

Chapter 19

Slow Fashion and Sustainability: The Luxury Impact

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ABSTRACT

The fashion industry is contributing to today's sustainability challenge in a number of ways. Despite all the advantages of modernization, the pace of life is getting frantic and societal behaviour is in conflict with natural resources. Thus, an urgent need arises to ensure quality in production and improve social and environmental conditions. In this vein, slow fashion emerges as a revolutionary process, which is sensitive to the impact that production and distribution have on society and ecosystems. This chapter contributes an original discussion by exploring how luxury fashion could be valuable for long-term sustainability. While luxury fashion is growing fast, it is interesting to ask to what extent luxury fashion could have a positive impact on sustainability due to quality, heritage and artisan skills. This chapter looks deeply into (i) how luxury fashion could enhance sustainability through sustainable sourcing and local manufacturing, and (ii) how the slow fashion concept could be further endorsed through luxury.

INTRODUCTION

Modernization has brought many benefits to our daily lives such as the accessibility and availability of products and services at affordable prices. Nevertheless, the pace of life is getting frantic. Industries are contributing to today's sustainability challenge in a number of ways including the depletion of fossil fuels, diminished fresh water reserves, droughts, desertification and climate change. Not only does the impact on environment increase dramatically, but also a significant drop occurs in quality due to mass production. Current practices are thus in need of a restructure where societal behaviour is not in conflict with natural resources.

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The fashion industry is emerging as an important sector due to its extraordinary progression. In particular, the global luxury industry exceeded €850 billion in 2014 by showing a healthy growth of 7% overall (D'Arpizio, Levato, Zito, & de Montgolfier, 2014). Bain & Company (2014) indicated that personal luxury goods, also known as the core of luxury, reached €223 billion in 2014, triple its previous size. Nevertheless, the outlook is not promising despite the economic growth. The future holds many challenges for the industry, which is in the midst of dynamic changes with the edition of new distribution channels, resource shortages, climate change, new technologies, and the shift in the global economy (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). Luxury and sustainability have not been considered supplementary; nevertheless, it can be interesting to ask whether the luxury fashion industry could have an opportunity to reduce the negative environmental impact. This chapter aims at providing an insight into what extent luxury fashion could provide an opportunity to have a positive impact on sustainability.

In this vein, it is essential to step into the world of slow movement. The '*Slow*' approach was initiated as a revolutionary process to ensure quality in production. In the 1980s, Carlo Petrini commenced the '*Slow Movement*' in the food industry in Italy to defend regional traditions and gastronomic heritage. The slow food movement has moved forward to comprise a comprehensive approach by recognizing the connections among people, planet and culture. Slow does not refer to time, but to a philosophy of attentiveness, a different yet innovative approach in which manufacturers, suppliers, and consumers are much more aware of the environmental impact. To this end, slow food could be seen as a starting point for the '*Slow Movement*' experience. Slow movement has entered into discussion in the fashion industry in the last few years. At this stage, it is worth explaining the strong similarities between two concepts: food and fashion. An association with a country of origin provides a source of excellence for a certain product category (Brun & Castelli, 2013).

'Made in' is a merchandise mark indicating that a product is all planned, manufactured and packed in the mentioned country, such as Italy. 'Made in Italy' has been used to indicate the international uniqueness of Italy in four main traditional industries: fashion, food, furniture and mechanical engineering. Considering that Italian products have often been associated with quality, high specialization and differentiation, there are strong links that could be observed between food and fashion. Therefore, a sustainable movement initiated in Italy could be united through principles and values for both food and fashion. These guiding principles could help each other grow, and the strengths of each industry could be further reinforced. Thus, creating a sustainable society could be inspired and encouraged by emphasizing sustainable sourcing, local production and conscious consumption.

Slow fashion refers to a philosophy of attention that is sensitive to environmental and societal needs and to the impact that production and distribution has on society, ecosystems and earth (Fletcher, 2008, 2010). Correspondingly, this chapter examines whether and/or to what extent the luxury fashion industry could improve sustainability through the incorporation of the guiding principles of slow fashion. Prior research investigated contributing concepts such as fast fashion, social responsibility, sustainability, and ethics within the fashion systems (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, the luxury impact on sustainability has a discourse that has not been investigated. Therefore, this study makes an original contribution by exploring how luxury fashion is indeed valuable for long-term sustainability. In this vein, we are looking through the lens of luxury to endorse sustainable sourcing and local production to provide managerial suggestions and to further contribute to the slow fashion concept.

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