The restless desire for the new versus sustainability: the pressing need for social marketing in fashion industry

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Abstract

Purpose – Detrimental impacts on social and ecological well-being of excessive fashion consumption and production practices are posing threats on future generations. Therefore, the need for sustainable solutions and endorsing them through social marketing efforts is more urgent than ever. From the consumption angle, this study aims to explore the driving forces behind consumers' restless desire for the new and the growing need to consume sustainably.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is conceptual in nature, and through a review of the literature in fashion, consumer, sustainability and social marketing studies, it examines why consumer desire for the new is so profound and how it conflicts with sustainability goals of the fashions industry. With a macrosocial approach, it reveals how multiple constituents of the fashion system can contribute toward sustainability goals.

Findings – This study explains consumers' psychological and social needs driving their restless desire for the new and the role of fast fashion companies fuelling this desire. It also discusses the consequences of excessive fashion consumption and presents social marketing solutions at micro, meso and macro levels with upstream and downstream effects toward sustainability goals.

Practical implications – Considering the increasing consciousness about the negative impacts of excessive fashion consumption, this study suggests both practical and social implications that are associated with multiple stakeholders including consumers, fashion companies and public policymakers.

Originality/value – This study reveals in detail the challenges and potential social marketing solutions at micro, meso and macro levels, concerning the conflict between consumers' restless desire for the new and the pressing need to consume more sustainably.

Keywords Social marketing, Fashion, Consumption, Desire for the new, Sustainability, Macrosocial approach

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

> Sustainable fashion doesn't make any sense. It's a contradiction in terms. According to the Oxford Dictionary: Fashion is "the production and marketing of new styles of goods, especially clothing and cosmetics". Sustainable is "able to be maintained at a certain rate or level". On one hand, we have the pressure to be new; on the other, the imperative to maintain. Sustainable fashion is an oxymoron [. . .]. (Rickey, 2014)

Fashion and sustainability are often considered to be opposing concepts (Rickey, 2014; Lundblad and Davies, 2016). Because the current fashion system is mainly driven by speed,

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change, planned obsolescence, disposable trends and aesthetic fads, it is a challenge to associate it with sustainability, which connotes longevity and reusability (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2015). However, the detrimental societal and environmental impacts of global fashion industry pressingly call for a more sustainable fashion system (Biehl-Missal, 2013; Fletcher, 2013; Kennedy *et al.*, 2017; Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2020a, 2020b).

The problems associated especially with fast fashion industry – such as the exploitation of garment workers, the destruction of the ecosystem, the depletion of the natural resources and the increasing textile waste (Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009; Fletcher, 2013; Blanchard, 2013) – are so complex that they need to be treated as wicked problems within a multitude of social, economic and cultural influences (Kennedy, 2016; Kennedy *et al.*, 2017). Accordingly, their solutions require a structural change through the involvement of multiple stakeholders at all – micro, meso and macro – levels. Recently, Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik (2020a) outlined the roles of multiple institutional constituents of the fashion system at different levels (such as the role of designers, big fast fashion brands, other actors of the fashion supply chain, luxury brands, fashion organizations and associations and consumers) in potentially advocating change toward a more sustainable fashion system. In this study, we examine with a closer look one of the most challenging issues of the complex sustainability problem of the industry, which is the fashion consumers' restless desire for the new that contributes to growing textile waste and puts pressure on the actors of the supply chain.

Our study is conceptual in nature. Through an extensive review of the literature in fashion, sustainability, social marketing and consumer studies, it theoretically explores if consumers' restless desire for the new can ever align with the growing need to produce and consume sustainably. Although our focus seems to be at micro level, involving consumers' desire for the new, the potential solutions to the problem are complex, certainly not straightforward, and lie in the hands of multiple actors, not just consumers. Therefore, our analysis has a more holistic, macrosocial approach (Brennan, *et al.*, 2016; Kennedy, 2016), embracing both potential downstream and upstream effects, involving actors at micro, meso and macro levels.

The relationship between consumers and newness has been previously studied in consumer research (Atik, 2007; Coskuner-Balli and Sandıkcı, 2014), which will be discussed further in the next section. As a novelty, we bring the sustainability dimension into this relationship. In this journal, scholars in a similar research stream suggested ways on how to mitigate perceived barriers to green consumption processes (Beatson *et al.*, 2020), and they have examined the role of personal and subjective norms influencing pro-environmental behavior (Setiawan *et al.*, 2021); however, none of these studies specifically explored consumers' desire for the new as a barrier against sustainability in the context of fashion industry. This conceptual study's original contribution to social marketing studies comes from revealing in detail the challenges and potential downstream and upstream solutions at micro, meso and macro levels for aligning consumers' restless desire for newness and the pressing need for sustainability. Furthermore, many of the studies conducted in social marketing field have been in health-related contexts such as preventing obesity (Bastos *et al.*, 2021), observing the effectiveness of antismoking advertisement (Kapoor and Singhal, 2021) or promoting HIV prevention messages (Edelstein *et al.*, 2020), to name a few. Social marketing studies in the context of fashion is limited (Kennedy *et al.*, 2017). This study stresses both the lack and the pressing need of social marketing studies in the field of fashion and the need to implement social marketing tools in fashion industry.

In the next sections, to examine the complex problem of sustainability in relation to consumer desires, we first explore at micro level the motivations of consumers behind their restless desire for the new in light of consumer studies and try to understand why such

desire is so profound. We then explore, at meso and macro levels, the role of fast fashion companies and the media in fuelling this desire and look at the consequences of excessive fashion consumption practices. In our final analysis, we discuss potential solutions to alleviate and reorient the desire for the new toward more sustainable consumption alternatives. More specifically, from a macrosocial perspective, we present social marketing implications at micro, meso and macro levels with potential downstream and upstream effects in creating awareness of the sustainability challenges in the fashion industry and educating consumers toward more sustainable consumption behavior.

The forces behind the restless desire for the new in fashion consumption

Consumers at micro level are the main motivators behind the rapidly changing fashion system (Kennedy *et al.*, 2017). The unquenchable desire for newness is conceivably the most crucial driving force behind fashion consumption, which is not about long-term possessions, but change that is continuously attained through quick disposal of products (Atik, 2007; Rojek, 2004). In modern societies, such desire is hardly associated with any utilitarian justifications because it is not about urgent necessities such as keeping warm or protecting the body. People are guided by their imaginary emotions, hopes, fears, illusions, fantasies and dreams, which are not as instinctual as so called biological or primary needs (Radkowski, 1980). Therefore, the newness of clothes is related more to their symbolic rather than technical features (Atik, 2007; Coskuner-Balli and Sandıkcı, 2014).

Through empirical research with fashion consumers in Italy, Atik (2007) highlighted five main themes for understanding consumers' restless desire for newness in fashion. Most of these themes are related to consumers' psychological and social needs, whereas one of them is about the institutional forces fuelling the desire for newness (such as the influence of media and fashion images). These five themes, which we also briefly discuss here, outline the reasons for vitality of the desire for newness for consumers, despite all the tangible drawbacks of excessive consumption it leads to.

If we start from the first theme, the desire for newness is partly rooted in consumers' search for constructing new images of self to represent; acquisition of new fashion objects help them to accommodate this desire (Atik, 2007; Thompson and Haytko, 1997). Davis (1992) suggests that no other field has organized itself so systematically toward the management of change as a social activity as apparel design. Different combinations of apparel and clothing features (such as fabric, color, texture, cut, weight, weaving and stitching) carry meanings for wearers and their viewers (Davis, 1992). For example, one can secure athletic accomplishments, sex appeal, popularity or status badges through the signifier value of the commodities they consume (Goldman and Papson, 1996).

Other reasons for the desire for newness, Atik (2007) suggests, are boredom and emotional lack, as novelty overcomes the boredom by adding color and new excitements to life. Coskuner-Balli and Sandıkcı (2014) also found that using the same things can generate boredom and this boredom with the existing clothes and the desire to keep up with fashion trends can trigger a new purchase, which in return often leads to an experience of pleasure and excitement. However, this excitement is usually an elusive and temporary one, which needs to be recreated through constantly searching for something new.

Prominent scholars such as Barthes (1967/1990) and Ewen (1988) portray modern consumption as a shallow dream of identity. Modern life is so anonymous and people are so rootless and isolated by individualism that they seek goods to substitute an internal emptiness, assembling a commodity self (Ewen, 1988). Thus, fashion objects can soothe this emptiness or the emotional lack they feel (Atik, 2007). The individual anticipates the possession of a good, and through this, the realization of a certain ideal lifestyle

(McCracken, 1988). Basically, a more secure self requires fewer security objects (Ewen, 1988). However, in today's consumer society where people are accustomed and encouraged to seek happiness through acquiring new commodities because of advertising and media, it is certainly difficult to break the habit.

Furthermore, the role of others in society is another force fuelling the desire for the new in fashion consumption (Atik, 2007). Fashion is a complex mechanism amalgamated with the aspects of individual, social, cultural and aesthetic life that is the representation of the individual in harmony with others (Lipovetsky, 1987). Fashion diffuses through mimetic desire (Girard, 1977) having consumers imitate each other and taking the other as a reference point. Atik (2007) found that mass consumers often conform to the socially accepted norms for clothing, even the ones who are more skeptical about fashion, with the fear of isolation. Thus, although some more slowly, people change with new fashion. Nowadays, consumers' increased visibility in social media and the desire for positive social impact further increases the demand for new clothing (Lewittes, 2019).

Finally, fashion industry agents are not innocent in regards to excessive fashion consumption practices; they constantly fuel consumers' desire for the new. In other words, consumers themselves are not the sole agents to blame for their own insatiable desire for newness. According to some, particularly Frankfurt School scholars and their followers, market can dominate over consumer desires, and consumers are manipulated into mass conformity (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944; Ewen, 1988; Haug, 1986). The manufacturer has the function of both making the goods and making the desires for these goods (Galbraith, 1958). Within this academic discourse, consumer desires are not independent but determined by other factors under family or social pressure such as changing fashion trends, advertising, marketing and the media (Slater, 1997). However, Haug (1986) suggests that manipulation can only occur if it is aligned with the interests of those being manipulated, which seem to be the case with the desire for newness in fashion, because fashion consumption is highly connected with consumers' identity construction projects.

Although the strong stance of Frankfurt School in placing consumers as passive agents of the market system has been challenged by consumer researchers who posit consumers as cultural producers who are free to interpret potentially constraining circumstances, and personalize, negotiate and challenge the dominant consumption codes (Fırat *et al.*, 1995; Thompson and Haytko, 1997), the influence of advertising and media is undeniable in fashion industry. The images used in media create an image of an ideal life that is enchanting, which often triggers the desire for the new (McCracken, 1988). Consumer ads often tell stories of success, happiness and social fulfillment in the lives of the people who consume the right brands (Goldman and Papson, 1996). The desire inducing advertised images, together with the widespread availability of the new styles in the market reinforce conformity with the new fashion trends. Especially, fast fashion industry has a substantial part in fuelling the desire for the new.

The role of the fast fashion industry in fuelling the desire for the new

The term "fast fashion" is commonly used to describe a relatively new form of fashion industry in which fresh designs are quickly adapted from the catwalks to the affordable mass retailing market (Cline, 2012). Albeit being introduced by global brands such as Zara and H&M only a couple of decades ago, due to larger profit rates it yields, fast fashion has become the dominant trend in today's textile and clothing industry that is characterized by demand for speed (Ozdamar Ertekin, 2016). These fast fashion retailers encourage product obsolescence by limiting the functional life and durability of products. They further encourage perceived obsolescence by constantly altering the designs and offering new

trends to promote consumption (Cooper, 2005; Kennedy *et al.*, 2017). In previous decades, fashion companies presented only two collections a year, spring/summer and autumn/winter; nowadays, they offer around 20 collections per year, which requires changing collections in stores every two to three weeks (LeBlanc, 2012). Some retailers like Zara and H&M receive new styles twice a week (Cline, 2012). This continuous emergence of new designs and product obsolescence supported by low prices subsequently leads to excessive consumption practices (Jorgensen and Jensen, 2012).

The Spanish brand, Zara, is one of the main retailers leading the change in fashion industry. Instead of focusing on large quantities, Zara manufactures small amounts of each style. The company hardly have stock replenishments, which creates a hunger in consumers who fear that they will miss out the opportunity to have an affordable version of a catwalk item if they do not act fast enough (Siegle, 2011). Similar to Zara, the British brand Primark also reassures consumers to come back to its stores by constantly adding new styles. Primark's head of buying for womenswear stated that about 10% of the lines in its stores are new each week (Davey and Morris, 2014). As a result, consumers are accustomed to expect new styles or at least certain novelties that look different from those of the previous week. Their shopping habits have changed as well. People used to shop at the beginning of the season and buy what they needed for that season; nowadays, they go shopping almost every week (Ozdamar Ertekin, 2016). According to Greenpeace "Fashion at the Crossroads" report, compared to 15 years ago, people buy 60% more clothing items and keep them for about half as long (Greenpeace International, 2017). Fashion companies are well aware that new is the antidote to boredom. H&M's style adviser stated in an interview that having the same items in stores all the time is not so exciting for customers and that the company wants to surprise them (Godelnik, 2014). Consequently, fast fashion industry feeds from and at the same time fuels consumers' never-ending desire for the new.

Along with the speed of the new trends, disposability has become an important characteristic of fashion consumption. For instance, fast fashion companies set 10 washes as a reference point before the item loses its original value (Joy *et al.*, 2012). Clothing, which was once respected as a valuable good that is made to endure, has become a disposable item. Consumers no longer care for its quality or craftsmanship, and they do not have a personal or lasting relationship with their clothes (Cline, 2012). Although using, reusing and disposal are all parts of the consumption process and can have an important impact on the sustainability of a garment (Lundblad and Davies, 2016), the current fashion system requires frequent renewal of products for the market to grow constantly (Atik and Fırat, 2013). As a result, the speed of fast fashion industry produces severe consequences on the physical and psychological health of its workers, environment and society in general (Ozdamar Ertekin, 2016).

Consequences of excessive fashion consumption

> Fast fashion is about greed and it is time to slow down and consider the true cost of choosing quantity over quality (Fletcher, 2007).

Progress and the desire for the new have been valued highly, especially in Western societies, leading consumers to purchase relentlessly (Fiske, 1989). However, such excessive consumption patterns have resulted in pollution, waste and deterioration of individual well-being (Kilbourne *et al.*, 1997). The current fast fashion system, which requires products to be renewed frequently, so that the market grows constantly, illustrates perfectly this devastating condition in contemporary consumer society (Atik and Fırat, 2013).

Fashion industry has been primarily criticized for creating artificial newness and obsolescence. Mass-market fashion retailers today create and get rid of trends ever more quickly than before (Ozdamar Ertekin, 2016), which leads to excessive waste of resources, as clothes are discarded before they are worn out. These companies also exploit consumers' desire for attention seeking through dress and the social pressure to be seen as trendy by constantly offering new products (Böhme, 2003; Cline, 2012). Consequently, wearing the "must have" styles of the season outshine the unsustainable conditions and negative consequences of fashion production (Cline, 2012), leading to waste of massive amounts of clothing and to the deterioration of natural resources and the environment (Cline, 2012; Gupta *et al.*, 2019). A recent *ABC News* article (Besser, 2021) reveals that millions of unwanted used clothing items from the West (UK, Europe, North America and Australia) end up in West African countries such as Ghana for resale and reuse. However, an estimated 40% of these items are of such poor quality that they end up in landfills, creating an environmental catastrophe. Furthermore, they create danger for the local people because the methane trapped inside the old piles can catch fire, and it takes hundreds of years for the synthetic textiles to decompose.

Besides the deplorable damage big fast fashion brands cause for the environment, the speed of fast fashion puts a serious strain on the actors involved in the fashion supply chain (Ozdamar Ertekin, 2016). The growing supply and demand of fast fashion compel designers, manufacturers and retailers to react faster while keeping the cost low. As a result, garment workers in developing countries often work overtime with minimum wages while the time and financial pressures on the supply chain cause companies to overlook the code-of-conduct requirements (Cataldi *et al.*, 2010; Fletcher, 2007; Ozdamar Ertekin, 2016). Numerous sweatshop scandals, such as the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Bangladesh, killing 1,129 workers and leaving more than 2,500 injured in 2013 (Butler, 2013), are evidences of these dreadful working conditions. The insufferable factory conditions of Cambodian garment workers where there have been mass fainting and deaths while producing clothing for famous Western fashion retailers (Chua, 2014) are only a few of the countless appalling factory conditions.

At another level, criticism involves fashion advertising imagery for inducing a beauty myth that cannot be attained by most women, creating a burden for trying to fit in (Bordo, 1993; Wolf, 1991). Recent research shows that diverse groups of consumers in terms of racial and ethnic background, socioeconomic class, religion, sexual orientation, age and body type are not represented in fashion industry, which has generally idealized whiteness, thinness and youth (Cavusoglu and Atik, 2021). These underrepresented women feel undeserved and excluded from the fashion scene.

In summary, all these criticisms signify that continuous recreation of insatiable desires work for the fashion industry's own economic well-being rather than for the well-being of its workers or consumers (Bordo, 1993; Wolf, 1991). Even though there is a sustainable fashion consumer movement and a greater interest in sustainable fashion (Lundblad and Davies, 2016), most consumers are unfortunately still not aware or unwilling to face the negative consequences of their excessive fashion consumption practices (Goodwin, 2012). Consequently, if fashion consumption keeps growing at its current rate, its negative impacts will become an even bigger threat for the environment and future generations (Cataldi *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, the need to align consumers' restless desire for newness with the pressing need to consume and produce sustainably is more urgent than ever before. Accordingly, in the next section, we reflect upon potential social marketing solutions for aligning this restless desire with the need for sustainability.

Social marketing implications for aligning consumers' restless desire for the new and the pressing need for sustainability

In our conceptual analysis, we particularly focused on the desire for the new, which is only one of the critical barriers against sustainable fashion (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2015). Therefore, the potential solutions we discuss in this section are mainly directed to alleviate this restless desire; thus, they are not encompassing all of the problems involved in the entire fashion supply chain. Yet, as we mentioned at the beginning, although our focus seems to be at micro level, the potential solutions to this complex problem lie in the hands of multiple actors at micro, meso and macro levels, not just consumers. Therefore, adopting a macrosocial approach (Kennedy, 2016), we take a closer look at what these actors at different levels can do to create positive social change with downstream and upstream effects.

The role of micro level actors

Some consumers are indeed frustrated and disappointed with the careless fashion consumption and its negative consequences (Kozinets and Handleman, 2004). Some of these concerned consumers are willing to support sustainable fashion practices (Beard, 2008; Lundblad and Davies, 2016). For example, Lundblad and Davies (2016) identified certain values that drive consumption of sustainable clothing such as self-expression, self-esteem, responsibility for protecting the planet, feeling a sense of accomplishment and promoting social justice. In a similar line, Vehmas *et al.* (2018) found that consumers' interest toward recycling and sustainable solutions is increasing in the social context of Finland. A survey conducted by McKinsey during the COVID-19 crisis shows that 65% of consumers plan to purchase more long-lasting, high-quality items and they consider "newness" as one of the least important criteria in making purchases. Hence, according to the State of Fashion 2021 Report, the pandemic has accelerated the critique of consumerism and increased the importance of sustainability, leading to the rise of circular business models, especially resale (BOF and McKinsey and Company, 2021).

Second-hand consumption is one of the sustainable alternatives in satisfying consumers' desire for newness. As a form of circular and collaborative consumption practice in the fashion context, Gopalakrishnan and Matthews (2018) examined the business model of second-hand fashion stores where customers are the primary suppliers of products. The authors reveal that cheaper price, thrill of finding great deals, value for brands and variety are the main reasons for consumers to shop at second-hand stores. However, previous research also shows that some consumers may have negative perceptions and view used clothing as an inferior good. In the context of USA, Norum and Norton (2017) suggest that younger consumers are more likely to be involved in second-hand clothing consumption than the older generation. This may be due to the fact that younger people such as students are operating on more limited budgets, and they may be more open to experiment new things compared to the older generations. There can also be cultural and social class differences toward second-hand clothing consumption as wealthy people may assert their distinction by consuming new high fashion items, and in certain countries, second-hand clothing may be perceived as a sign of poverty.

Moreover, "swishing" or "swapping" events, where consumers exchange items that they no longer use (Prothero *et al.*, 2010), or "shwopping" initiatives, which enable customers to recycle by donating still-wearable but unwanted clothing items (WRAP, 2012), can help decrease textile waste while satisfying their desire for newness without contributing to increased consumption. Lucy Shea, the founder of Futerra Sustainability Communications Agency in the UK, states that, "swishing is designed to cut this waste by giving women the thrill of retail therapy without the environmental side effects" (Rowley, 2012).

Henninger *et al.* (2019) examined swap-shops, which are part of the collaborative consumption phenomenon, and showed that consumers can be concerned with availability, sizing and the quality of garments in such stores. Yet, swishing or swapping events can extend the use of garments and slow down the material throughput in the system, supporting sustainability goals and at the same time fulfilling the desire for the new as addressed above. Some consumers may prefer to borrow instead of swapping garments. Borrowing clothing allows consumers to enjoy wearing something new and trendy while preventing the social discomfort and humiliation associated with wearing the same outfits over and over again (Coskuner-Balli and Sandıkcı, 2014).

Recently, Gupta *et al.* (2019) underlined that there is a paradigm shift from individual ownership to sharing, as access is valued over ownership by some individuals (Lewittes, 2019). People do not need to purchase a garment to have something new to wear. They can experience newness without making a commitment (Coskuner-Balli and Sandıkcı, 2014). Sharing used clothing items with others or learning different ways to mix and match existing clothing can be perceived as creative, fun and fashionable, and fashion leaders can diffuse this excitement to others (Lang and Armstrong, 2018). Through these new channels, consumers can fulfill their desire for the new by creating a constantly changing wardrobe and meanwhile supporting sustainable consumption practices (Clube and Tennant, 2020; Lewittes, 2019).

Furthermore, some of the previous scholarly contributions have valuable suggestions toward developing informed consumption practices such as buying few well-made high-quality pieces instead of multiple cheap items; recycling old clothes instead of throwing away; buying ethical, fair trade and organic products; and ultimately developing a long-lasting relationship with clothes rather than seeing them as disposable items (Cline, 2012; Martinko, 2015; Noble, 2014). Others recommend consumers to support fashion brands that protect workers in developing countries and preserve traditional crafts (Kissa, 2015). Furthermore, Martindale and Mckinney (2018) found that the ability to sew at home provided women with more control over their selection of clothing specifically concerning body fit, and those women develop more attachment to the clothing they have made and altered themselves.

In summary, conscious consumers who adopt such responsible consumption practices and engage in collaborative consumption can indeed have upstream effects in creating positive change at institutional level, by making more informed product decisions, buying ethical and fair-trade products, and thus forcing companies and policymakers to adopt sustainable practices (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2020a). Global Sustainability Study 2021 (*Businesswire*, 2021) shows that more than a third of global consumers expect companies to end the exploitation of workers throughout the global supply chain and are willing to pay more for sustainable products.

However, studies also show that there is an attitude–behavior gap in sustainable consumption practices (Niinimäki, 2010). Despite consumers' ethical interests, the increased amount of affordable fashionable clothing leads to unsustainable consumption practices even for some of the concerned consumers. Therefore, sustainable fashion consumption is unfortunately not the dominant behavior, and the relentless desire for the new is still a barrier against sustainability (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2015). As we conceptualize in our Figure 1, potential solutions for initiating change toward a sustainable fashion system requires the undertakings from all of its institutional agents involved in production and marketing of fashion such as fashion designers, manufacturers, fast-fashion retailers, advertisers and public policymakers (Boström and Micheletti, 2016; Cataldi *et al.*, 2010; Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2020a) at meso and macro levels. Accordingly, the next sections

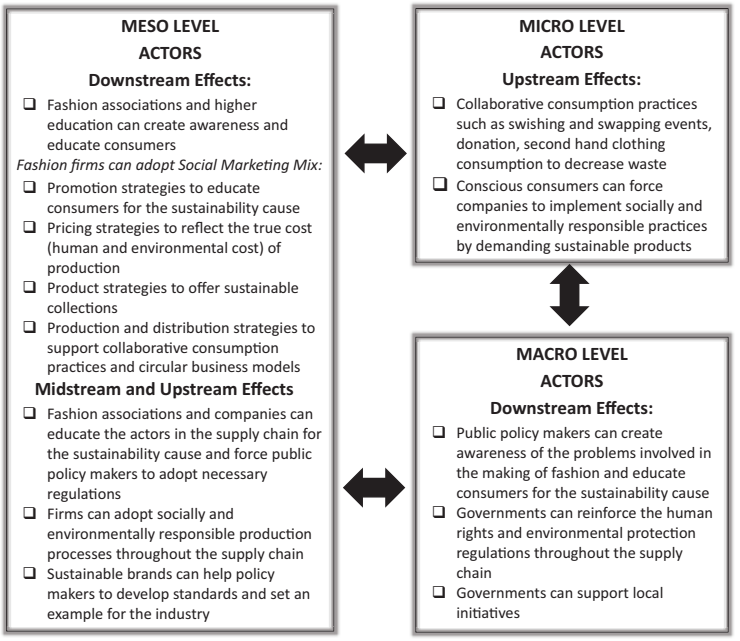

Figure 1.
A macrosocial approach to align the desire for the new and the need for sustainability

explore how some of these actors can have both downstream and upstream effects for making consumers and the industry agents act in more sustainable ways. At meso level, we pay particular attention to the role of fashion associations and higher education to create awareness and to educate consumers and how fashion companies can adopt more socially and environmentally responsible marketing mix strategies in production, promotion, pricing and distribution of fashion products.

The role of meso level actors

Consumer education is a start for alleviating the restless desire for the new and eventually slowing down the excessive fashion consumption practices. Prior literature suggests that individual consumers seldom associate consumption practices with their environmental or societal outcomes (Connolly and Prothero, 2003). For example, Kant Hvass and Pedersen's (2019) recent study of a global fashion brand points at multiple challenges in the process of implementing circular business models in fashion such as the limited consumer interest in "product tak/e-back" that could ease garment reuse and recycling. Partly this is due to lack of consumer awareness about the environmental consequences of textile waste and the potential value of garment reuse and recycling.

Fashion organizations such as the sustainable or ethical fashion shows, sustainable design awards and events (e.g. Redress Design Award) or online platforms for promoting sustainability (e.g. The Future of Fashion is Now) can have an important role in increasing such awareness and educating consumers (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2020a). Centre of Sustainable Fashion, established in 2008, aims to find new ways of behaving and interacting with clothes (McIntosh, 2013). Such organizations can also have upstream effects by developing indexes and measurement tools to be adopted by the industry agents and

policymakers. For example, Sustainable Apparel Coalition launched the Higg Index in 2012 to accurately measure and score companies' sustainability performance and assess environmental and social impact throughout the supply chain (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik 2020a).

Furthermore, recently, social marketing studies have shown how institutions of higher education can become partners in social marketing efforts, creating a motivating learning environment for students as potential sustainability change agents (Hübscher *et al.*, 2021). Films and documentaries are effective media for educating people and increasing their consciousness. "The True Cost" by the director Andrew Morgan is a documentary film released in 2015 about the story of clothes throughout the supply chain, the people who make them and the impact of the industry on the environment (Ozdamar Ertekin, 2017). It shows in a very impactful way the true cost – human cost, environmental cost and societal cost – of making clothing. Cotton Road is another documentary by Laura Kissel (Chua, 2015a) about the story of clothing and its transnational journey from the cotton fields of South Carolina to the factories in China. Such documentaries can be shown in academia, in classes at all levels from high schools to universities, and also in exhibitions and fashion events. Along with universities and fashion associations, big fashion brands can help educate consumers (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2020a) through the use of social marketing. Hence, the next subheadings suggest how fashion companies can adopt more socially and environmentally responsible marketing mix strategies.

Promotion strategies of fashion companies: First of all, big fast fashion brands need to stop fuelling consumer's desire for the new by constantly promoting the throw-away, disposable fashion. Instead, they need to slow down the fashion cycles and promote the sustainability cause for a better future for everyone (including human beings, animals and plants).

Previous research shows that a lack of understanding of the key terminology of the sustainability discourse used by fashion companies can confuse consumers. Evans and Peirson-Smith (2018) suggest that greater clarity about sustainability issues and related actions to be taken by consumers can enhance sustainable fashion marketing communications. Vehmas *et al.* (2018) emphasize the importance of using multiple marketing communication channels in providing consumers with more visible and clear information about circular clothing and its positive impact on the environment.

For example, Levi's has launched an educational initiative to help consumers understand the environmental impact of clothing production about water and energy usage. The company is also working with the Better Cotton Initiative to train farmers to grow cotton, using less water, which is a good example of how fashion companies can have both downstream and upstream positive impacts. The company's water stewardship actions have saved 1 billion liters of water. Levi's announced that by engaging and educating consumers, they could change the environmental impact of apparel and, ideally, change how consumers think about the clothes they wear (Chua, 2015b). Another initiative was started by Kering group, which owns high-profile apparel brands such as Gucci, Saint Laurent, Bottega Veneta and more. The group started an educational partnership with London College of Fashion's Centre for Sustainable Fashion to support their academic program and initiated a competition to reward the problem-solvers (Mower, 2014). Through such initiatives of fashion brands to educate consumers and increase public awareness, other fashion brands can also be forced to become more conscious, and public pressure may compel them to carry more ethical and sustainable production processes.

Not for last, previous research in social marketing has emphasized the use of social media as an effective tool to educate and influence consumers (Shawky, *et al.*, 2019), more

specifically, to encourage them to buy sustainable apparel (De Lenne and Vandenbosch, 2017). However, how much fast fashion corporations use social media for social marketing purposes is still largely unknown, and if used, its effectiveness has not been measured in the field of fashion.

Product strategies of fashion companies: Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik (2020a) suggest that big fashion brands can play an important role by using sustainable materials, encouraging waste reduction, recycling, adopting circular models of production for improving environmental footprints, creating sustainable collections and supporting local production. Especially, luxury brands have the potential to make an impact by meeting ethical and environmental standards and leading an example for the industry by providing products with higher quality and durability (Ozdamar Ertekin, 2019). Some of the famous designers such as Giorgio Armani, Stella McCartney and Betsey Johnson have been using sustainable materials in their designs, creating stylish garments made with sustainable materials (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2020a).

Furthermore, new styles are changing so quickly in fast fashion that fashion trends and styles have begun to repeat themselves, resulting in artificial newness, lack of uniqueness and originality (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2015). Lundblad and Davies (2016) emphasize that consumers want to express their personality, values and opinions through their clothing, which motivates them to purchase sustainable fashion that offer unique styles and materials. This could be an opportunity for promoting high quality, durable artisanal products and reorient the desire for newness toward sustainable fashion.

Along with this line, customization could become a solution. For example, tailor-made clothing is still popular in more traditional societies such as United Arab Emirates. In the context of USA, among college students, Seo and Lang (2019) found that the need for uniqueness and self-monitoring were significantly related to consumers' perception of customization and the sense of extended-self, which are also positively associated with the purchase intention of customized apparel products. Accordingly, tailor-made and customized products could be promoted as new sustainable fashion consumption alternatives.

Production and distribution strategies of fashion companies: As we started discussing above, the ethical conduct of fashion companies throughout the supply chain is extremely critical to create positive downstream and upstream effects. Some of the big fast fashion brands have already started using sustainable materials in manufacturing to eliminate hazardous chemicals and improve their environmental footprints. For instance, Lindex, one of Europe's leading fashion companies, aims to use 100% organically farmed cotton in its manufacturing, certified under Better Cotton. Similarly, Levi's cooperate with Better Cotton initiative to train farmers to grow organic cotton.

Furthermore, upcycling is a method that makes use of discarded goods and textile waste to transform end-of-life garments into new, high-value products (Cassidy and Han, 2013), fulfilling consumers' desire for the new without creating waste. Orsola de Castro is one of the leading fashion designers striving to promote upcycling as a sustainable business model since 1997. Although it is not entirely upcycling, H&M endeavors to implement circular models throughout its supply chain, promoting textiles to be collected, processed and remade into new textiles and fashion items (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2020a).

Big fast fashion brands by implementing socially and environmentally responsible production and distribution process such as paying fair wages, improving the working conditions of their workers and suppliers, and applying standards to prevent ecological destruction, can make a positive impact in moving the industry toward a more sustainable future.

Pricing strategies of fashion companies: Only if big fast fashion brands would reflect the true cost of their production in their prices, by enforcing fair wages and working conditions throughout the supply chain and implementing high standards to protect the environment, they would make a tangible impact in reducing the excessive consumption of new fashion products (Campbell, 2021). Such a fair pricing strategy would also alter the perceptions of consumers about clothing as an easily disposable item and help rebuild long-lasting relationship with clothes. This would also be an opportunity to produce more aesthetically original designs and customized products with higher quality material for longer use rather than cheap fast fashion products that lack uniqueness.

Ultimately, while adopting these more socially and environmentally responsible marketing mix strategies, fashion companies also need to become more transparent throughout the supply chain, to increase trust and enable traceability.

The role of macro level actors

Governments can make a serious positive impact by reinforcing the code of conduct standards related to human rights and environmental protection throughout the fashion supply chain. By regulating trading practices, "governments exercise considerable control of what is sold and under what conditions, and even – to a degree – at what price" (Campbell, 2021, p. 190).

Moreover, besides fashion associations, higher education and fashion companies, public policymakers bear responsibility to create consumer awareness of the problems starting with the design of a fashion item all along the pathway of the supply chain until its distribution. A very creative and interesting example is an experiment carried out as part of Fashion Revolution Day in Berlin, in April 24, 2015 (Zimmer, 2015). A vending machine offering €2 t-shirts was set in the center of Berlin's main shopping district. However, after depositing €2, the t-shirt was not dispensed. Instead, the machine showed images of sweatshops around the world, featuring images of women and children who made those t-shirts. Striking facts about women's working conditions, such as the 16 hours work days and 13 cents per hour salaries were shared along with touchy imagery. The shoppers were then asked if they still wanted the t-shirt or they wanted to donate the €2 to a charity that helps those women. Nine out of 10 shoppers chose to donate their €2 (Zimmer, 2015). This is a very effective example of creating public awareness about the problems associated with fashion production, although how much this awareness is sustained in consumers' minds and leads to more conscious consumption behavior in the long run remains a question mark and requires further investigation.

Another solution public policymakers can endorse is shifting away the attention from fast fashion to regain back the connection with traditional and local crafts (Kissa, 2015). Local practices, such as use of hand skills, revival of knitting and other craft processes facilitate more transparent production systems that help to build relationships between producers and consumers through co-creation (Cataldi *et al.*, 2010), which enables consumers to establish long-lasting meaningful relationships with clothing. Governments can endorse such local initiatives.

Conclusion

From a macrosocial perspective, this conceptual study brings some light to the complex problem of aligning consumers' restless desire for the new with the pressing need to consume sustainably. Because consumer desires behind fashion consumption involve profound psychological and social dynamics such as consumer fantasies for new images of self to present to others (Belk, 1988), it would be very difficult to entirely dispense this desire.

Instead, we rather suggest ways to alleviate and reorient this desire toward more sustainable alternatives through social marketing strategies at micro, meso and macro levels. However, challenges are still on the way, for sustainability to become the main principle in fashion industry, as fast fashion is still the dominant production and consumption practice.

At micro level, consumers are still seduced with low prices of fast fashion industry and the vast availability of cheap clothing leads to unsustainable consumption practices, even for some of the concerned consumers. Furthermore, as previous literature also highlights, there are important challenges associated with some of the collaborative sustainable consumption practices, as we discussed above. Becker-Leifhold and Iran (2018) identified some of these challenges as hygiene/health concerns about second-hand clothing, lack of trust in these alternative exchange platforms, lack of ownership and consumers' concerns about product attachment as in the case of rental items, to name a few. In their recent research, Clube and Tennant (2020) examined contamination as a barrier to and reason for rejection of garment rental. Products touched by others in a retail context can be viewed as contaminated. These concerns could have also increased with the recent corona virus pandemic and deserve further empirical investigation.

At meso level, fast fashion companies still continue to fuel consumers' desire for the new as this is their growth and profit engine, and consequently, fast fashion cycles continue to pressure the actors in the supply chain. Thus, powerful fast fashion retailers have an immense role in excessive fashion consumption and negatively impact social and environmental well-being. They need to slow down not only the fashion cycles (Clark, 2008; Fletcher, 2007), but also fuelling consumers' desire for newness through their endless advertising campaigns and sales promotions. As we suggested above, they can adopt more sustainable marketing mix strategies and reorient the desire for the new toward more sustainable consumption practices. Firms can further offer different modalities of newness to their consumers such as presenting opportunities for modification of their products, promoting barter communities and reconsidering alternative ownership models (Coskuner-Balli and Sandıkcı, 2014). Offering services such as repairing and recycling garments that can be modified with different accessories can provide alternative means for business growth (Lundblad and Davies, 2016) while fulfilling the desire for the new and supporting sustainability goals.

At macro level, as we discussed above, the cooperation of governments and public policymakers is also needed to educate consumers and increase awareness, and they have the crucial responsibility to regulate fashion companies' production processes and marketing practices for social and environmental well-being. In this regard, the new EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles proposes actions for the entire lifecycle of textile products, addressing the way textiles are designed, produced and consumed. It aims to tackle the demand and supply challenges that the fast fashion system creates by introducing new design requirements, digital product passports and measures to extend the lifetime of clothing and encourage reuse and repair. On the consumer side, the strategy aims to promote a shift toward quality, durability, longer use, repair and reuse (European Commission, 2022).

As we briefly touched in this paper, the problems of the fashion industry are much broader than excessive fashion consumption practices. They are spread throughout the entire supply chain evidenced by the unbearable working conditions of garment workers, especially in less developed countries, the serious deterioration of the natural resources and pollution of the environment in the same countries, the greed of the industry in promoting materialistic values and the vanishing of artisanal and local craft globally. Some scholars,

marketers, policymakers and consumers have already began seeking out solutions and taking actions to resolve these problems. However, these are still baby steps because the dominant practice is still fast fashion, and for a more sustainable future, all constituents of the fashion system at micro, meso and macro levels must adopt a new culture of fashion and a transformative logic of sustainability (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2020b).

Accordingly, at micro level, future research can examine whether and to which degree responsible consumption practices such as second-hand clothing consumption, swishing, swapping, sharing and renting can fulfill consumers' desire for the new. At meso level, future studies can observe how fashion corporations use social media for social marketing purposes and the effectiveness of their promotional strategies around the sustainability cause. Researchers can also examine whether production and distribution strategies to support collaborative consumption practices and offering services such as customization, repairing and upcycling can be promoted as sustainable fashion alternatives to reorient consumers' desire for the new. At macro level, sustainability initiatives of governments and public policymakers such as supporting local crafts, materials, designers and workers can be studied to understand their impact on experiencing newness. In brief, further social marketing studies are pressingly needed to develop solutions to the complex problems of the industry throughout the entire supply chain.

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Further reading

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