

Beyond Fashion Consumption: Mapping the Functional Systems of the Psychologists In Socio-Environmental Issues of the Fashion Industry

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored and conceptualized the functional systems of industrial psychologist practice and its socio-environmental influence on entrepreneurs' adaption of sustainable business practices in the fashion industry. The exploration is informed by the observation that although research on socio-economic aspect of sustainability has gained prominence in the fashion industry, the socio-environmental dimension which is a vital part of sustainability has not yet been fully explored in the extant literature. Since the functional role of the industrial psychologist cannot be overlooked with regards to issues of socio-environmental discussion in any discourse, this paper reviewed and conceptualized such functional roles and its socio-environmental consequences on entrepreneurship activities in the fashion sector. It is posited that the application of cognitive psychological principles and conceptions is critical in orienting entrepreneurs' adaption of sustainable business practices in the fashion industry.

Keywords: Functional systems, Industrial psychologist, Entrepreneur, Socio-environmental consequence, Sustainable business practice, Fashion industry

INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry has evolved over the years, with present trends in technology, consumption habits and branding shaping the industry (Sahni and Chopra, 2020; Garcia, 2021). The fashion industry has embraced change, innovation and technology which has resulted in new products and fashion trends which consumers have come to love and appreciate. Consumer demands and modern trends in fashion also require innovative technology in order to satisfy the demands of modern consumers (Vătămănescu, 2021). Within most fashion houses, there are various professionals who work together to ensure that a fashion brand is able to satisfy the needs of its customers at a profit. Professionals such as designers, illustrators, production managers, operational leads and human resource officers are in charge of determining the strategies and tactics that are required to steer fashion houses towards their goals and objectives (Karpova et al., 2013). At the same time, other

experts such as marketers are tasked with promoting the end product of fashion to stimulate consumer demands (Jung et al., 2020). Consumers' desire for good designs, quality fashion items at low prices and exciting shopping experiences poses challenges for fashion entrepreneurs who need to understand the various threats facing the industry which may result in a possible doomsday scenario if the situation is not well managed (Gwilt and Rissanen, 2012). Whilst generating income and creating jobs worldwide, current patterns of unproductive ventures coupled with consumers constant changes in preference, as well as an environmentally unsustainable practices by actors within the field has had a detrimental effect on the environment. The industry in the past was known to be design-based and business-focused, but now it depends heavily on manipulative marketing techniques employed by advertisers to influence consumers buying behaviors. Though the fashion industry aims to target and exploit one end of society by encouraging high-spending behavior, it appears to also exploit another end of society through inhumane labour practices (Brydges et al., 2021). This dynamics necessitate the need to explore and conceptualize the functional system of the industrial psychologist practice and its socio-environmental influence on entrepreneurs' adaption of sustainable business practices in the fashion industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Industrial Psychologist, Fashion Entrepreneurship, Socio-Environmental Dynamics and Sustainable Business Practices

Psychology is the science that studies human behavior and mental processes (Bargh, 2007). It is a field that provides insight into human behavior. This implies that psychologists have the capacity and can be enabled to manage man's lasting actions and in-actions. In their training psychologists acquire the skills to apply psychological principles and theories to manage all manner of issues. This is relevant to the global fashion industry as psychologists play a key role in understanding triggers of consumer demand for fashion products, and also factors that can result in continual patronage. As practitioners, the services of psychologists are employed in care of people with mental issues. However, their domain transcends healthcare to issues of social concern (Manning, 2009). Little is known about other applied fields within psychology such as environmental psychology, cognitive psychology and fashion psychology. It is therefore critical to examine how psychological theories can be applied to stimulate behavior change in the fashion industry that promotes sustainable practices in the industry. In this stead, the following proposition (P) is posited.

P1: Sustainable business practices will have a significant positive effect on socio-environmental dynamics in the fashion industry.

According to Abdallah et al. (2012), sustainability refers to "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This definition is extensive in that it explains how living within limits of available physical/environment, social and economic rights can perpetuate existing resources for the benefits of the

immediate and future generation. In the past, issues such as sustainability and conditions of service for factory workers have reared its head in the fashion industry. This has led to global brands such as Nike facing scrutiny for its outsourcing practices which did not meet socio-environmental standards (Greenberg and Knight, 2004; Peretti and Micheletti, 2004). Hence, it is important to factor in sustainable fashion practices which include a range of business undertakings that seeks to manage a variety of perceived wrongs in the fashion industry which include employee victimization, animal cruelty and environmental damage (Lundblad and Davies, 2016).

Systemic Interaction Between Industrial Psychologist and Fashion Entrepreneur Informed by the Socio-Environmental Consequences of Fashion Consumption

The modern behavior of consumers has various implications and consequences for sustainability in the fashion industry. Consumers of the present age have a high demand for new and fast fashion, constantly demanding for innovations in fashion, without giving too much concern for the environmental effects. The issue of recycling in the fashion industry has been floated around, but not given much thought when it comes to practical implication. As such, the effects of fashion consumption on the social-environmental factors are profound. Consumers and workers within the fashion industry are all affected by various issues which are brought about by the trends in fashion consumption, and the negative effects it has on the environment and sustainability in general. There is a tight nexus between social and physical systems that influence each other. It is a known fact that human behavior, decisions and policies influence one's immediate environment and in turn the ecosystem also influences the decisions, actions and shapes policy docket. Recent research on fashion's activities and its influence on the environment and the social well-being of its workers has gained popularity in academia and public discussions (Liu et al., 2015; Turner et al., 2015). Despite the upsurge of interest in socio-environmental issues evident by an increasing number of publications. Missing in the scholarship are studies attempting to explain the impact of fashion on the social well-being of its workers. Embedded in most explanations is the over emphasis of environmentalism. With growing concern around the fashion industry's socio-environmental impact, the industry has come under intense scrutiny by researchers as well as stakeholders. Research on the industry's negative impact has largely focused on environmental consequences of the industry's activities; emission of greenhouse gases and secretion of harmful substances into water bodies which has a detrimental effect on the environment (Khan, 2019). Globally, ecologists and biodiversity experts have reported serious deterioration of the world's climate caused by the industry. Failure of fashion experts to recognize the negative impact of its activities on the social and psychological well-being on its workers (Avi and Kallur, 2021), leaves a lot to be desired. The social and psychological effect of the industry's practices is no means a new revelation (Wu and Li, 2019). The heightened concern stirred by evidence of social injustices have intensified labour exploitation, child labour, poor working

conditions, long hours of work and low wages has surged in recent years (Henninger et al., 2017; Salcedo-Sánchez et al., 2016). The social dangers of the fashion industry are as a result of demand for cheap, trendy garments which has resulted in fast fashion (a cheap business model), in which entrepreneurs are obliged to always find the cheapest medium and cut down on prices (Henninger et al., 2017; Salcedo-Sánchez et al., 2016) at the detriment of entrepreneurs and their workers. The dramatic increase in clothing consumption has been fueled by fast fashion, increased accessibility to fashion trends via online retailing and an increase in spending expenditure from a growing middle class and the youth (Amed et al. 2021). Unfortunately, fast fashion and excessive production has propagated a culture of excess supply over demand and a pattern of ‘one-time’ use of clothing. Consequently, this cycle propagates a phenomenon of quick disposal of unused clothes into landfills (Clark, 2008; Langdown, 2014), overabundance of fashion production, competition and theft of creative content. In this stead, the following proposition (P) is posited.

P2: Industrial psychologists’ principles will have a significant impact on sustainable business practices in the fashion industry.

In the middle of the struggle lies the entrepreneur who faces uncompromising set of pressure, precarity and constant need to invent and re-invent in order to stay abreast with a fast-paced production (Pike, 2017). Creatives in this industry are challenged in keeping a sense of balance and serenity, the difficulty of meeting deadlines (timing) and economic insistence. Another social issue generated by fashion is the huge concern of the younger generation about their appearance and zeal for an ‘ideal body type and appearance.’ Despite the existing challenges, extant research has overlooked the peculiar realities and difficulties facing the industry as the issues of the sector transcends environmental degradation (Avi and Kallur, 2021), to more pressing issues that has become a center of discussion across the sciences, politics, education, public health, fashion marketing scholarship, religion, spiritualism, among others. Nonetheless, none of these disciplines have been able to provide a comprehensive and lasting solution to the threatening menace of the industry. Neumayer and Joly (2021) and Bowker (2018) assert that the neglect of psychology in sustainable research is at the core of why the shift to sustainable practices have been slow and has probably failed. In this stead, the following proposition (P) is posited.

P3: Principles of industrial psychologist will have an impact on socio-environmental dynamics of the fashion industry.

Socio-environmental issues are a huge part of the fashion industry. It is therefore imperative to delve deeper into this space to determine the role psychologists can play in influencing fashion houses to adopt sustainable behaviors which enhance the image and reputation of fashion brands and appeal to environmentally friendly consumers. Psychologists play a crucial role in the fashion industry such as offering insights into consumer behavior, consumer preferences and product designs which can stimulate sales during the various seasons such as autumn, spring, summer and winter (Carter, 2011; Steg, 2015; Apaolaza et al., 2022). Even though owners of businesses profess sustainability concerns, their actual consumption behaviors poorly reflect

such responsibility (Chan and Wong, 2012; Joy et al., 2012; McNeil and Moore, 2015). Thus, this study offers a novel perspective which highlights the role psychologists can play in the field of fashion to educate consumers and workers in the fashion industry to become more conscious toward sustainable practices.

Systemic Interaction Between Industrial Psychologist and Fashion Entrepreneur on Sustainable Business Practices

Psychology of fashion represents a new sub-field of psychology that expounds the contribution of psychologists and promotes a transdisciplinary perspective (Mair, 2015). It expands the discussion on sustainability of fashion to include an attempt to improve the total well-being of actors within the fashion sector. Psychologists' contribution to sustainable practices in the fashion industry is a relatively recent topic. Psychologists are known to help brands become more diverse in the areas of design, thinking and communication (Mair, 2015). The specific focus on the use of psychological principles and methods to disentangle one of the world's leading polluters of the environment cannot be underestimated (Diale and Shammah, 2020). Theories of psychology and its practice have been applied to a wide range of fields including clinical, educational, counseling, forensic, occupational management and in research (Diale and Shammah, 2020). This include finding remedy for environmental and social issues of individuals in organizations by devising interventions and strategies that improve these problems. Psychologists have long been involved in environmental issues. Social and environmental issues are as a result of the feelings, thinking and actions of individuals. According to cognitive psychologists, the best way to solve problems is to tap into the mind of the person causing it. The focus of psychology is to create conditions that make sustainable behaviors most pleasing. Thus, to end unsustainable human practices in the industry, the role of the psychologists cannot be ignored. Entrepreneurs need to produce differently, and consumers need to buy differently, and psychologists can help both parties with behavior change (Mair, 2015). With rising consumer demands, shopping and increasing competition, psychologists are 'right' to understand all the neural activities that happen in the brain as well as the social processes that happen between people (Mair, 2015). in the demand and supply curve. Psychologists over the years have developed models that have helped in resolving socio-environmental issues in the fashion industry (Mair, 2015). Psychologists unlike fashion forecasters, rely heavily on gut feelings, intuition and consumer patterns of demand to predict future needs. This model over the years has failed woefully, as predictions based on feelings lack statistical rigor (Mair, 2015). Other disciplines have proposed business models including recycling, resale, rental, reuse, and repair as environmental lifesaving means (Moran et al., 2021). Unfortunately, all the supposed innovation and experimentation in the fashion industry over the past 25 years has been unsuccessful to lessen its planetary impact, a reminder to those who think that voluntary efforts can successfully address social and environmental challenges facing the industry. Pressure for unrelenting growth coupled with consumer demand

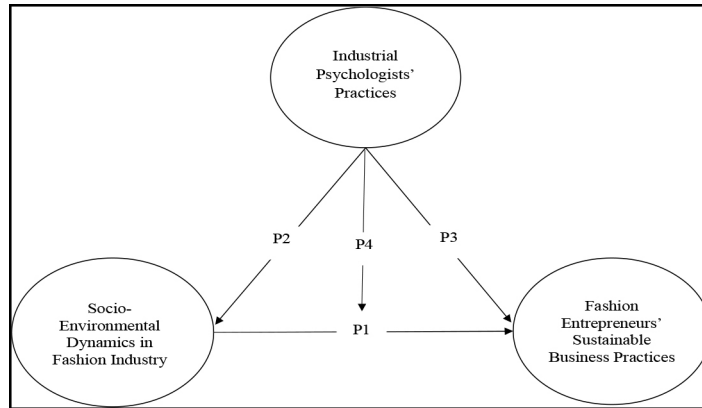


Figure 1: Proposed model highlighting the systemic interactive triad between the industrial psychologist, socio-environmental dynamics of entrepreneurs, and sustainable business practices in the fashion industry.

for cheap and fast fashion has greatly contributed to failure of sustainable practices. In this stead, the following proposition (P) is posited.

P4: Principles of industrial psychologists will influence the relationship between sustainable business practices and socio-environmental principles.

Proposed Model for Systemic Interaction Between Industrial Psychologist and Fashion Entrepreneur and Sustainable Business Practices

In the review above, four propositions were made relative to the systemic interaction between the industrial psychologist, entrepreneurs sustainable business practices and the socio-environmental dynamics in the fashion industry. Based on the four propositions, the framework shown in Fig. 1 below is conceptualized to modelize the systemic interactive triad between the industrial psychologist, entrepreneurs sustainable business practices and the socio-environmental dynamics in the fashion industry.

CONCLUSION

Emerging trends in fashion psychology indicates an over-representation of research focusing on the negative impact of the sector on the environment, while social pressure emanating from unsustainable practices have been left largely unexplored. The social and psychological impact of fashion on its workers and consumers has been underestimated, and this has contributed to limited inclusion of psychologists in the fashion industry. The presence of fashion psychologists empowered to push a sustainability agenda can result in a thriving fashion industry globally. This would further contribute to the provision of decent work, inspire creativity and stimulate sustainable practices within the industry. A number of strategies have been employed over the years to rectify environmental issues as sustainable fashion alternatives but many of these attempts have only scratched the surface of the issue rather

than address all the components. Fashion producers have adopted clothing materials that are more environmentally friendly. However, the sad truth is that all this experimentation and supposed models have failed to address the socio-environmental concerns challenging the industry as most of these strategies lack rigor in its application. This study has drawn attention to the possible roles and contribution of psychologists to the fashion industry, and concludes on the premise that to push the sustainability agenda in the fashion industry, the efforts and expertise of psychologists are paramount.

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