

Environmental sustainability vs. Fast Fashion: The communication of fast fashion companies about environmental sustainability efforts.

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## Abstract

Awareness of environmental issues in general and those caused by the fashion industry specifically has been globally increasing and people realize that changes need to be made in order to save the planet. The relatively new and rapidly growing fast fashion industry especially creates negative impact on the environment because of its specific characteristics and strategies. Has this awareness about the environmental impact of the fashion industry and the consciousness that changes need to be made also reached the companies engaging in fast fashion? This study addresses the questions to what extent fast fashion companies are focussing to make the fashion industry more sustainable, what are the efforts made by the companies and how do they communicate them? This research is based on a qualitative content analysis in which company reports for the period 2017-2019 of three fast fashion companies, Inditex, H&M and M&S, are analysed. The main findings of this research are that there are indeed many efforts made by the companies under study towards increased environmental sustainability in the fashion industry and that over the years reviewed some progress appears to be made showing a positive trend. However, there are also many contradictions found. First of all, the sustainable efforts do not (yet) outweigh the production rate and volume. Secondly, the companies create a positive frame about their environmental efforts and thereby enhance their brand image through their communication. And third, engaging in efforts towards environmental sustainability seems also often driven by a financial benefit.

**KEYWORDS:** environmental sustainability, fast fashion, supply chain, sustainable production, (corporate)communication