

Analysis on the Development of Fashion Brands under the Concept of Sustainable Fashion

Qingxi Yu *

College of International Art Exchange, Shandong University of Arts, Jinan, Shandong, 250000, China

* Corresponding Author Email: zoeyu@stu.sdp.edu.cn

Abstract. In recent years, with the growth of the fashion industry's pollution index, some brands have focused on sustainable development. To solve the problems brought by the fashion industry, this paper uses Stella McCartney as a case study, analyzes the effectiveness of sustainable development from three perspectives, and makes suggestions. The first aspect is environmental protection. Stella McCartney is cruelty-free, develops innovative materials, and promotes the sustainable development of the brand. The second aspect is social responsibility. Stella McCartney prioritizes the respect of human rights and the protection of workers' rights and well-being, thereby exerting a significant influence on the sustainable development of social responsibility. The final aspect is economic viability, with Stella McCartney planning a new textile economy that promotes the development of a circular economy in the fashion industry. Because of these three aspects, this paper puts forward some suggestions. Firstly, fashion brands should utilize recyclable waste clothing and leather goods, ensuring zero cruelty and reducing the pollution caused by material waste. Secondly, they should collaborate with the local government to engage in tree planting activities, thereby protecting ecological diversity. Lastly, by embracing the circular economy, they can comprehensively promote the sustainable development of their brands. This thesis fills a research gap in the field of sustainable fashion development, offers suggestions for brands to develop sustainable fashion, and significantly advances the development of sustainable fashion.

Keywords: Stella McCartney, Environmental Protection, Social Responsibility, Economic Viability.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

With increasing demand and requirements for clothing in recent years, the fashion industry is developing into a vigorous trend. However, although it has brought some benefits to the economy, it has become one of the most polluted industries, with serious problems such as textile waste, chemical pollution, and resource waste. The garment industry generates a staggering amount of textile waste, equivalent to one garbage truck of textiles landfilled or incinerated every second. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, the textile and apparel industry accounts for 10% of global carbon emissions, more than all flights and shipping combined [1].

However, with the increase in consumer awareness of environmental protection, more and more fashion brands (PRADA, HERMES, ZARA, H&M, etc.) have begun to pay attention to sustainable development. In this context, there are only a few brands in the fashion industry that maintain the concept of sustainability. Still, Stella McCartney, a fashion brand founded by Stella McCartney in 2001, has adhered to the principles of sustainability since the establishment of the brand, striving to use the most cutting-edge and advanced materials, reduce the impact on the planet, always be cruelty-free, and follow the principle of recycling, becoming an industry benchmark.

Researchers have done lots of research around sustainable development; for instance, Daniela Candeloro took H&M as the research object and studied the strategy of artificial intelligence to help H&M implement sustainable business decisions through a case study [2]. Shabir and AIBishri studied Zara's sustainable retail performance. The problem studied in this paper is that Zara's unique

sustainable operation model in the COVID-19 era has enabled it to succeed even during the pandemic [3]. Yoo and Lee conducted a study on the sustainability of Louis Vuitton, Hermes, Gucci, Burberry, and Prada, examining their respective sustainable development cases [4]. They shed light on the current state of sustainable development practices in luxury fashion brands [4].

1.2. Research Gap

According to the summarized literature, while most researchers have conducted extensive research on sustainable development, their focus has primarily been on the environmental pollution of the fashion industry and the sustainable development strategies of a limited number of fast fashion brands. This has resulted in a lack of research on the significance and positive impact of sustainable fashion development for these brands. Therefore, there exists a significant research gap in this area. This paper aims to address this research gap by exploring the reasons behind promoting sustainable development in the fashion industry. Exploring this issue aims to mobilize all brands to implement the concept of sustainable development on the three pillars of environmental protection, social responsibility, and economic feasibility and realize the sustainable development of brands. Investigate Stella McCartney's sustainability practices and, initially, uncover the factors and strategies that led to its success, thereby serving as a model for other brands. Secondly, it analyzes the importance of sustainability in the fashion industry and its positive impact on the environment, society, and economy. Finally, it provides new perspectives and theoretical support for the development of sustainable fashion in academia and industry, as well as promoting the development of relevant research and practice.

1.3. Fill the gap

In order to address the aforementioned research issues and bridge the knowledge gaps regarding the importance and effects of sustainable development in the fashion industry, this article will utilize Stella McCartney as a case study, highlighting her brand's achievements in sustainable development and examining the influence of pertinent strategic policies on her brand. The article then goes on to analyze the impact of sustainable development on the brand. Finally, in addition to the reasons analyzed, it should give the brand reasonable suggestions on how to better optimize themselves in terms of sustainable development to further enhance their brand image and value.

2. Case Description

Stella McCartney, the eponymous brand founded in 2001 by renowned British fashion designer Stella McCartney, is a leader and benchmark in sustainability in the fashion industry. She advocated the equality of animals and humans, and was civilized with clear environmental advocacy, rejecting the use of animal leather and fur. Since its establishment, it has been adhering to the sustainable development of the brand, focusing on comfort and practicality, and is committed to creating desirable fashion that fully expresses strong confidence and femininity. Some vegans who also reject killing and respect animals and some environmentalists will be consumers of this brand.

Stella McCartney has made many achievements in sustainable development since the establishment of the brand, firstly refusing to use animal skin and using renewable energy to power UK stores, these measures lay the foundation for Stella McCartney's sustainable path and establish a sustainable image for her brand. Secondly, it is committed to innovation in sustainable materials and the inclusion of recyclable recycled materials, collaborating with Veuve Clicquot to pioneer a grape-based alternative to animal leather. Leather's impact on the environment is significant; It is estimated that the livestock sector accounts for 11-17% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, of which 65% comes from cattle. Stella McCartney's new generation leather alternative, VEGEA (VEGEA is a grape-based vegan alternative to animal leather), is made from 80% plant-based, renewable, and recycled raw materials. All grape stems used are recycled by Veuve Clicquot in its historic vineyards and are free of solvents, metals, and dangerous and toxic substances.

In addition, there is a material called Savian, which is the first 100% plant-based, plastic-free fur alternative. It has pioneered a highly innovative, next-generation alternative to animal fur. Made in Italy by combining natural materials, heritage craftsmanship, and biotechnology, the material is 100% plant-based, plastic-free, and GMO-free. Stella McCartney, a brand that loves animals and nature, created Savian to avoid both the harm of using animal fur and the pollution of the planet caused by synthetic fur alternatives. Savian is a plant-based, vegan, and biodegradable alternative to animal and synthetic fur derived from non-GMO plant inputs such as nettles, hemp, and flax - about 50% of which can come from agricultural waste logistics. According to the official website of Stella McCartney, the production of Savian produces approximately 40-90% less carbon dioxide than high-quality synthetic fur alternatives. This reduces air pollution to some extent. The emergence of innovative renewable materials is the further sustainable development of Stella McCartney, which protects more animals from materials, reduces environmental pollution, and increases the environmental awareness of more consumers, thus boosting the company's stock price.

In addition to the sustainable development of materials, Stella McCartney's store design also pays attention to environmental protection and sustainable development. She advocates the use of sustainable materials and design as much as possible and prohibits the use of chemicals harmful to the environment. The overall style is modern and simple, high-tech, and full of natural atmosphere, to increase the number of consumers who come to experience offline stores due to the environment. To enhance the brand image.

3. Analysis on Problems

3.1. Effectiveness on Environmental Protection

Stella McCartney uses 100% plant-based, plastic-free wool-like materials, which reduces harm to animals and the environment, has a positive impact on environmental protection, promotes the important role of sustainable development, and contributes to the sustainable development of environmental protection.

Stella McCartney's plant cellulose is the source of Bio Sequins, a non-toxic biodegradable material that produces glitter and sparkles without the use of metals, minerals, synthetic pigments, or colorants in the production process. Stella McCartney said the fashion industry is a "huge contributor" to the world's plastic problem. According to Oxfam research, British women purchase up to 33 million sequined garments every holiday season, of which 1.7 million end up in landfills after just five uses, and synthetic clothing accounts for about 35% of the plastic that enters the world's oceans [5].

Bio sequences can effectively mitigate this pollution phenomenon. Stella McCartney also develops regenerative farming (aka "carbon farming"). Traditionally, raising sheep in exchange for wool not only destroys biodiversity, but also leads to soil degradation. Developing regenerative agriculture can increase biodiversity; it protects land by improving soil quality, protects animals by ensuring healthy animal feeding, and supports farmers and local communities by improving their livelihoods.

In addition, water quality has improved and carbon dioxide levels have decreased. Developing regenerative farming is more beneficial to sustainable fashion brands and the environment than traditional farming methods. The emergence of bio sequences and regenerative agriculture has resulted in a certain protection of the environment, ultimately forming a sustainable brand image that is both environmentally friendly and fashionable.

Regarding the benefits of this aspect, many researchers have demonstrated theoretical arguments, including Yang et al. in their research on alternative materials for animal leather [6]. Researchers have demonstrated through their study of discarded fruits that the production of leather goods can also utilize plant leather. This approach not only mitigates the pollution from discarded fruits to the environment, but also prevents the harm from animal slaughter to the ecosystem, thereby promoting environmental protection. Indeed, promoting sustainable development can positively impact the brand.

3.2. Effectiveness on Social Responsibility

The theory of corporate social responsibility (CSR) holds that enterprises should assume more social responsibilities in addition to economic interests and achieve sustainable development of enterprises by improving working conditions and protecting animal rights and interests.

The fashion industry involves a large number of workers, especially in developing countries, often with poor working conditions and low wages. Promoting sustainable development helps to improve the working environment and workers' well-being.

Stella McCartney adheres to the cruelty-free principle of not using animal fur and is committed to using innovative eco-friendly materials such as organic cotton, recycled polyester, and home-developed plant-based leather alternatives. The brand's core philosophy revolves around sustainability and ethical fashion, reflecting respect for animal rights and social ethics. Stella McCartney has been a member of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) since 2012, prioritizing respect for human rights and safeguarding workers' rights and well-being. These initiatives have positively influenced social responsibility and highlighted the crucial role of sustainable development, thereby influencing Stella McCartney's commitment to sustainable development. This all contributes to helping to create a better and more equal world, as envisioned in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Stella McCartney has finally developed an image as a sustainable fashion brand that is fair, respectful, and equal.

Through in-depth research on social responsibility, Pang et al. proved that corporate social responsibility has a positive role in promoting the sustainable development ability of enterprises [7]. Indeed, it can promote sustainable development and then impact the brand.

3.3. Effectiveness on Economic Viability

The new textile economy, or circular economy, represents a \$500 billion opportunity for the fashion industry, and Stella McCartney has achieved both environmental goals and reduced production costs by using recyclable materials such as recyclable polyester, recyclable metals, recyclable nylon, recycled cashmere, traceable wool, and more.

Stella McCartney is planning a new textile economy in which clothes, fabrics, and fibers re-enter the economy after use and never become waste. This initiative is expected to positively impact economic viability in the future, highlighting the crucial role of sustainable development and its impact on economic viability. Stella McCartney's sustainable status will take it to the next level in fashion.

Regarding the advantages of economic feasibility, numerous scholars have presented theoretical arguments during Zhu Dajian's study of sustainable development [8]. Researching the effects of circular economy practices confirms the necessity of a circular economy for sustainable development. Indeed, doing so can drive sustainable development, which in turn affects the brand.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Suggestion on Environmental Protection

The fashion industry is one of the most polluting industries in the world, with a large amount of textile waste, chemical pollution, and resource waste causing great pressure on the environment. In recent years, with the deterioration of the earth's environment, people's awareness of environmental protection has gradually increased, and environmental protection has been paid more and more attention in various industries.

Stella McCartney, as a sustainable advocate in the fashion field for many years, has made some achievements in environmental protection, using 100% plant-based, plastic-free hair-like materials. The use of innovative materials such as apple and grape skins instead of animal skins reduces the harm to animals and the environment [9].

To further promote the brand, this paper suggests that Stella McCartney should carry out the utilization of recyclable waste clothes and leather goods in the next few days to reduce the secondary pollution caused by material waste on the earth.

In the same environment, the Miu Miu Upcycled collection was born in 2020, by recycling second-hand clothes and reusing and transforming them, giving clothes a new life, not only continuing the precious antique clothing but also reducing the need for new resources of the brand, thus having a smaller impact on the environment, promoting the sustainable development of the fashion field. Enhance the sustainable impact of the brand. In addition to Miu Miu, brands such as Conner Ives, 1/OFF, and AALTO are also committed to making recycled goods. Therefore, Stella McCartney, the research object of this paper, can do the same.

4.2. Suggestion on Social Responsibility

A company with a sense of social responsibility can win the trust and love of consumers. Nowadays, more and more enterprises are beginning to talk about social responsibility, requiring businesses to assume more social responsibility in addition to economic interests and achieve sustainable development of enterprises by improving labor conditions, protecting animal rights, and other measures.

Stella McCartney holds the belief that fashion should be synonymous with fairness, respect, and equality. It adheres to the principle of zero cruelty and does not use animal fur, reflecting respect for animal rights and social morality. The supply chain treats everyone with respect and dignity, safeguarding the rights and well-being of workers and showcasing respect for human rights. In tandem with tree-planting initiatives, it should educate citizens about urban afforestation.

In the same context, Italian luxury goods group Prada has entered into a new partnership with Milanese tree-planting initiative Forestshuami to jointly launch the Forestami Academy project, which will educate citizens about urban afforestation through outdoor activities and other means over the next three years. To protect Milan's natural environment, Prada plans to plant 3 million trees in Milan by 2030. This initiative not only strengthens the protection of the natural environment but also promotes the sustainable development of fashion brands more comprehensively. Thus, Stella McCartney, the research object for this paper, can do the same.

4.3. Suggestion on Economic Viability

In the context of the fashion industry's gradual shift towards sustainable development, Stella McCartney has set a benchmark by incorporating a significant number of renewable materials.

This paper suggests that Stella McCartney should design innovative materials that are recyclable and renewable in the future, replace materials that eventually become waste, and foster a renewable economy to further enhance the brand. The fashion industry can promote sustainable development by developing a self-pleasing economy based on a renewable economy, attracting more consumers to participate in it, and expanding participation in the circular economy.

"Her economy," i.e., a self-pleasing economy, is a unique economic circle and economic phenomenon formed around female consumption. In the Chinese market, there are nearly 400 million female consumers aged 20-60, Lululemon's "She economy" has become a harvester for middle-class women, its products seize the practical and fashionable, and can provide women with healthy life choices [10]. As a result, it is also possible to do the same for the research objective of this paper. While developing the circular economy, Stella McCartney can join the self-friendly economy, attract more consumers who advocate vegetarianism and environmentalism, further enhance brand awareness, and promote the development of a sustainable brand economy.

5. Conclusion

The increasing demand for clothing has caused substantial pollution and damage to the environment. This paper examines how Stella McCartney, a brand that has been implementing sustainable development since its establishment, has consistently adhered to this approach. Additionally, it explores strategies for enhancing future performance. The research question revolves around why it is important to promote the sustainable development of the fashion industry. After analyzing the three aspects of environmental protection, social responsibility, and economic feasibility of the research object, this paper concludes that advocating for the sustainable development of the fashion industry can not only lessen its environmental impact, but also enhance the protection of workers' human rights, while the circular economy can boost product utilization rates.

This article offers three suggestions for brands to develop sustainable fashion. In terms of environmental protection, brands can adopt cruelty-free practices and use innovative materials such as fruit peels instead of leather. In terms of social responsibility, they can prioritize worker welfare and respect for human rights. In terms of economic feasibility, developing a circular economy, improving product utilization, and reducing the appearance of clothing waste can greatly promote the sustainable development of the fashion industry and also contribute to global development. Furthermore, this paper's findings demonstrate academically the importance of the fashion industry in implementing sustainable practices and the benefits of promoting sustainable development, all of which have a positive impact on global development.

In addition, there are some deficiencies in the whole study of this paper, which are specifically reflected in the description and suggestions on economic feasibility being too few and too broad, and there is no accurate definition of circular economy. In future studies and research, this paper should deeply explore the impact of economic feasibility on sustainable development and make up for the defects in theory and practice.

References

- [1] Information on: <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/air-pollution.World>.
- [2] D, Candeloro. Towards Sustainable Fashion: The Role of Artificial Intelligence --- H&M, Stella McCartney, Farfetch, and Moosejaw: A Multiple Case Study. *ZoneModa Journal*, 10(2), (2020), 91–105.
- [3] S, Shabir. & N, AlBishri. Sustainable Retailing Performance of Zara during COVID-19 Pandemic. *Open Journal of Business and Management*, 9, (2021), 1013-1029.
- [4] S. M. Yoo and J. S. Lee, a Case Study of the Sustainable Practice in Luxury Brands. *Journal of Fashion Business*, 27(2), (2023), 88–107.
- [5] Information on: <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/mc/gv6hcp/>.
- [6] S. Yang, Y.F. Guo, Z.H. Wu, K.Y. Lin, T. Lin, Z.Y. Wang, Q, Zeng. Trial Manufacture and Application Prospects of Vegetable “Leather-Like” Composites [J]. *Leather Science and Engineering*, 33(4), (2023), 52-57.
- [7] K.T. Pang, H.M. Qian, L.Y. Shen. Corporate social responsibility, corporate reputation and corporate sustainable development capability study [J]. *Journal of Applied Mathematics*, 11 (10), (2022) 7086-7096.
- [8] D.J. Zhu. Sustainable Development Appeals for Cycle Economy [J]. *Science & Technology Review*, 16(9809), (1998), 39-42.
- [9] Information on: <https://www.stellamccartney.com/cn/zh/sustainabilitysustainability.html>.
- [10] Information on: <https://www.stellamccartney.com/cn/zh/sustainability/ circularity-2.html>.