

Topic: Sustainability

THE SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES OF INDONESIAN FASHION BRANDS

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Abstract

In the recent years, sustainability has been more prominent and performing as an influential attribute in the fashion industry. As fashion consumers become more conscious and informed on the complications caused by the prevailing fashion system and industry to the environment, the slow fashion movement has emerged as the more recent sustainable notion in the fashion industry. More fashion retailers and emerging entrepreneurs have attempted to create values through sustainable initiatives and practices, including Indonesian fashion brands. However, as a result of ‘green consumerism’ and ‘greewashing’, many of the sustainable approaches by fashion retailers such as H&M and Zara are widely questioned. The knowledge and understanding on sustainable fashion practices are varied across diverse demographics and cultures. Using descriptive qualitative approach through literature studies, observation and non-probability sampling, this paper discusses sustainable fashion and slow fashion theories, investigates the progression of the sustainable practices of Indonesian fashion brands and identifies the opportunities of slow fashion in contribution to the development of creative economy in Indonesia.

Keywords

Sustainability; Sustainable fashion; Slow fashion; Fashion industry

1. Introduction

The sustainable fashion concept surfaced as a response to the complications caused by the industrialisation and became more prominent since the emergence of fast fashion that has become the dominating culture in the fashion industry. This fast fashion phenomena has stimulated the overproduction and overconsumption of fashion products where fashion companies more products in low prices to spur consumers to purchase more products than they actually need, which ultimately lead to low social and environmental standards and fashion waste [4,5]. As a result, fashion companies all over the world including Indonesian fashion brands and retailers have attempted to create values and build positive image through sustainable initiatives. In spite of the positive initiatives, more and more fashion companies utilise the sustainable concept to gain more sales and deceive their viewers and consumers with misleading green credentials [5].

This paper is a descriptive research that aims to present sustainable fashion theories to investigate the sustainable progression in Indonesian fashion industry. Qualitative research methodologies through literature studies are employed to establish the underlying sustainable fashion theories and to discover a credible measurement to validate the sustainable practice of individual fashion brands. The literature studies on sustainable fashion, slow fashion, greenwashing and green consumerism were sourced from textbooks, e-journals, e-books and articles from the Internet. The non-probability sampling method using the author’s judgment was conducted to select two Indonesian renowned

sustainable fashion brands, fbudi and Sejauh Mata Memandang. The sustainable fashion matrix developed by Henninger [4] is utilised to demonstrate the advancement of each brand in terms of sustainability and slow fashion practices based on the information acquired from the Internet due to lack of insights from books and journals.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sustainable fashion

The sustainable fashion concept started to emerge decades ago in the 1960s when consumers started to recognize the impact of clothing and textiles manufacturing to the environment and the term sustainable fashion was first introduced at the World Commission on Environmental development in 1987.[1-2] However, the adaptation of sustainability concept in the fashion industry is relatively recent. Since the past decade, fashion designers, retailers, entrepreneurs, academicians and environmentalists have been exploring the opportunities and possibilities of sustainable fashion to address the criticism from media and consumers on the implications that are caused by current globalized and fast fashion system.[3]

The term sustainable fashion contains a broad view and approach. Henninger [4] defines sustainable fashion from two different aspects:

a. Sourcing and production process

Sustainable fashion implies high concern and consciousness to environmental sustainability, such as the use of environmentally friendly, ethical and low-impact materials and production process, zero waste, fair trade, garment life cycle — durability, reusability and recyclability in creating fashion products.[4]

b. Transparency and traceability

Transparency and traceability emerged as consumers sought further evidence of the source of raw materials, the production process, the workers' rights and working conditions and carbon footprints from the whole supply chain process.[4]

2.2 Slow Fashion Movement

The emergence of slow fashion movement was inspired by the slow food movement that initiated in the 1980s in Italy as the society's response to the escalating fast food culture.[5,6] Slow fashion movement emerged as a more recent sustainable notion in the fashion industry. The concept was first established by Fletcher as a more comprehensive and integrated concept compared to limiting the focus of sustainable fashion to the environmental sustainability alone. Rather than defined as the opposite of fast fashion, slow fashion is characterised as a socially conscious movement where the producers, designers, retailers, buyers and consumers are working together and more conscious of the impacts of fashion products to the environment, workers and communities. It encompasses reversing the consumerism culture, maximising the product efficiency and lifetime, embedding personal and emotional value to fashion products, nourishing local producers, craftsmen and communities as well as seeking authenticity and design diversity by designing and producing consciously, locally and ethically.[7,8]

2.3 Green Consumerism and Greenwashing

Fashion consumers have become more aware, informed and concerned about the environmental and social issues in the fashion industry. This phenomena has shaped global "megatrends" called green consumerism and greenwashing. The green consumerism culture appeared as a result of environmental and ethical concerns from consumers which encourage producers to sell more

products and gain more profits by greenwashing their advertisements [9]. Catriona [10] states that market research has suggested that the consumers were more willing to purchase organic, eco, cruelty-free, recycled, fair-trade and green labeled products at higher price tags which consequently caused producers and corporations to develop their products and marketing strategies accordingly.

Fast fashion corporations that mass-produce low-cost garments with the latest fashion trends such as Inditex and Hennes & Mauritz are globally renowned for their negative environmental and social impacts, yet establish communication and marketing strategies that imply sustainability initiatives and practices. The actual environmental impacts from the fast fashion industry juxtapose with representations that the companies try to portray (see Fig. 1-2). This paradox has led to consumers' skepticism and mistrust on the credibility of sustainability, ethical and other 'green' claims made by fashion companies in general [4,11].



Figure 1. (a) River polluted from irresponsible disposal of garment manufacturing waste (left); (b) Social issues in the apparel industry (right).

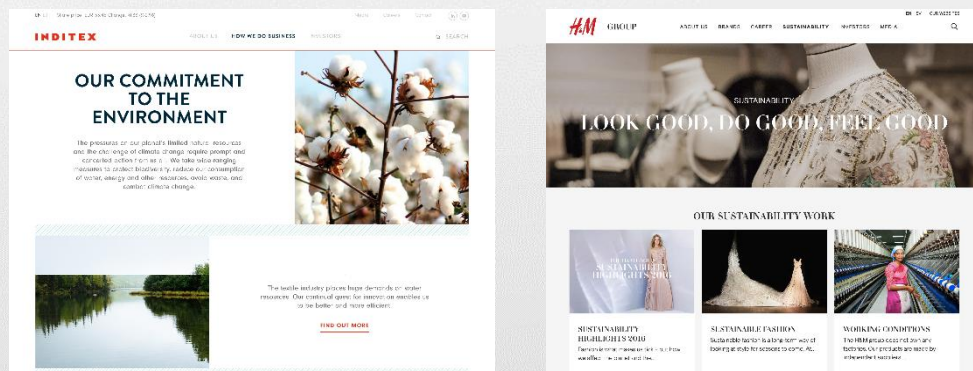


Figure 2. (a) Inditex commitment to the environment (left); (b) H&M Group sustainability works (right)

2.5 Sustainable Fashion in Indonesia

The level of knowledge and awareness on sustainable fashion in Indonesia is still relatively low. Sustainable fashion is commonly associated with organic cotton, natural dyes, recycled and recyclable material whereas the concept is much wider than the materials. Nonetheless the concept of sustainable fashion in Indonesia is growing due to its trends in the global fashion industry [12]. Greenpeace campaigner Ahmad Ashov [12] argues that many international fashion brands manufacture their products in Indonesia and contribute more negative to positive environmental and social impacts. Ashov also states the lack of support from the government who performs an important role as the regulator of production, chemical and waste management in the industries towards more sustainable fashion futures in Indonesia [12]. According to Felicia Budi [13], the most prominent challenge is the fact that the Indonesian fashion system is not yet integrated or systematic and the information of most fashion businesses are not openly accessible to the public.

Furthermore, according to the author's observation up to date, local fashion companies with sustainable values and initiatives only consist of independent fashion brands that are accounted as small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Sustainable and slow fashion movements are predominantly initiated by independent fashion designers and labels such as Felicia Budi, Lenny Agustin and Sejauh Mata Memandang. Indonesian large enterprises that operates within the fashion and textile industry such as PT Sri Rejeki Isman Tbk (Sritex), PT Matahari Department Store Tbk and PT Mitra Adiperkasa Tbk (MAP) have neither yet demonstrates nor prioritised substantial sustainable values in their businesses, whereas these companies account for more environmental and social impacts.

2.6 Sustainable Fashion Indicator

Consumers are demanding environmental and social responsibility from fashion companies to feel better about their consumption on fashion products. However, the understanding of both producers and consumers especially in developing countries on the fundamental principles of sustainability is still fairly limited. In addition, there are with many ambiguities and controversies within the fashion industry that cause suspicions and negative response from consumers on sustainable fashion. [4] In order to resolve the confusion, a comprehensive sustainable fashion matrix was developed by Henninger [4] to demonstrate an individual fashion company's priority level in implementing the sustainability and slow fashion concept supported by the provision of evidence by the company itself and third party organisations.

The matrix encapsulates twenty one attributes [4]: (1) Forward thinking; (2) Innovation; (3) Ethical/sustainable design; (4) Ethically sourced; (5) Meaningful; (6) Local production; (7) Production techniques (recycling, upcycling, traditional techniques); (8) Versatile; (9) Promoting fair trade; (10) Transparency/traceability; (11) Checks for harmful substances; (12) Long-term focus; (13) Environmental Standards; (14) Human rights/working conditions; (15) Community support/integration; (16) Financially viable; (17) Environmentally friendly materials; (18) Renewable sources; (19) Limited transportation; (20) Fashion with conscience; (21) Heritage.

3. Findings and Analysis

3.1 Fbudi

Fbudi is an independent Jakarta based fashion brand which was established by Felicia Budi in late 2010 with sustainability as the forefront of the brand. Beyond using low-impact and sustainable materials, the brand's main focus is to contribute to local communities, empowering local workers and to the society. Budi as the creative director of the brand is renowned for her experimental approach in designing her collections. Her creative explorations include consistent experiments with patterns, textiles, fabrications, textures, shapes, silhouettes and designs that compliment the female form (see Fig. 3a,b). [13,14]



Figure 3. (a) fbudi Tanah Air collection (left); (b) fbudi F/W 2014 (right)

Budi aspires to lead the brand for sustainable future and aims to make the products 100 percent locally in Indonesia from fibre to finished product. She gradually work towards this goal by using cotton grown in Maumere, natural dyes and working with local weavers to create the Tanah Air collection in 2016 (see Fig. 3a), which profits were utilised to aid to weaving establishments in Flores, Maumere and East Nusa Tenggara. She continues to collaborate with local organisations and local artisans in creating the brand’s products [13,14].

Table 1. Sustainable Fashion Matrix (fbudi)

	No	Low	Medium	High	rganizational	Third
	information	priority	priority	priority	vidence	party
						evidence
1)	Forward thinking			□		
2)	Innovation			□		
3)	Ethical/sustainable design		□			
4)	Ethically sourced			□		
5)	Meaningful, interesting			□		
6)	Local production			□		
7)	Production techniques (recycling, upcycling, traditional techniques)		□			
8)	Versatile		□			
9)	Promoting fair trade			□		
10)	Transparency/traceability	□				
11)	Checks for harmful substances			□		
12)	Long-term focus			□		
13)	Environmental standards	□				
14)	Human rights/working conditions	□				
15)	Community support/integration			□		
16)	Financially viable			□		
17)	Environmentally friendly materials		□			
18)	Renewable sources		□			
19)	Limited transportation	□				
20)	Fashion with conscience			□		
21)	Heritage		□			

4.1 Sejauh Mata Memandang

Sejauh Mata Memandang (Sejauh) is an Indonesian brand that produces apparels and homewares using textiles that are printed by artisans from Java, Bali and Sumba using traditional hand-drawn and hand-stamped batik techniques with exclusive patterns that are inspired by everyday lives in Indonesia. Each pattern tells a compelling story that represents Indonesian culture and tradition. For instance, the infamous “Noodle Bowl” collection inspired by the rooster noodle bowl originated from China represents Indonesian diversity and popular culture; the “Algae” collection that represents the seaweed farm with little farmers’ boats on Indonesian water; and the exclusive “Humba Ikat” collection inspired by the beautiful landscape in Sumba Island made by Sumbanese master ikat weavers (see Fig. 4a-c). Sejauh frequently demonstrates the creative and production processes and features the local artisans – batik artists, weavers, embroiderers who are involved in making the products in the brand’s social media. Constant collaborations with local public figures such as

celebrities, designers, film directors and photographers have been the brand's key to successful marketing strategy to escalate the brand's image and generate excitements from the viewers [15,16].



Figure 4. (a) The Noodle Bowl collection (left); (b) The Algae collection (center); (c) The Humba Ikat: Meet Rambu Ana, Rambu Yustin, Rambu Anas and Rambu Emu (right)

Table 2. Sustainable Fashion Matrix (Sejauh)

	No information	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority	rganizational vidence	Third party evidence
1) Forward thinking			☐			
2) Innovation			☐			
3) Ethical/sustainable design			☐			
4) Ethically sourced				☐		
5) Meaningful, interesting				☐	☐	
6) Local production				☐	☐	
7) Production techniques (recycling, upcycling, traditional techniques)			☐		☐	
8) Versatile				☐		
9) Promoting fair trade	☐					
10) Transparency/traceability		☐			☐	
11) Checks for harmful substances		☐				
12) Long-term focus				☐		
13) Environmental standards	☐					
14) Human rights/working conditions	☐					
15) Community support/integration				☐	☐	
16) Financially viable				☐		
17) Environmentally friendly materials			☐			
18) Renewable sources			☐			
19) Limited transportation						
20) Fashion with conscience				☐		
21) Heritage				☐	☐	

4. Discussions and Conclusions

The findings reveals that sustainability has been fbudi and Sejauh main priority with ‘medium and high priority’ for the majority of the attributes in the sustainable fashion matrix. Fbudi’s main focus leans more towards localism through local production, community supports and product innovation for sustainable futures for the brand. On the other hand, Sejauh takes local content as the main inspiration for the product designs and cultivation of traditional techniques by as the main production methods. Both brands consistently demonstrates its creative and production process and exhibits its local inspirations. Sejauh goes as far as crediting the master weavers and artisans on the brand’s social media and other media coverage.

Nevertheless, there are some gaps in their sustainable practices. Both fbudi and Sejauh are lacking in providing credible organisational evidence, such as company report, data and statistics of their sustainability practices and there is no certifications or legitimate acknowledgements from accountable third party organisations. There is no measure that can validate the actual environmental and social impacts from their sustainable initiatives. And regardless of their vocal supports for local productions and community supports, there is no information on the wages and the working conditions of the workers.

Overall it can be concluded that the sustainable initiatives of Indonesian fashion brands are still in the preliminary stage. Sustainable fashion is an integrated and holistic concept that involves everyone within the whole supply chain to work together towards conscious and responsible fashion production and consumption for sustainable futures. It is important for Indonesian fashion brands to continuously develop their sustainable initiatives as well as openly communicating and validating their practices to the public to inform and cultivate sustainability values. Consumers as the main drivers need to recognise the authentic sustainability values to evaluate the green claims and credentials made by fashion brands and producers. It is also essential to establish partnerships with third party organisations and relevant NGOs to enhance the brands’ credibility and authenticity as well as to acquire trust and confidence from the consumers. Furthermore, the government’s aids and supports are also critical to the advancement of sustainable fashion practices for developing the creative economy in Indonesia.

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