

Project Summary

Title Fast Fashion, Luxury Fashion, and Their Sustainability Efforts

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School University of Arkansas

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Fast fashion and luxury fashion are two areas of the apparel industry that have many different characteristics that make them each pivotal and unique. The larger defining factor of the two that I have decided to base my research around is their sustainability practices. Fast fashion is known for being wasteful and unsustainable, while luxury fashion is known for developing long lasting pieces that are sustainable. From a glance, this seems very black and white; however, it is important to fully understand not just each sides sustainability practices, but the detailed background that truly differentiate fast fashion and luxury fashion.

To understand the full concept of the fast fashion and their environmental impact, I examined not only sustainability, but fast fashions significant growth, greenwashing, pollution, and human rights issues in order to gain a greater understanding. Similarly, I examined what luxury fashion means to consumers and their specific sustainability efforts they have implemented.

In this proposal research, I will examine the information gained from the comparative analysis to produce the content analysis. With this research, I will develop the advertisement campaign, that acts as a luxury fashion company urging a fast fashion company to become more sustainable.

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Background, Problem and Need

In today's fashion industry, there are two basic categories from a broad scale: fast fashion and luxury fashion. The phrase “fast fashion” refers to the idea of inexpensive garments that reflect the more expensive luxury trends. Fast fashion is inexpensive, low quality, trendy, quick, and disposable. On the other hand, luxury fashion can be defined as, “Established images in the minds of consumers that comprise associations about a strong degree of exclusiveness, selectiveness, extraordinariness, superiority, aesthetics, rarity, price, quality, and many other intangible features and symbolic meanings” (IGI Global, 2022, para. 1).

It is important to understand all aspects of both luxury fashion and fast fashion. From an environmental standpoint, there are some specific examples that point to luxury fashion having made more diligent strides to combat the effects that their production methods have on the environment. To start, Gucci, a well-known luxury fashion brand known for their leather goods, has also been transparent about making their own sustainability strides using recycled, organic and sustainably sourced materials (A. Fowler (2020) in a collection titled, “Off the Grid”. Brands like Gucci are making attempts to combat the negative effects of the industry.

Similarly, a highly recognized fast fashion company, Shein, has really made its mark in the fast fashion industry when in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world. In-person shopping was at a halt, and for a lot of the world, money was scarce. All these factors made Shein a favorable option due to three components: inexpensive, online, and trendy. A common

conception is that Shein is devastating for the environment, but Isobella Wolfe said it perfectly on the website “Good on You”. Wolfe (2021) shared that “is no evidence” Shien was taking any action to reduce environmental impacts within the organization.

The problem at hand becomes the fact that these fast fashion companies claim they make sustainability strides, yet they have no actual action to their claims. On the other hand, there is evidence of luxury companies following through with their claims.

Literature Review

Comparison between fast fashion and luxury fashion will draw specific comparisons between fast fashion and luxury fashion and discuss differences when it comes to sustainability practices and will also explore specific luxury fashion sustainability efforts.

As previously mentioned, the rapid production of materials, the social acceptability to quickly discard clothes, and their high social media impact are the main environmental hazards associated with fast fashion.

A common term in the apparel industry is circularity. Circularity entails clothes will either be repurposed into new clothing items, therefore using existing fabric and materials, or resold to thrift stores. This concept sounds appealing to many; unfortunately, circularity does not exist in the fast fashion industry. Less than one percent of clothes are repurposed or recycled into new ones. Most garments end up in landfills or incinerated. (Jasmin, 2022, para 2). Pollution is a huge environmental issue, and fast fashion has enhanced the problem. Many fast fashion companies use materials that are hard to breakdown, like plastic. They also contain harmful and hazardous chemicals that cause environmental issues that can become irreversible (Jasmin, 2022, para 14). Not only is water pollution specifically a problem, but it has also become a challenge in places where garments are produced.

With the constant talk of sustainability and how it relates to fashion, the leaders of the luxury fashion industry, such as Hermes and Stella McCartney, have spoken out and shared examples of the strides being made. Kruger (2022) discussed how: Not only have fast fashion brands been slow to find eco-friendly materials and sustainable ways to create product, the luxury industry has too. However, in March 2021, Hermes released luggage made from mushrooms. It was a three year project, showing luxury brands are working to create eco-friendly products. (Kruger, 2022, para. 11). Thomas (2022) discussed another luxury brand, Stella McCartney, which released a sustainably created option showcasing a lab-grown leather also made from mushrooms. This material was used to create a corset and trousers and a handbag.

Although these processes are trial and error, some luxury fashion companies are working hard to try and make a difference. However, similar examples cannot be found within the fast fashion industry.

Development Plan and Research Objectives

The importance of the analysis between fast fashion and luxury fashion is to present a possible explanation of the two sectors of the apparel industry. To understand the difference between fast fashion and luxury fashion requires going beyond a surface level analysis, but could help explain the environmental state of our world directly associated with the apparel industry. To then understand what makes fast fashion and luxury fashion so different, a call for change must be made. Considering this, the advertisement campaign was implemented and visually explained the importance of environmental awareness in the fashion industry. The following steps were taken to create this thesis project:

Conducting a Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis was conducted in order to allow the reader to fully understand not only the fundamentals of fast fashion and luxury fashion, but their effects, whether beneficial or harmful, on Earth. This included comparing the two sectors' different roles in the fashion world and their objective meanings to people. An additional goal was to identify specific examples of sustainability, or a lack thereof, between different fast fashion and luxury brands. It was important to gather as many sources as possible to get a subjective view.

Developing a Content Analysis

A content analysis was conducted by looking deep into a fast fashion company, Shein, and one luxury company, Gucci, by researching their individual Instagram accounts and identifying how many times each brand posts about their own sustainability practices and their environmental support during the past year. I will also identify whether brands provide a sustainability statement on their websites and if there is any other information regarding sustainability or their environmental impact on their website to analyze similarities or differences.

Developing an Advertisement Campaign

An advertisement campaign was created to incorporate a more creative aspect to the original comparative analysis and instill a call to action. The reasoning for this was to develop something tangible and result oriented to pair with the background information and research. By using creative skills and the information from the comparative analysis and content analysis, an advertisement campaign poster was created using Adobe Photoshop. This was made to not just question the fast fashion ways of production, but to plead with fast fashion companies, explaining there is more sustainable approach to producing fashion.

These steps were followed to create the campaign materials: identify the audience, select the platform to share the messages, develop messages and materials and finally to Seek feedback on the messages and materials and address items that needed edits.

The development of the comparative analysis and the creative advertisement campaign comes together to educate and call for action to be taken. The comparative analysis alone was not enough to show and explain the idea of comparing fast fashion and luxury fashions effect on the world.

Research Timeline

During the Spring 2024 semester, I have a detailed month-by-month timeline that will allow me to be successful and intentional with my time. During the month of January, I will be conducting the content analysis portion of my project mentioned before. I will use this time to go through each brand's Instagram's and identify how many times sustainability is mentioned on each account. Additionally, I will take a deep dive into each brand's websites, to identify their vision and mission statement, sustainability statement, and identify any additional information regarding sustainability. I will do this to understand the importance of sustainability to each brand, specifically to the public eye. During the month of February, I will be creating the advertisement campaign. I will create multiple different advertisement in the form of an editorial that will act as an advertisement campaign. I will receive feedback from my mentor and committee members to pick the most efficient and powerful campaign, as well as fix edits suggested to me. During the months of March, I will create my thesis defense before the deadline on April 1st. This will include the final formatting of my thesis, adding any additional information, and finally, the presentation of my thesis defense to my mentor and committee.

January – Conducting content analysis

February – Create Advertisement Campaign

March – Create thesis defense

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