual mission statements and advertising fashion films for a seasonal collection. That is followed with a discourse analysis of previous literature to identify the essential tenets for a successful creation and communication of an ethical fashion brand. Once that is done it is possible to make a connection between the material and the identified tenets in the discussion section.

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54 Fletcher, Sustainable Fashion and Textiles, 41-42
56 Carbonaro and Goldsmith, Branding Sustainability, 160-170
2.1. Descriptive Analysis of Branding Material

2.1.1. H&M

2.1.1.1. Written Mission Statement: Sustainability

On H&M’s UK online store, and under the title “Discover H&M” there is a link in the form of a photograph of green draped textiles with the text “H&M Conscious - Sustainable Style - Read More”. When clicked upon, the link leads to a page with a large picture of dresses on dummies. The dresses are from their 2016 “Conscious Exclusive Collection” with a text that reads, “Sustainability Look Good, Do Good, Feel Good.” Under that there are three groups of links. Each group has three links, and each link in the first two has a photograph, a title and an extract from the text it is linked to. The first two groups read as follows:

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57 The UK online store was chosen because it is provided in English, however, the link to their sustainability information is the same for all websites and it is offered in English or Swedish.
OUR SUSTAINABILITY WORK

OUR APPROACH
Looking good should do good too. That’s what our sustainability work is all about.
To…

SUSTAINABLE FASHION
Sustainable fashion is a long term way of looking at style for seasons to come. At…

WORKING CONDITIONS
The H&M group does not own any factories. Our products are instead made by independent…

GET INVOLVED

THE WAY TO SUSTAINABLE FASHION
We want to make sustainable, good-quality fashion accessible to as many people as possible. We…

RECYCLE YOUR CLOTHES
We believe fashion is far too precious to end up in landfills. That is why…

CARE FOR YOUR CLOTHES
The way you act in your everyday life matters - things can always be done…

Between the first and the second there is a link that reads:

“INTERESTED TO KNOW MORE? To find out more about the sustainability work visit our sustainability site. On that site you can read details about the sustainability report and about our suppliers. SUSTAINABILITY SITE.”

The third is entitled “Latest Sustainability News”, and has three frames with the words “Sustainability Update” in them. The texts chosen for analysis are the texts grouped under “Our Sustainable Work”: “Our approach”, “Sustainable Fashion” and “Working Conditions”. Through the three texts H&M insisted on the important role of its factories in developing countries to help spur economic growth and create millions of jobs. It also points out that women occupy more than two third of these jobs, and that these jobs are their only way to economic independence.

They also stated that they signed The Global Deal, a joint initiative launched in 2016 by the Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). This deal “aims to address the challenges in the global labour market and improve social dialogue and working conditions.” Their sustainable claims, whether regarding environmental impact or workers’
rights were set in the form of general statements or sentences that begin with “we want” “we love” “we have the opportunity”. Specific information has been provided concerning an approximate number of their offices and employees around the world, and of their employees in Dhaka, Bangladesh working with their suppliers. It includes a goal to procure cotton only from organic sources by the year 2020.

H&M defined sustainable fashion in a statement as “a long-term way of looking at style for seasons to come.” and made the claim that, “with all our brands, we offer fashion at outstanding value, in a sustainable way.” The statement could cause confusion since their definition of sustainable fashion is inaccurate or at least incoherent with the scientific definitions of the term as provided by previous literature specialised in the subject and presented earlier in this paper. Additionally, only a fraction of H&M brands and products carry sustainable values in the scientific meaning of the term. Later, they make this statement under the title “More Than Organic Cotton: Many people identify sustainable fashion as fashion that is simply made from sustainable materials. However, for us, the responsibility goes further than this, and spans across our entire value chain.” This statement conveys information that is different from their first definition of sustainable fashion as dependent on timeless style. Also it does not specify how sustainability can “span across their entire value chain”. They continue to state that they “pose very strict demands” on their supplier with “both social and environmental regulations” through their code of conduct that they call sustainability commitment. The issue is that the regulations they demand are not always supported by the local laws of where the supplies are based. For example, the document states that employees should not be exposed to discrimination based on their gender or religion. In Bangladesh however, the law is discriminatory towards women, transgender people, and homosexuals. Moreover, a person’s religion has legal implications in the courts.58

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The texts recommend to go to their sustainability page in order to get more information. However, specific information such as numbers illustrating what constitutes fair wages through the supply chain or the factual progress of their factories’ safety plans are not available.

Since the introduction of their first codes of conduct H&M has been updating the document continuously and claiming that they have progressed. But no older versions of the document are available. Without the older versions, the audience have no concrete evidence of the company’s progressing policies.

2.1.1.2. Visual Mission Statement: H&M World Recycle Week Campaign featuring M.I.A

Although it has a very simple plot, the type of this fashion film could be considered narrative. Its official main objective is to send a public awareness message, and specifically to promote world recycle week and consequently express H&M’s interest in sustainability issues. The film is perhaps a visual sustainability mission statement. The film achieves aesthetic delight through attractive landscapes, beautiful choreography and highlighting the exceptional features of the characters in the film and their outfits. The film was released on H&M’s YouTube channel and published on their website in April 2016. The ethical values are manifest in the title and lyrics of the song, extracts from multilingual speeches about environmental issues and a text added in the end to invite viewers to recycle their clothes at H&M stores. It is unclear if the clothing in the video are made by H&M.

Narrative analysis:
The film is a music video starring the English artist M.I.A. It appears as if it begins at dawn and ends at night. The film is made of fast changing frames that combine different scenes shot in different spots in the world, and it features M.I.A standing on a tour of textiles with a background of skyscrapers for a while and standing on oriental carpets in front of tents made of clothes for an other. It also shows people from diverse ethnicities in different locations. It begins
with the beginning of a choreography that moves through the majority of the characters in different places and it ends with them all performing the same move. The final common move draws the shape of a circle which is reminiscent of the theme of recycling. Most of the characters in the film are cultural influencers from different disciplines such as models, actors, dancers, singers, and rappers from all around the world such as Australia, UK, South Korea, Mauritania, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, America, and China. The video ends with a text advising the audience to recycle their clothes at H&M stores during world recycle week. Although the film is supposed to be about recycling as the title and the song suggest, its predominant theme is diversity, with the multiethnic, multicultural characters in different locations. According to the Gothenburg-based firm Forsman & Bodenfors, which collaborated with H&M to make the music video, the focus on diversity was intentional. They explain that the diversity theme aims to show that people from different backgrounds have the planet in common and that they should join in this “fashion movement”. However, the only visual reference to recycling in the film is the towers of fabric that M.I.A and her dancers are standing on and the background of tents that are made of a patchwork of green and blue clothes. In addition to a diversity of nature backgrounds that could be seen as a symbol of the environment such as the mountains background scene and the ocean waves scene in the beginning.

The song’s title is “Rewear It” and it is worth mentioning that the theme of recycling is not present in the lyrics. The lyrics are an interesting component of the video - especially that the lines could be subjected to multiple interpretations, for example:

But, you know me
I keep it clean
I don't like doing things I don't really mean
That's my team, sport or win
We don't give a fuck 'bout reppin' green.

“Repping” is an abbreviation for acting as a sales representative. “Green” here could stand for a number of things: the green of US dollars, the green of the ecological movement or even the concept of greenwashing. Ultimately, the meaning is intriguingly ambiguous. What doesn’t she “give a fuck” about representing? There is no clear answer.
2.1.1.3. Seasonal Campaign: Conscious Exclusive Collection 2016

The film type is non-narrative and it shows a photo shoot starring Parisian art director Julia Restoin Roitfeld. The objective of the film is to introduce H&M Conscious Exclusive Collection of 2016. The film achieves aesthetic delight through the beauty of Roitfeld who used to be a model and the beauty of the garments she is wearing. The film was released on H&M’s YouTube channel and published on their website in April 2016. The centre of the film is the products and their sustainable value.

Narrative analysis

Through the film Roitfeld is talking; she tells the audience that she is honoured to be ambassador for H&M Conscious Exclusive Collection for Spring/Summer 2016, and that the collection was inspired by French art and was the result of a collaboration between the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris and H&M. She shares her favourite pieces and admires their sustainable value such as recycled beads and organic lace. For the past few years H&M has been choosing established, older female celebrities to promote their conscious collection. The films have a specific tone that differs from their glamorous, exciting narrative-driven films that promote the main collections. They still count on the presence of celebrities, but they are a different kind of celebrity that are popular among different age and interests group. For example, Kendall Jenner starring in their H&M x Balmain collection addresses a wider, younger group of new celebrities’ followers.59 The choice of Jenner contracts with Roitfeld, who is older and the daughter of a former fashion editor of French Vogue. In addition to modelling for luxury brands, Roitfeld represents a more sophisticated taste.

2.1.2. Stella McCartney

2.1.2.1. Website Mission Statement: About Stella - Sustainability

At the bottom of Stella McCartney’s website there are four lists. The third one has seven links; the first is titled “About Stella” and the sixth is titled “Sustainability.” “About Stella” leads to a

summary of the designer’s biography and work. The sites main points are the aesthetics of her designs, her personal identity as a vegetarian and the impact that has on the brand’s methods, and the availability of the brand in various ranges and major locations. There is also a link titled “Timeline” under “About Stella” that leads to a timeline of her career, achievements and awards from 1999 to 2016. Going down the page again and clicking on Sustainability, the first of seven pages open, which are titled from first to last as follows:

- A Modern Business
- Materials
- Responsible Sourcing
- Our Partners
- Our Stores and Offices
- Timeline
- Q&A With Stella

Although those texts all discuss ethical and sustainable achievements and challenges through Stella McCartney’s production process, each focus on an individual issue. Under “A Modern Business”, they announce with a general statement that the company takes responsibility for the environmental and social impact of the brand. The text focuses on the sustainable value of the brand and its aspiration to aestheticise “eco fashion”, in addition to environmental facts supporting and motivating the brand’s choice to follow a sustainable path.

Under “Materials” they go into the details of the materials used in their products such as vegetarian leather, organic cotton, recycled material and certified viscose. They offer specific information about the challenges that face them when using these materials, the motivations for the choices they made, and their future goals.

Under “Responsible Sourcing” they focus on ethical trade, sourcing of materials and social impact. They state that they are a member of the Ethical Trading Initiative and declare their commitment to workers’ rights. The company declares that they manufacture all of their products in Europe, and that Italy is their largest sourcing country. But no specific numbers or countries are given. They mention their collaborations with the Ethical Fashion Initiative, and how it leads to positive impacts both socially and economically. The production of bags in Kenya is one
example - which conflicts however with a previous statement where they declare that all their products are made in Europe.

The text continues on to state their “Responsible Sourcing Policies”:

- No Leather, No fur, No Skin
- No Animal Testing
- No PVC
- No To Angora
- Sand Blasting

The first and the third are a information that is repeated from previous texts - especially the one concerned with materials. The second “No Animal Testing” constitutes a political statement against Chinese legislation that allows for animal testing. They call on other brands to take the same stand in order to pressure the Chinese authorities to change those legislations. The fourth “no to angora” indicates the brand’s positive response to campaigns by organizations such as PETA. The fifth shows the brands concern for and attention to workers well-being.

Under “Our Partners” they list Kering as their fifty-fifty partner, and such partnerships as with Adidas for active wear and COTY for cosmetics and fragrances. They guarantee that the products made under those partnerships follow the same ethos as Stella McCartney. They also list a number of organizations they have collaborations or partnerships with such as the Ethical Trading Initiative, Wildlife Works and the Centre for Sustainable Fashion at University Arts London.

Under “Our Stores and Offices” they show the progress they have made to use sustainable and renewable energy sources for their stores and offices in various cities. They also addressed their management of waste and water, in addition to using vintage furniture and certified wood and paper in packaging and insulation.

Under “Timeline” they organize their sustainability progress and achievements in a chronological order from 2008 to 2016. Under “Q&A With Stella” is an interview with
McCartney the designer, where the answers to questions about sustainability and social responsibility are given in a less formal and more personal manner.

The information provided in this section suggests a positive effort and results. However, the information offered solely concerns goals that have been achieved, and general aspirational objectives for the future. A link to Stella McCartney’s “2015 Environmental Profit and Loss Account” reveals an uncommon metric that measures environmental impact in monetary terms. The content of the report is challenging, and not readily digestible. A casual reader will glean little from it. A quote by McCartney is added at the end of the document expressing future goals for achieving benefit to the environment instead of only reducing harm to it. Although Stella McCartney has not been involved in news scandals on labour issues, the information it provides concerning its suppliers, countries of production, working conditions for those who make the clothes remains scarce if not nonexistent.

2.1.2.2. Visual Mission Statement: Deforestation
The type of the film is organic narrative. The film shows the model Carmen Kass talking about environmental issues caused by misuse of wood resources. The main objective is to broadcast an awareness message, and also to advertize for Stella McCartney’s sustainable value. The film achieves aesthetic delight through the miniature town model: the beauty of the model, the green plants and the cat. The film was released in November 2016 on Stella McCartney’s YouTube channel. The presence of the ethical values of the brand is manifest and the presence of the products is delitescent, the model is most likely wearing Stella McCartney garments but that is not the focus of the film.

Narrative Analysis
The viewers listen to Kass talk about viscose and the drastic consequences of deforestation on the environment and animals while she stands, walks and lays on the grass of this miniature town. At the end she informs the viewer that at Stella McCartney they try to use sustainable
material. The idea of the video is humorous, with the giant model in the miniature town and the appearance of the cat when Kass starts talking about loss of habitat. The film is short, entertaining and clear. Visual elements of sustainability are present such as green plants and trees. The choice of the model is not strange to the brand, for it seems to have a preference for older models that could reflect more credibility. The style of the film shows consistency that will be noted in the following section in their winter collection film analysis. Although this film does not portray luxury necessarily, it presents the brand’s values in a confident, direct manner through an older established model that inspires trust and good taste with her natural makeup and simple outfit.

2.1.2.3. Seasonal Campaign: Winter 2016 Campaign Film: This Film May Contain Gluten!

The type of the fashion film is closest to the organic-narrative, a staged documentary-like fashion film showing the process of making the looks for the winter 2016 campaign. It stars Amber Valletta with a cameo by Stella McCartney herself, actor Steven Cree and the Australian artist Jess Glynne. The objective is to present the winter collection. The film achieves aesthetic delight through the beauty of the model, the characters and the clothes. The film was released in July 2016 on Stella McCartney’s YouTube channel and website. The products of the brand are manifest through the film, on the persons of Valletta and Glynne, on the dresser and in the hands of the staff surrounding them. The values of the brand are delitescent. For example a voice screams in the beginning of the film “I’m a vegan bitch!” or during the conversation when Valletta wonders about McCartney, “how does she have the time to save the planet”.

Narrative Analysis

The film is a succession of scenes of Valletta getting ready for photo shoots. She is sitting in front of a dresser with a group of stylists, makeup artists and film making crew. Every scene she has a different hair and makeup look and a different outfit, and according to the theme of her outfit, a number of accessories sitting on the dresser change. The film has humorous conversations such as a stylist mishearing “warrior” as “worrier” and Valletta bragging about
her great immune system because she ate dirt as a kid - but her stubborn refusal to taste the snacks they gave her because she suspected that they contain gluten followed by her lighting a cigarette. Glynne also walks in with two goats for the photo shoot that were not needed any longer because Valletta does not like goats. Finally McCartney appears to approve the final look and everybody cheers. The film, like the brand counts on the celebrity status of McCartney and her casual relationship with other celebrities such as Valletta and Glynne. The luxury value is constructed through the golden lighting, the designs of the garments, and the huge amount of personnel trying to please the picky model who does not eat gluten and the picky designer who one moment wants goats, and another wants cows. The ethical value of the brand and in the garments is almost non-existent, the film is light, its humour is subtle and it could be mistaken as just another luxury ad.

2.1.3. People Tree

2.1.3.1. Website Mission Statement: Our Story

At the top of People Tree’s website and under its logo there is a string of links in the following order:

New In - Women - Men - Sale - Our Story - Features - #5lookschallenge

By clicking on “Our Story” a new page opens with the title Our Story and a menu drops:

- Mission
- Awards
- Meet the Maker
- Handskills
- Fair Trade
- Sustainability
- Our Cotton
- Our Wool
- Our Standards
- Social Review
- Tencel For People Tree
- Tencel-FAQs
- Behind the Clothes - Creative Handicrafts
- Just Friday

Under “Our Story” the text begins with this statement: “When you wear People Tree, you look good and feel good knowing your unique garment was made with respect for people and the planet.” It continues with four subparagraphs. The first is titled “A Simple Idea” and presents the
business concept behind the brand. The information it provides is that People Tree has been making “ethical and eco fashion collections” for over 25 years, and that a reasonable definition of “fair trade” requires material benefits for vulnerable communities. The second is titled “We Are Proud To Be Different” where they present themselves as an alternative to fast fashion, and define their methods by opposition to fast fashion. The third is titled “Fair Trade Fashion”. Here they claim to have made ethical fashion “contemporary, accessible, and desirable”. They point out the aesthetic value of their products and collections is a result of collaborations with renowned designers, and that their ethics have led the WFTO to label them a Fair Trade Manufacturer in 2013. In addition they insist on the positive social impact of their production methods. The last is titled “Sustainable Fashion” where they pride themselves in being “the first organisation anywhere to achieve GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) certification on a supply chain entirely in the developing world.” They also list a number of production details where they have made sustainable choices to reduce their impact.

Under “Mission” they express their desire to become 100 percent Fair Trade. But though they guarantee that the majority of their products are Fair Trade, no percentage is provided. They list the focus tasks of their business:

TO SUPPORT producer partners’ efforts towards economic independence and control over their environment and to challenge the power structures that undermine their rights to a livelihood.
TO PROTECT the environment and use natural resources sustainably throughout our trading and to promote environmentally responsible initiatives to create new models to promote sustainability.
TO SUPPLY customers with good quality products, with friendly and efficient service, and build awareness to empower customers and producers to participate in FairTrade and environmentally sustainable solutions.
TO PROVIDE a supportive environment to all stakeholders and promote dialogue and understanding between them.
TO SET AN EXAMPLE to business and the government of a Fair Trade model of business based on partnership, people-centred values and sustainability.

The rest of the sections are an extension on these points in a different order. The following section is “Awards”. There they set themselves as a practical example for others. They list the number of times People Tree and its founder Safia Minney have received recognition by sustainability and fair trade organizations, the media and others in a chronological order from 2005 to 2016. Under “Meet The Maker”, they list the organizations they cooperate with to source
fair trade products. The focus is upon developing countries and communities within them, like Artisan Hut in Bangladesh. This organization seeks to support artisans in rural areas that are marginalized because of competition with mechanized forms of production. Under “Hand Skills” they insist on the importance of incorporating skills such as hand embroidery in the design process in order to generate more jobs in poor communities. This additionally is a sustainable feature to reduce harmful energy sources that fuel factories and machines. Under “Fair Trade” they offer a longer definition of it and the practical steps they take to achieve it. Under “Sustainable” they list the principles supporting their attempts to be more environmentally sustainable. Under “Our Cotton” they state that 80 percent of their products are made of 100 percent organic cotton in collaboration with Agrocel, an organization that guarantees better conditions for farmers, more jobs and protection of the land and water. Under “Our Wool” they state that at present, they source cruelty free and organic wool from KTS, New Zealand because of difficulties tracing the sources of wool in developing countries. However, they are working on developing a traceable organic, fair trade and cruelty free supply project in Nepal. Under “Our Standards” they list their fair trade and ecological credentials. Under “Social Review” they share reports that they produce every two years that cover their work throughout the period from 2009 to 2014. The 2015 to 2016 report is not yet available. Under “Tencel For People Tree”, “Tencel-FAQs” and “Behind the Clothes - Creative Handicrafts” they present their latest development in sustainable material: introducing Tencel as a modern, sustainable, and naturally-sourced fibre that could open more work opportunities for poor garment makers. The fibre enjoys advantages over other materials in regards to sustainable sourcing, recycling and aesthetic qualities. Under “Just Friday” they join Traidcraft in its fight to stop mindless shopping - specifically on Black Friday, the first Friday after thanksgiving when Christmas shopping officially starts. They call for people to shop with their hearts, and to make sure the products they are buying are ethically and sustainably produced. They point out that they invest their revenue in the artisans they partner with, and provide down payments in order for their partners to survive. But they insist on the importance of the choices made by the consumers in order for People Tree to continue their work.
2.1.3.2. Visual Mission Statement: People Tree 2016
The type of the film is organic narrative: it presents People Tree’s methods, values and achievements until the making of this film in 2016. The main objective of the film is presenting the brand of People Tree and telling its story in the form of a visual mission statement. The film achieves aesthetic delight through both aesthetically pleasing scenes of happy workers in colorful costumes, People Tree garments, nature scenes such as cotton fields, but also ugliness of scenes extracted from the documentary “The True Cost” where minors are working barefoot in tanneries and buildings are collapsing. The film was released on People Tree’s YouTube channel in March 2016. The ethical values of the brand and its products are are both manifest this film.

Narrative Analysis
The film’s genre is documentary-like, it includes a considerable number of speakers, scenes and information. It begins at the foundation of People Tree by Safia Minney and her husband James and it ends with their latest achievements. In between, a number of employees and coworkers speak and give various information about People Tree’s methods and materials, in addition to the scenes from “The True Cost”, which are used to strengthen their arguments and motivate their purpose. An interview with the character Minney plays an important role here. The film’s focus is the impact of People Tree’s work in poor communities bringing material prosperity and benefits such as education and healthcare. The film has a fast pace, a captivating narration and concise and specific information that keep the viewer interested. A curious observation is that the majority if not all of the employees and models featured in People Tree films are white, the only people of colour are Minney herself and the workers and farmers in developing countries.

2.1.3.3. Seasonal Campaign: Autumn Collection 2016
The type of the film is non-narrative. It depicts a photo shoot starring a model named Stephanie Abrishamchi, and the filmmaker and editor Christopher Nicholson Price. The objective of the film is to present their spring/summer 2016 collection. The film achieves aesthetic delight through the beauty of the male and female model and the garments they are wearing. The film was released on People Tree’s YouTube channel in March 2016. The presence of the products is

60 The reason it is a spring summer collection because to the date of this paper no fashion film has been released for their autumn/winter 2016 collection.
manifest and towards the end the models carry panels with texts on them that express the values of the brand.

Narrative Analysis
The film is made to the music of a track entitled “No Doubt About It” by The Passion HiFi and has no conversation or talking. We only see the model standing, sitting, posing, jumping, walking around the studio and photo shoot location, waving, and towards the end carrying panels. One reads a quote by Gandhi: “There is more to life than increasing its speed”, others that read: “Slow fashion = Sustainable”, “Go organic, cut CO2 - People Tree”, and “100% Fair Trade & Sustainable - People Tree”. Although these texts express some of the brand’s values, they only start after one minute and 49 seconds of watching this model with modest skills posing. The main focus of this film is the aesthetic value of the garments and no visual representations of the brand’s ethical values are present. The film is typical of all People Tree’s collections fashion films - often starring white, less popular models posing for few minutes to a music track, and as noted in the previous film analysis, their films in general lack in diversity of models.

2.2. Discourse Analysis of Previous Literature
Now that we have examined the branding materials of H&M, Stella McCartney and People Tree, through our established theories and methods, the next step is to establish a set of criteria to help us evaluate each brand.

Carbonaro and Goldsmith understand that sustainability branding begins at the business idea of a brand.61 A brand - whether existing or in the making - must follow fundamental practices in its production methods and communication of these methods in order to be branded “ethical”. The company must be both socially and environmentally responsible. This study is not concerned with evaluating the practical side of constructing an ethical brand, but rather with the issues of ethical brand communications. Nevertheless, these two issues are interwoven. Ethical branding

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61 Carbonaro and Goldsmith, Branding Sustainability, 160-170
would often communicate the brand’s ethical practices and sustainable materials, for instance. There is a variety of issues and factors involved in sustainability branding that were identified by previous studies from multiple disciplines and perspectives. In order to evaluate the samples accordingly, it is more efficient to begin with organizing those issues and factors. In the process of reviewing and comparing previous literature, it was possible to distinguish eight tenets of sustainable fashion branding. Four are more practical, and the other four relate to communications. For the purpose of this study, we’ll be looking almost exclusively at the points under communications. However these tenets are only meaningful when connected with the practical tenets. The following chart outlines these eight tenets, and which I will discuss at length below:
Communicational and Practical Factors

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Communicational Factors

The first communication factor is availability and accessibility of information. This point is closely related to the next one, but it is specific to information transmitted on the “top layer” of a brand. For example, is information communicated on easily-found labels and mission statements, or is it buried in a hard-to-read annual report?62

The second factor is transparency and clarity. Clarity was identified by Carbonaro and Goldsmith as an important tenet of sustainability branding.63 According to Beard64, Markkula and Moisander65, the issue of differing and conflicting terms on what is “sustainable”, “fair trade” or “eco” has played a major role in confusing consumers. Beard has also argued that transparency is essential to accurately promote products and develop consumer loyalty.66

The third point is “conversational communication.” Belz and Peattie have included this point on their list of tenets to sustainability.67 It responds to the consumer’s need to be involved in the

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63 Carbonaro and Goldsmith. Branding Sustainability, 160-170
64 Beard, “The Branding of Ethical Fashion and the Consumer”, 447-467
65 Markkula and Moisander, “Discursive Confusion over Sustainable Consumption”, 105-125
66 Beard, “The Branding of Ethical Fashion and the Consumer”, 447-467
design and production process in order to receive products that satisfy their individual and psychological needs, and help them connect with the products.68

The fourth point is authenticity and credibility. As described by Beard69, Belz and Peattie70, this tenet demands that there be actions behind the words. A brand needs to be able to prove its claims and intentions and to make realistic promises and objectives. Belz and Peattie have differentiated between “credibility” and “consistency in commitment and continuity”.71 For the purpose of this study this differentiation was deemed unnecessary because of the direct connection of cause and effect between consistency and credibility. According to Beard the credibility of a brand embodied in the consumer’s trust and loyalty is shaken by acts of inconsistency by celebrity sustainability ambassadors.72

Practical factors
The first practical factor is that there be cooperative formulas with less intermediation between the user and marker. Belz and Peattie argue that the core business of a company should be built on cooperative formulas that define their supply and value chain creation.73 Clark notes that people’s ability to appreciate and understand the true value of material and labour increases when the distance between the two is minimized by citing a number of successful examples.74 Cooperative formulas give the makers more presence in the brand as a whole and decreases the distance between the user and the maker.

The second practical point is the material and social benefit that comes from prioritizing local resources and labor. Markkula and Moisander demonstrate the inherent conflict between sustainable development and the material benefit generated by employment of massive numbers of workers in the garment industry supplying fast fashion companies.75 An alternative is provided

68 Fletcher, Sustainable Fashion and Textiles.
69 Beard, “The Branding of Ethical Fashion and the Consumer”, 447-467
70 Belz and Peattie, Sustainability Marketing.
71 Ibid.
72 Beard, “The Branding of Ethical Fashion and the Consumer”, 447-467
73 Belz and Peattie, Sustainability Marketing.
74 Clark, “Slow Fashion”, 427-446
75 Markkula and Moisander, “Discursive Confusion over Sustainable Consumption”, 105-125
by both Clark and Fletcher who agree that local resources and skills are better for both sustainable and social development, as local communities can benefit from existing skills such as weaving or embroidery without the need to relocate to overpopulated cities to work in factories that overproduce, run on polluting energy and do not provide sufficient living wages.\(^76\)

The third practical point is that ethical and sensorial products deliver real consumer benefit. A number of studies have shown that compromised aesthetic value is a main obstacle to ethical consumption of fashion. Clark and Fletcher have explained the importance of fulfilling the user’s psychological needs with products that, in addition to being produced in a socially and environmentally ethical way, have added value in them such as aesthetics, quality and other values that help make a product more meaningful and personal.\(^77\) This enables consumers to connect with the products and construct their individual style that is not reliant on fast fashion trends.

The fourth practical point is the importance of institutional and political engagement. Beard has argued that politicizing the sustainable message in product branding has a negative impact on ethical consumption because it alienates consumers.\(^78\) However: cynicism and the debate on political and institutional responsibility for sustainable development have been recognized as factors impeding ethical consumption of fashion by Bray et al.,\(^79\) as well as Markkula and Moisander.\(^80\) Successful examples of companies committing to political issues include Levi’s\(^81\) and Kenneth Cole,\(^82\) which issued ads supporting same sex marriage legislations in USA. These campaigns have shown that politics does not necessarily alienate customers. Additionally, the authenticity of a brand’s interest in sustainable development and ethical production and consumption should manifest itself in all the company’s actions, including where it uses its

\(^{76}\) Clark, “Slow Fashion”, 427-446, and Fletcher, Sustainable Fashion and Textiles.
\(^{77}\) Ibid.
\(^{78}\) Beard, “The Branding of Ethical Fashion and the Consumer”, 447-467
\(^{79}\) Bray, “An Exploratory Study into the Factors Impeding Ethical Consumption”, 597-608
\(^{80}\) Markkula and Moisander, “Discursive Confusion over Sustainable Consumption”, 105-125
influence. According to Clark83, brands that identify as ethical fashion have the responsibility to draw attention to the damage by the fashion industry on people and the environment while staying relevant.

3. Discussion

In this section the findings of the descriptive analysis of the material will be connected with the identified tenets in order to recognise how each brand expressed its ethical value, what is missing and what could be improved.

H&M

Availability and accessibility of information: As the description of the sustainability links on the H&M website shows, a considerable number of texts communicate their ethical values and contain information touching on their practices and production process are presented in a simple format and easily accessed.

Transparency and clarity: The texts they provide focus on the social and material benefit of sourcing from developing countries in the form of economic growth and empowering women. They have shown H&M’s concern for the environment and responsibility for the people working for its supply chain. They expressed ambitious sustainability goals and commitment to the aesthetization of eco fashion. The language used in them is clear which gives the impression of transparency. However, the general statements leave a wide space for interpretation without accurate information. Also, H&M provides vague and inconsistent definitions of sustainability in the texts as shown earlier. All of this could lead to miscommunication and could confuse the consumer and compromise the brand’s transparency. The lack of evidence documenting the history of their codes of conduct (or as they call it now, their “sustainability report”) makes the brand seem less transparent as well. The films made to support and introduce H&M in general and specifically H&M Conscious Collection as sustainable were well-made in terms of quality

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83 Clark, “Slow Fashion”, 427-446
and intended aesthetic value. The one featuring M.I.A. has won an award.\textsuperscript{84} Although that suggests that the video has been successful in promoting recycling and diversity - which have positive impacts on the planet’s and society’s well-being - there are a number issues. The ambiguity of the song’s lyrics puts the film’s meaning into doubt. Additionally, there is a lack of visual representations of ethical values such as sustainable material or fair trade production process. On the other hand the film featuring their seasonal collection “H&M Conscious Exclusive Collection for Spring/Summer 2016” focused on communicating ethical values such as sustainable materials.

Conversational communication: Their sustainability commitment (or codes of conduct) have been updated a few times, which signals attention to the consumer’s changing needs and demands. On the other hand, communication with the H&M’s representatives to gain further information regarding how their garments are made is not encouraged on their webpage. Additionally discussions under their YouTube videos are disabled which prevents the audience from expressing their opinions or addressing H&M on that platform.

Credibility and authenticity: A problem with their authenticity is the conflict between their codes of conduct and the legislation in the countries where they source their products, as in the example of personal laws in Bangladesh visited earlier in this paper. The result is that the codes of conduct are invariably transgressed. Also, some information that H&M has long been asked to provider remains unavailable, such as a detailed account of how they calculate an acceptable living wage. Livia Firth asked an H&M sustainability representative in Copenhagen Fashion Summit 2014 about this issue.\textsuperscript{85} A report published in September 2016 by Clean Clothes

\textsuperscript{84} H&M was a bronze winner for Production & Post-Production Editing at the London International Awards, https://awards.eurobest.com/winners/2016/filmcrafentry.entry.cfm?entryid=1772&award=99&order=5&direction=2 and was shortlisted for Film Craft at Eurobest Awards, https://www.liaenrues.com/winners/index.cfm?id_entry=101027&id_medium=23&id_submedium=7&id_category=0&view=details range=w&view=64&keyword=&medium=&category=&award=&country=&title_brand=&credits=&company_name=&city =&proceed_simple_search=false&proceed_advanced_search=false

Campaign has shown that H&M was still behind its living wages commitments with its platinum suppliers in Cambodia.86

H&M claimed to have had conversations with the Prime Minister of Bangladesh in order to raise minimum wage for workers in 2012.87 This is not sufficient - garment workers are still receiving wages that are too low - but it is a positive institutional involvement. However, with such low pay for garment workers - as reported by Clean Clothes Campaign and noted earlier in this paper, the issue with the jobs that H&M creates in developing countries only benefit owners of factories and leave the workers with no prospect of development. As a result of little social or economic class mobility, the impact of such companies as H&M only increases wealth disparity, instead of offering a way to true material prosperity for everyone.

At the end, it appears that H&M has working methods of communicating ethical values that mostly count on deflecting from the most urgent issues, such as living wage and buildings safety, and focus instead on positive sides of the brand such as promoting diversity. These methods are increasing the brand’s popularity and growth - but that is not enough. In order to be a true ethical brand H&M needs to take strict measures dealing with its supply chain issues in order to be able to provide a full positive picture and achieve both material benefits for the workers, brand authenticity and legitimate credibility.

Stella McCartney
Availability and accessibility of information: As the descriptive analysis has shown, information about Stella McCartney’s sustainability policies and practices are available on their website and easily accessed. However, detailed information about their suppliers is unavailable: they state that they only produce in Europe and mostly from Italy.

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Transparency and clarity: The texts provide detailed information about their use of materials and energy with numbers and percentages. They admit their inability to attain perfection but express aspiration to achievable goals. On the other hand, the contrasting unavailability of enough information regarding their supply chain make the brand seem to be less transparent. The company’s choice to use terms such as “modern” and “responsible” to describe its ethical and sustainable values could confuse the consumer, since these terms are not directly connected to sustainability. On the other hand, the creation of terms particular to the brand may set it apart from other brands using the usual terms talking about sustainability. In spite of potentially beneficial exclusivity of the terms to the brand, it might cause more confusion in the general conversation about sustainability. Previous studies have shown that the multiplicity of terms affect the consumer’s ability to trust the terms and make confident purchase decisions.

The visual mission statement provides a clear explanation of the brand’s policies in sourcing viscose and its sustainable values. On the other hand, the second fashion film presenting their 2016 winter collection had only unclear, subtle hints to the brands sustainable values.

Conversational communication: There is not a communication platform that gives the consumer the chance to discuss the brand’s ethical values on its website. They have mentioned that their decisions to phase out angora and cut ties with a wool supplier in Argentina were the result of reports by PETA. They have included an interview with the designer Stella McCartney, where she answers a number of questions about herself and the brand. Additionally they have enabled comments under their YouTube videos which allows consumers to directly express their opinion in the fashion films and the brand.

Credibility and authenticity: By committing to a vegetarian identity, Stella McCartney has undeniably avoided a considerable amount of harm to the environment usually caused by luxury brands’ use of skins, furs - especially those of endangered species- and testing on animals. Although the lack of information concerning its supply chain could compromise the brand’s credibility, Stella McCartney’s collaboration with the Ethical Fashion Initiative shows both concern for material and social benefits and institutional involvement. The brand’s commitment to the welfare of animals is evident by its refusal to sell perfume in China because of the country’s regulations on animal testing.

To sum up, Stella McCartney is a positive initiative in the world of luxury fashion goods that could promote change towards a more ethical industry. However what is needed is more information on their supply chain, the wages and working conditions. Additionally, presence of the ethical value should be more manifest in the collection fashion films. For new consumers, the humor on smoking, gluten sensitivity and animals might be misunderstood and misjudged for carelessness.

People Tree
Availability and accessibility of information: The website of People Tree provides extensive detailed texts with all the knowledge necessary about the brand’s ethical values and practices, written in a simple language and direct clear sentences.

Transparency and clarity: The texts offer information about all People Tree suppliers and the material they use, the visual mission mission statement is in the form of a short documentary summarizing the history of People Tree, and the company offers numbers and percentages concerning their material and supplier chain that is backed up by expanding details in their “social review” report.
Conversational communication: People Tree does not offer a specific platform to communicate with consumers about sustainable and ethical values. They have however enabled comments under their YouTube videos which allows consumers to express their opinion in the brand directly.

Credibility and authenticity: Although the brand identifies as sustainable and fair trade fashion, and their latest reports show that a high percentage of their products are entirely sustainable and fair trade, they stay truthful and realistic. People Tree admits to having more work to do. People Tree’s mission statements go through details of all of their material, production methods, and collaborations with designers and organisations and have reliable credentials from sustainability, fair trade and humanitarian organisations. In spite of being behind on sharing updates on their social review, they have a track record of delivering their promises. Although the brand’s survival and prosperity, like any other fashion brand, depends on sales, they do not encourage mindless over-consumption. Their “Just Friday” initiative was started to spread awareness on the issues of Black Friday. One issue that might harm their authenticity is the discriminative proportion of ethnically white people in the films. It may be seen as inconsistent with their ethical values as a brand that speaks of its artisans as “partners” in an effort to promote equality.

People Tree covers the majority of the list of factors aside from one: the sensorial quality of the product. It is not represented in their fashion films. The sensorial value according to Clark are those extra qualities that exceed the functional and practical sides of a garment made by an ethical fashion brand. People Tree offers transparency, credibility, availability, and they take consumers’ feedback into consideration. Their work is beneficial for material prosperity, they are involved with organizations that work to improve their living environment, and they include their suppliers (or partners) in their brand. However, through their films they have failed repeatedly to offer anything but ethical value. According to Carbonaro and Goldsmith, sustainable fashion brands need a new approach to branding that is different from the “traditional” branding techniques that depend on lifestyle and experiential marketing. The problem in People Tree

90 Clark, “Slow + Fashion”, 427-446
91 Carbonaro and Goldsmith, Sustainability Branding, 160-170
branding, particularly in their seasonal collection campaign film, is that they abandoned those “traditional” techniques but still they have used the exact same form and aesthetic as any fast fashion company. As they have failed to offer sensorial value, they had no alternatives to fill the gap created by the absence of lifestyle and experiential marketing.

This situation guarantees that people driven by guilt or ethics are the majority of those who purchase People Tree products. It is an obstacle that prevents People Tree from spreading ethical fashion to more people - their original mission as a company. One way to improve is to consider creative and innovative visual representations of their ethical values that could be incorporated in the whole of their branding process from design to the visual and verbal communication of their end products to consumers. This image could be created through analysis of their potential consumers, which could have a rewarding creative outcome. Due to the brand’s price range and universal ideals they have the potential to cater to a diverse group of consumers.

4. Conclusion

In this study I have examined written and visual statements of three fashion brands: H&M, Stella McCartney and People Tree, in addition to fashion films by each of them promoting a seasonal collection. The goal of the study was to paint an image of what ethical fashion branding looks today, identify any issues that can impede ethical consumption from the perspective of branding, and determine if ethical fashion branding can be improved.

I managed to organize a list of principal tenets of ethical fashion branding through a discourse analysis of previous literature in that domain. The list of tenets was divided between two categories: practical and communicational. Each contain four tenets. The practical tenets are (1) cooperative formulas with less intermediation between user and maker, (2) material and social benefit through valuing local resources and distributed economy, (3) ethical and sensorial products that deliver real consumer benefit, and (4) institutional and political involvement. The communicational tenets are (1) availability and accessibility of information, (2) transparency and
clarity, (3) conversational communication, and (4) credibility and authenticity. The paper focused on examining each brand from a communicational perspective with some necessary connections made to the practical factors. Through the analysis I have identified the issues that each of these brands face and provided practical advice to solve these issues.

Through building this study on previous literature that has tackled this subject from different perspectives, the categorization and advice contained in this study could be relevant for future brand planning. Further studies could be carried into the details of each factor in this list. In order to reimagine sensorial value in fashion products and its communication through branding, further interdisciplinary investigation between fashion studies and cultural studies could be helpful. Moreover, it would be most helpful if corporate codes of conduct could be investigated for authenticity and realistic impact. Finally, now may be the time to take a more liberal view of how brands can express politics and ethical values. This may be necessary to encourage a new kind of consumer that is mindful, responsible, and empathetic.

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