





Sustainability in the Fashion Brands Websites: SEO Keywords Density Analysis and Consumers' Behavior

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Abstract. This paper is part of my PhD research, which I started in November 2018.

Sustainability is becoming one of the main trends within our society and there is the need to combine this value within fashion. The fashion industry is one of the leading industries, which produces the highest amount of pollution in the world. The production requires an immense use of water and chemicals and the pollution created with the textile waste has a tremendous negative impact on the environment [1]. Simultaneously, sustainability is becoming one of the main trends within our society, and there is a need to combine this value within fashion. Integrating sustainability, as a value within the fashion system, can be challenging; therefore, the perception towards sustainability has to be positive, has to be an opportunity [2]. Online communication is crucial to influence customers and to deliver sustainable purchase behavior. SEO keywords density analysis studies how fashion websites are implementing their online communication toward sustainability, focusing on specific keywords. The author chose keywords from previous literature and through online software, which suggests the most similar keywords to the word “sustainability” and “sustainable fashion” used online.

The objective of this paper is to observe and analyze the online keywords of fashion brands websites concerning sustainability. I plan to research its significance, taking into consideration the growing online marketplace.

Keywords: Sustainable · Fashion · Online · Website · Keywords

1 Introduction

1.1 Fashion Brands Online: The Impact of the Lexicon, Communication and Keywords on Customer's Behavior

Costumers' are becoming more aware and conscious about sustainability within the fashion system. The McKinsey report “The state of Fashion 2019” underlines the increasing need and attention of consumers regarding sustainability towards fashion. 32% costumers in Europe and the US, 65% costumers of the emerging markets such as India and China, research information about the fashion product they are interested in, also focusing on sustainability. Furthermore, although there is an unsteady trend, the

interest over time towards the Anglophone term “sustainable fashion” increased from March 2018 to March 2019.

It is clear that the fashion industry is trying to embrace the concept of “sustainability” with all the challenges that this evolution brings with it. Indeed, ethical fashion businesses have had a higher probability of survival during the recession in some countries such as the UK [3]. Not surprisingly, Pulse of the fashion industry report [4] says that if the fashion industry adopts the sustainable business model, they could generate 160 euro billion from 2017n to 2030.

McKinsey interviewed executives, who perceive the primary factor to influence costumers’ shift is technology, and after that, sustainability credibility, rating each from 7 to 6 out of 10 regarding business impact. Other surveys demonstrated that 66% of the customers are willing to pay more in order to buy sustainable goods, 42% millennials and 37% Generation Z show increasing attention to know how companies make the product and which kind of material they use. A large part of the sourcing managers (78%) assumes “sustainability” will be one of the main factors, which will affect the most customer purchasing behavior by 2025. Some 78% of sourcing managers responding to our survey believe that sustainability will also be a somewhat or highly likely key purchasing factor for mass-market apparel consumers by 2025 [5]. Online communication is crucial to delivering sustainable values and practices as many scholars underlined [6–11]. The online behavior of customers shows constant research through the web as a pre-stage before actual purchasing [12].

Ecology is one of the main intrinsic characteristics which sustainable fashion need to highlight within its online communication strategy, to gain consistent customers’ loyalty and attraction towards its fashion product [13–15]. Green marketing can increase eco fashion consumption [16].

“Green marketing” is a form of marketing which aims to create a minor environmental impact possible within the customers’ needs [17]. However, environmental sustainability has often been misleadingly promoted across fashion media. Fletcher [18] underlined how eco fashion communication is often used merely as a persuasive message, without its profound value, which should correspond to their corporate responsibility and their business model. This misleading message is often visible when some clothing claim to be environmentally friendly without any certification, which proves it, or with unclear information [19].

Sustainability requires ethical judgment, which is reached with consistent information, therefore these are crucial for business [20]. Industries should consider what their customers believe, which are their values and belief, focusing on these factors would allow a brand to meet customers’ needs and to influence more efficiently their purchase behavior [21].

As the internet allows fashion brands to spread awareness and brands characteristics, some of them implemented their collection based on a more sustainable process. These fashion companies deliver this new business model communicating detailed information [22] which can educate customers and train them to be aware of sustainable fashion products.

Therefore, information given by language and words can shape and affect people thinking and, consequently, purchase behavior. Chan and Wong [16] underline that green marketing can drive and increase eco fashion consumption. Thomas [23]

identified some of the most used keywords linked to sustainable fashion, such as green, environmental, fair trade, eco, eco-fashion, sustainable, ethical, recycled, down-cycled and upcycled.

Thomas gives definitions for each of these terms. “Green” means there is a positive attitude towards the environment. “Environmental” is closely related to Earth’s protection; Thomas cited the report *Well Dressed?—The Present and Future Sustainability of Clothing and Textiles* [24] which identified the term connected with the nature of the fibers used: they should have qualities which allow a fashion product to have long life span, ease of laundering and ease of recycling. The word “ethical” has a more vast significance straightly linked to responsibility, towards the economic, the social and the environmental area. “Organic” refers to the absence of pesticide or any chemical substance used during the entire growing phase of the plants or animal fibers. Recycled, down-cycled and up-cycled, refer to any product, which can have second life span from its first owner.

2 Methodology and Research Questions

2.1 SEO Keywords Density Analysis

There has implemented an SEO keywords density analysis of 53 fashion websites, providing other secondary keywords they are associated with. The author chose among the 100 best online fashion websites listed by The Independent [25], classifying and dividing them as High Street, Up-and-coming designers, Vintage, Discount, Boutiques (online platforms boutiques which allow purchasing multi-brand fashion product), Luxury, Lingerie, Menswear, Childrenswear, Sportswear. The domain chosen is “.com”, the language selected “English”.

The website are as listed in Table 1.

The analysis is conducted underlining important keywords, and the use of particular descriptions which promote sustainability within online communication. The research has been taken in March 2019.

The paper analyses 16 keywords: Thomas [23] identified 12 keywords linked with sustainable value. Furthermore the author used an SEO software identified the other four keywords connected with the word “sustainability”: Sustainability, Sustainable Organic, Eco, Ecological, Eco-friendly, Ecology, Recycled, Down-cycling, Up-cycling, Ethical, Bio, Climate change, Fair Trade, Green, Environmental.

Furthermore, using a keywords suggestion software the author added other words connected to sustainability which are most used online, it is possible to identify other terms: Eco-friendly, Ecology, Climate change.

The paper investigates the use of keywords related to sustainability within the online communication strategy in fashion brands website.

Table 1. Fashion website

<i>Fast Fashion</i>	<i>Luxury</i>
https://www.boohoo.com/	https://www.modaoperandi.com
https://www.missguided.eu/	https://www.stylebop.com/
https://www.inthestyle.com/	https://www.ln-cc.com
https://lavishalice.com/	https://www.farfetch.com
https://www.linzi.com	https://www.net-a-porter.com
https://glamorous.eu/	https://www.selfridges.com
https://www.topshop.com	https://www.mytheresa.com
https://euro.missselfridge.com	<i>Lingerie</i>
https://www.dorothyperkins.com	https://www.bouxavenue.com
https://euro.wallisfashion.com	https://www.annsummers.com
https://euro.evansfashion.com	https://www.fagleaves.com
https://www.newlook.com	https://global.rigbyandpeller.com
https://www.c-and-a.com/eu/en/shop	https://www.agentprovocateur.com
https://www.zara.com	https://www.victoriasscret.com
https://eu.riverisland.com	https://www.bluebella.com
https://shop.mango.com	<i>Men's wear</i>
https://www.stradivarius.com	https://www.mrporter.com
https://www.forever21.com	https://www.jacamo.com
https://www.uniql.com	https://theidleman.com
https://www.whistles.com	https://www.percivalclo.com
https://www.bershka.com	https://www.thread.com
https://www.pullandbear.com	https://www.hackett.com
<i>Up-and-coming designers</i>	<i>Childrenswear</i>
https://www.wolfandbadger.com	https://www.tobiasandthebear.com
https://www.youngbritishdesigners.com	https://www.trotters.com nn childwear
https://www.notjustalabel.com/	https://www.turtledovelondon.com
<i>Boutiques</i>	https://www.tootsa.com
https://www.coggles.com	https://www.minirodini.com/en-uk/
https://seftonfashion.com	<i>Sportswear</i>
https://www.the-dressingroom.com	https://shop.lululemon.com/
	https://www.sweatybetty.com
	https://eu.gymshark.com

2.2 Research Questions

The analysis will focus on these following questions:

- Do fashion brand websites promote sustainable fashion on their website?
- Do fashion brand websites use keywords related to sustainability to promote their sustainable fashion products within their website for each category?
- Which are the most used keywords related to sustainability for each category?

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Fast Fashion Websites

Analyzing the 22 fast fashion website, the SEO analysis shows that the keyword linked to sustainability most used within the high-street fashion website is “sustainable”, with a mean frequency of 0,18, a mean percentage of 0,39 and a relative percentage of 26,77 among the 16 keywords analyzed. Following the analysis, the second most used word is “organic”, showing a frequency of 3, with a mean frequency of 0,13 and a mean percentage of 0,02. “Organic” is mentioned 16,27% compared to the other 16 keywords. “Sustainability” has a mean frequency of 2, with a mean percentage of 0,01 and a relative percentage of 7, 79.

“Sustainable”, “Organic” and “Bio” are the most used words linked to sustainability, and are followed by “Recycled” and “Environmental”.

“Eco”, “ecological”, “eco-friendly”, “ecology”, “down-cycling”, “up-cycling”, “climate change”, “fair trade”, “green”, “environmental” are not mentioned as keywords.

Significant links are found with some of the main “one keyword” associated with more words, creating a subgroup of two or three keywords associated with the main sustainable oriented keywords.

C&A fashion brand 2017 has the keyword “sustainability” associated with “company”, identifying their brand identity with sustainable values. “Sustainable” is associated with “products”; one given example is the sentence written beneath one fashion product: “produced using sustainable methods”. It is also linked as “become sustainable” and “sustainable commitment first”. Textile Exchange Organic Cotton Market Report [26] affirms that C&A brand is “the world’s largest user of organic cotton”. Indeed the keyword “organic” within its website it is linked to “global organic textile” and “ocs”, which stands for “Certified Organic Cotton”. “Bio” is linked with “bio cotton retailer” Example written beneath one child wear product is: “Bio Cotton protects our environment and is safer for cotton farmers and their communities”. Certification can reinforce sustainable product’s attributes, affecting positively costumers’ purchase behavior [27].

Zara website has the keyword “organic” linked as “organic cotton”, whereas “recycled” is significantly linked with “recycled material”. Example of one environmental friendly sentence to describe one fashion product within the website is “Recycled polyester is made from recycled plastic bottles and consumes less water, less energy and fewer natural resources”.

It is possible to quickly find the word “sustainability” in the “About Uniqlo” section, where the company called its mission statement “Unlocking the Power of Clothing”. This slogan aims to a different goal, which the brand promises, such as: “Recycling Initiative, in which we collect articles of clothing in our stores. Other efforts by our stories include educational programs and initiatives to reduce environmental impacts: “Selecting the best materials while considering the environment”; “Eliminate all waste in manufacturing, and minimize our environmental impact”; “We respect the human rights of employees working at our group”.

Significant link within the Whistle website with the use of the word “sustainable” is “sustainable cashmere”. The description of these cashmere products is “Introducing our new sustainable cashmere pieces made from Re.Verso™, a regenerated cashmere yarn created from post-factory waste. Using a completely integrated production process, Re. Verso™ yarn is completely traceable and is 100% crafted in Italy”. Additional information which informs that the supply chain system of Re.Verso™ can save up to –76% of energy, –89% of water and –92% of Co2 emissions [28] are not written within the product’s description. Additional information can be useful for a brand, as customers search for information about the product before purchasing it, for this reason, it is crucial for fashion brands to deliver clear information about the sustainability of the product. When information about the product show sustainable characteristic, customers are more willing to purchase sustainable fashion [29].

3.2 Up and Coming Designer Fashion Websites

Among the three up and coming designer fashion websites, the keywords “sustainable” and “organic” have a frequency of 1 each. However, the word “sustainable” has a higher mean percentage (0,07). “Ethical” has a frequency of 1, but a mean percentage of 0,03, it is the third most keywords among the 16 (25%), following the word “organic” (22,5%). Significant link with other words is the three keywords “sustainable feature collection” within the “Not Just a Label” website.

“Eco”, “ecological”, “eco-friendly”, “ecology”, “recycled”, “down-cycling”, “up-cycling”, “climate change”, “fair trade”, “green”, “environmental” are not mentioned as keywords.

3.3 Boutiques Fashion Websites

The three boutiques websites examined do not show any of the listed keywords linked to sustainability.

Among the seven luxury fashion websites, the most used keywords are “sustainability”, with a mean frequency of 0,28 and a relative percentage of 71,42%. In the LN-CC website the keyword “eco-friendly” is linked with “conscious eco-friendly packaging”. This factor is crucial to influence purchase customer behavior, driving it towards sustainability. Indeed, Nielsen global survey of corporate social responsibility and sustainability [30] shows the results of 30,000 consumers interviewed in 60 countries across the globe about the key sustainability purchase drivers. One of the factors which affect customers the most is the environmentally friendly product’s packaging characteristics. “Eco-friendly” is the second keywords more used with a mean frequency of 0,14 and a relative percentage of 28,57%. “Eco”, “ecological”, “ecology”, “recycled”, “down-cycling”, “upcycling”, “climate change”, “fair trade”, “green”, “environmental” are not mentioned as keywords.

3.4 Lingerie Fashion Websites

“Ethical” is the only keyword mentioned among the seven lingerie website analyzed. The SEO analysis found the same three keyword connected with “ethical” in the Boux Avenue, Agent Provocateur and Figleaves websites it is linked with “ethical trading”. Boux Avenue, which is part of The Theo Paphitis Retail Group, claims that “it is fully committed to striving to ensure there is no modern slavery and human trafficking in any part of its businesses or its supply chains”. Agent Provocateur says “Agent Provocateur is committed to preventing slavery and human trafficking in all its corporate activities, and to ensuring that its supply chains are free from slavery and human trafficking”. Figleaves claims “We are members of the Ethical Trade Initiative which looks out for those making our clothes and helps to improve our working conditions”. This aspect can be positively cited, as Yatish Joshi Zillur Rahman [31] reviewed 53 empirical articles about environmental purchase behavior and in six of them underlined that ethical value affect customer purchase behavior.

3.5 Men’s Wear Fashion Websites

The six men’s wear fashion website analyzed do not mention any keywords analyzed linked to sustainability.

3.6 Children Wear Fashion Websites

The five children wear fashion websites shows that the most used keyword among the sixteen is “organic” (67,58%), followed by “ethical” (14,06%) recycled (6,11%) and green (6,11%), sustainable (3,66%) and sustainability (2,44%). Tootsa website has significant linked keywords, such as “100% recycled paper”, Furthermore there is the two keywords “ethical made” Tootsa states: “All are registered with SEDEX (Suppliers Ethical Data Exchange) to ensure that they conform to ethical standards. Our aim is to produce beautiful, ethically made [...]”. “Green credential” and “100% organic cotton” and “certified organic cotton” which are clarified and reinforced with the presence of the certification GOTS. Ottman [32] affirms women are more focused on environmentally oriented messages; therefore this meticulous attention and descriptions towards different forms of sustainability would allow those who are a mother to meet their shopping needs. However, Yatish Joshi Zillur Rahman [31] found a low level of trust towards brand which claims to be environmentally friendly even if they show eco-label certifications, by contrast, a possible solution to build a stronger trust can be creating an easy-in-use product label [33]. Therefore, trust is a crucial factor to influence customer sustainable purchase behavior, also confirmed by Nielsen Report which underlined “trust” as the most important purchasing driving.

3.7 Sportswear Fashion Websites

The three sportswear fashion websites do not mention any of the listed keywords analyzed.

Overall there has not been a high percentage of words which are linked to sustainability. The two groups which show more attention in terms of keywords communication appear to be the fast fashion websites along with the childrenwear websites. Further research on the reasons for these different use of keywords among fashion websites would be interesting. Another research which should be done is to verify if such communication which promotes sustainability is a merely “greenwashing” system or it is effectively a new a more sustainable business model.

4 Managerial Implications

This study provides an online analysis focusing on sustainability. The keywords content analysis is based on previous customers’ purchase behavior studies, reports and literature. The main 16 keywords about sustainable fashion provided are the most used ones within the web and the literature. Merging customers’ point of view and the websites approaches examples of how and if fashion brands are meeting actual customers’ needs and attitudes regarding the complex concept of sustainability. Being the second industry which pollutes the most worldwide, certainly the fashion system has still to improve. The entire supply chain should aim to become more sustainable economically, socially and environmentally. However, this would not be sufficient in order to persuade and affect customer purchase behavior towards sustainable fashion. Sustainable business should lead to clear, transparent and easy-in-use communication, which would let consumers be aware of sustainable fashion products in all their characteristics. Furthermore, it is crucial not to create false messages supporting sustainability without concrete, consistent and true sustainable business’ choices. Being sustainable fashion products full of ethical values, trust is crucial to purchase sustainable fashion products. Therefore, transparency and consistency are necessary.

5 Limitation and Further Research

This research has some limitations, one of these is the lack of internal companies’ data regarding their purchasing rate of sustainable fashion products and the connections with the profit generated by sustainable products and the use of specific keywords to measure keywords efficiency. Another limitation is the impossibility to verify the authenticity of proclaimed sustainability, mostly because of the lack of complete transparency of the companies. The limited frame of time did not allow to monitor the evolution of the use of the keywords; it is suggested to monitor and analyze it over time. Future images and videos web content analysis will provide more sights about online sustainable fashion communication. Future research regarding the Future interviews with companies’ managers is suggested to gain more information about companies’ sustainability missions, their authenticity and transparency and how they intend to communicate it through the online platforms.

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