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## **Changes Must Happen in the Clothing Industry-the Transition Towards Carbon Neutral in Europe**

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### **Abstract**

Nowadays, the clothing industry is found to make big contributions to climate change, stepping the way towards carbon neutrality in Europe. Leading fashion companies are driven by the desire to make more money and tend to accelerate their product cycle to produce more unnecessary clothes, sell more clothes and make more profits. These strategies perfectly correspond to the nature of capital, which is to chase more money in endless time, being the easiest and the cheapest way to satisfy the growing profiting desire of these companies. Even if these companies have already made some efforts to be more sustainable, the effects remain unknown in the uncertain future. Those strategies that brought false prosperity to the clothing markets impacted the environment largely. From the perspective of consumers, they tend to buy new clothes instead of using old ones or buying second-hand products. Though more consumers started to buy products made from recycled materials, vintage or second-hand products, these consumption ways are still not mainstream. The reasons behind those options are comprehensive. It is believed that chasing profits, which is rooted in the depth of human nature accounts for part of it. Consumers tend to be attracted to cheaper products. However, regardless of the hard work, it is necessary to change the strategies of those leading clothing companies and consumers' thoughts towards buying clothes. So, thoughts of carbon neutrality can permeate into people's lives and thus gradually impact all kinds of lives. To tackle this problem, consumers should take the role of educating companies, and leading clothing companies should be clearer about the current situation and take real action.

**Keywords:** Carbon neutral; Europe; clothing industry; changes.

## **1. Current situations in european clothing industry**

### **1.1. Leading companies' marketing strategies are out of date**

Nowadays, leading companies are still using the old tricks of the last century to attract consumers to buy more clothes. That is to squeeze designers' last piece of creativity, accelerate the cycle of the new product and advertise to make consumers buy more unnecessary clothes. Those marketing strategies can be summarized into just one short

phrase, that is to create unnecessary needs. However, in the era of energy transition, the whole world is turning its energy mood from largely depending on coal and oil fuel to multiples of clear energies. The strategies based on the permitted huge waste and pollution can no longer exist anymore. Apparently, the old strategy is deemed to die with the old energy mood. The new shall be born in the doom towards carbon neutrality. Fighting climate change is a huge and difficult task for all the people on this beautiful green planet.

### **1.1.1. Reasons behind the situations**

It is believed that the strategies last for reasons. First, from the perspective of psychology, these strategies perfectly correspond to the nature of capital, which is to chase more money in endless time. Leading companies are driven by the desire to make more money. So they have to sell more products and make more profits. But, in a short term, in fact, according to the cult of thrift arising from human nature, people will not have new needs if they already have the things they need, and the things still perform very well. To encourage consumers to buy their products, companies tend to design new types of products, such as changing the color or the materials, launching co-branded styles, or changing other small details of the former products to encourage people to buy the new ones. Or companies can create fancy pictures of people who use these products. They say if you buy their amazing clothes, your life will be much better. Clothes thus change their nature from keeping warm to becoming the symbol of certain lifestyles. These are called Consumption Traps, the rebellion to the core of rational man that rescue people from the darkness of medieval. For a very long time, those arrogant companies have been trying to wipe out the truth, making people forget that they are the one and only people who can define their own value. Once the wrong thought is put into people's minds, the inertia is huge.

Second, from the perspective of realistic factors, those strategies are the easiest and the cheapest way to satisfy the growing profiting desire of the leading companies. Also, for those smaller companies that tend to follow the leading companies. Any type of truly eco-friendly product costs a huge amount of investment if companies still want to sell new products. And for all those years, they have spent too much money educating consumers that the new will be better, and their products represent certain types of lifestyles. Of course, many leading clothing companies such as H&M and Adidas have already launched many products that are made from recycled materials.

But does it make a real contribution to the transition of carbon neutrality in Europe? Can things made from recycled materials mean that they cost less energy and do less harm to the environment?

Sometimes, it is believed that those companies are playing some sorts of games of disguising replacements of concepts. Besides, many European leading clothing companies, except the luxury companies such as LVMH and Kering, have already transferred the highly polluting manufactories to Africa and Asia, which allowed them to escape environmental responsibilities to some extent. Even if these companies have already made some efforts to be more sustainable, the effects remain unknown in the uncertain future.

In conclusion, the cost of transformation is too much compared to the uncertain future for clothing companies.

### **1.1.2. Outcomes**

Those strategies that brought false prosperity to the clothing markets impacted the environment largely.

It produced large amounts of waste. Clothing manufacturing which produces kinds of toxic chemical waste usually sets their factories in developing countries. Those wastes are likely to get into the water, thus producing or worsening water pollution in these countries. Plus, workers exposed to those toxic and harmful substances are likely to get sick. And after these high-cost clothes come into the hands of consumers, they might only serve for a couple of seasons and end up being thrown away or lying on the bottom of the closet.

## **1.2. Consumers tend to buy more clothes instead of using the old ones**

Though more and more consumers have started to buy products made from recycled materials, vintage, or second-hand products, so far, these consumption ways are not mainstream. Many consumers, especially those in Asia who care about 'Feng Shui, insist on buying new ones rather than second-hand products. Will things be better in Europe? Regretfully, though many consumers prefer ethical purchases, considering the higher price of those products, the answer might be "No". And obviously, there are several more explanations for this phenomenon.

## **1.2.1. Reasons behind this phenomenon**

It is believed that chasing profits, which is rooted in the depth of human nature accounts for part of it. According to Bentham, people tend to pursue profits. Every human being, as long as he is a rational one, has the desire of owning more and new. This kind of desire might have existed since ancient times. Regarding safety, more and newer properties support the feeling of it. It supports not only physical security in the traditional sense but also in the social sense. This is proof of wealth growing, which can be called financial security. The basic need for security always stands in front of the need for self-actualization like fighting climate change and contributing to the transit toward carbon neutrality.

Another thing that accounts for this phenomenon is that consumers tend to be attracted by cheaper products. There are always many big signs like 'bargain' or 'on sale' hanging in conspicuous positions in a shopping mall or any type of shop. Consumers think that they bought the same products with less money, without realizing they are paying for illusions created by capitalists. Forget about the tricks of the prices, here, the question is, are they really getting a bargain or just getting excited the moment they see the price and creating a nonexistent need in an instant? Sometimes, it is easy for full consumers.

The most important thing is that the marketing strategies of those leading clothing companies are working right now. The worst is that it has been working for too long for consumers to remember that the nature of life is very simple, and basic living needs are easy to satisfy. Many options are created by companies, not rising from a sense of scarcity in life.

## **1.2.2. Outcomes**

Leading clothing companies spend huge amounts of money every year to study consumers' psychology. They knew consumers' needs and desires and designed tricks many years ago to make more money. These old marketing strategies brought companies huge profits. They might be stuck in their glory days as the transition from the petroleum industry to carbon neutralization would cost a lot. Besides, it produces too much waste. Tons of used clothes were placed in the bottom of people's closets or lying on dust heaps. Those clothes could be used in a more proper way. Though a lot more post-consumer recycled products appear in markets, the trends boost the prosperity of vintage clothes markets. The energy they have been saved still is far from wasted energy. And those clothes only take very small parts of useless clothes. Its function might not be as good as we thought.

Consumers lose their right to self-decision in these old marketing strategies. They have been fooled for too long.

## **2. How to tackle the questions in the clothing industry in Europe?**

### **2.1. Consumers take the role to educate companies**

Fast fashion is out, sustainable fashion is in. These trends appear on luxury stages in Paris, Milan, and New York. For example, Gucci changed its chief designer for more elegant and sustainable clothes. As the economy is still declining and consumers prefer more sustainable clothes to save money. This means that the change in consumers' psychology results in these changes. So, in this way, consumers should take positive ways to educate companies. As consumers, we should use our own voice and take our own moves to make clothing companies realize that markets would abandon those companies failing to satisfy consumers' elevated expectations.

#### **2.1.1. Educate the consumers in a new way**

The educators can be the consumers themselves. Consumers should change the way they think. Contributing towards carbon neutrality in Europe does not mean just buying more clothes made from recycled materials, but also means buying fewer clothes with high quantities that can be worn for a longer time. Also, wearing the same clothes for many years is not a shame but a medal. As it means you make the right choice of buying the right thing in good quantity, classical color, and pattern. And it proves your good taste, sense of your own style, and the good shape of your body. As we all know, keeping the shape of bodies is not that easy.

Furthermore, buying second-hand clothes is not a shame. It does not mean consumers' poverty. On the opposite, it shows that consumers have already stepped outside the zone that was drawn by those companies, starting to realize that good products can be the old ones placed in vintage or second-hand stores rather than in the new-arrival counters. Thoughts of recycling should sink into people's daily lives. Above all, this is a unique time – circularity touches on how people rethink design and implementation.

## 2.2. Leading companies should be clearer about the current situation

### 2.2.1. Policy in the European Union (“the EU”) is much tougher than we think

The Green Deal shows Europe's environmental ambition. Its goal can only be achieved through global cooperation. As climate change and biodiversity loss are global issues. They should not be limited by national borders. During the transition to carbon neutrality, the EU's neighbors and partners can be mobilized by its influence, expertise, and financial resources to join it on a sustainable path. Also, the EU will keep the leading role in international efforts and wants to build alliances with like-minded. Even when others are unwilling to act.

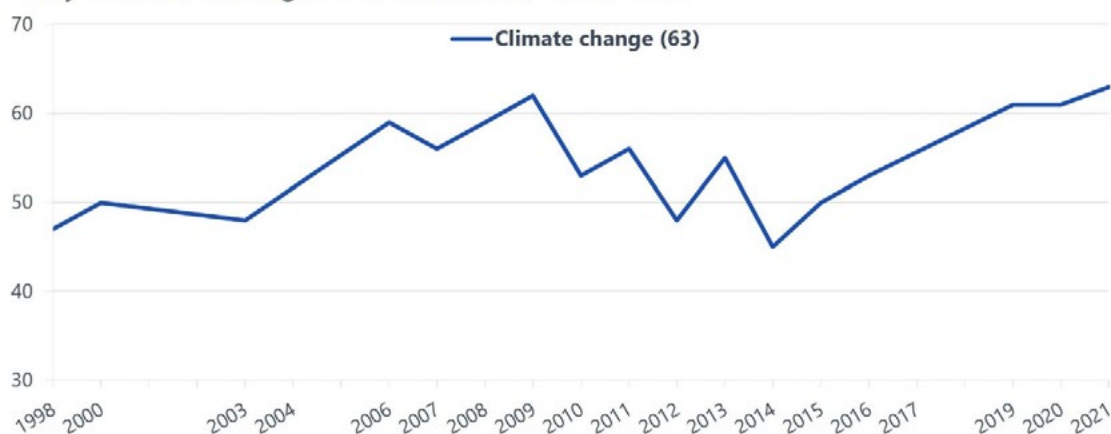
The war in Ukraine and the economic decline have been wiping out the industry in Europe and swab-offing the money which could be used in this transition. During the transition, Europe needs to maintain its security of supply and competitiveness. To deliver the European Green Deal, policies are needed to rethink for clean energy supply across the industry, production, and consumption. To achieve the three aims, the priority of increasing the value given to natural ecosystems protection and restoration, resources sustainable use, and human health improvement exists. Besides, COP 27 showed that the EU chose to take a tougher way though facing a serious energy crisis due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and epidemic the lasted for almost three years.

### 2.2.2. Consumers are paying more attention to climate change

In a research covering most of the European countries to investigate consumers' attitudes towards climate change, the results suggested that they are paying more attention through the years go by.

#### Seriousness of Climate Change

“Very Serious,” Average of 17 Countries,\* 1998–2021



\*Includes Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, Spain, Turkey, UK, and USA. Not asked in all countries in all years. Before 2019 this question was asked using an in-person and telephone methodology.

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Chart 1

According to the Healthy & Sustainable Living study, the researchers recorded heightened environmental consciousness in 2020, the first year of the pandemic, and it seems like that this shift has been locked in ever since (chart 1). Seventy-three percent of consumers globally agree that we need to reduce consumption to protect the

environment for future generations, while 52 percent say that their negative impact brings them guilt, similar to 2020 after a large increase compared to 2019 (chart 2).

### Environmental Attitudes "Strongly" and "Somewhat Agree," Average of 24 Markets,\* 2019–2021



\*Includes Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, UK, and USA

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Chart 2

The research also finds that across 24 markets surveyed in 2019 and 2021, there have been only marginal increases in sustainable behaviors over the past two years, despite remarkable increases in environmental consciousness, looking at a large range of sustainable behaviors in the areas of shopping, home energy use, mobility, and food.

This research also studies attitudes towards sustainability vary across countries. When looking at consumers who have either made significant changes to their purchasing behavior or completely changed their way of living to be more sustainable, Austria leads the way (42 percent), followed by Italy (41 percent), Spain (35 percent), and Germany (34 percent). As for the US, 22 percent of consumers indicate major changes to their behaviors, but that number jumps to 55 percent when including those who say they’ve at least made some modest changes. “Millennials and Gen Z are becoming a force to be reckoned with as they continue to represent a larger share of the consumer demographic. Companies that do not have sustainability as part of their core value proposition need to act now to protect against future reputational impacts and loss of market share,” said Shikha Jain, author of the study and Partner at Simon-Kucher & Partners. “We’ve been on this journey for a while, but the clock is ticking and failure to think through the implications could have long-term consequences for traditional firms.”

### 2.2.3. Companies should extend their product cycle

The policy and consumer’s preferable products are changing. Companies should adapt to it and change their strategies, not just in marketing, but also in product developments. This means that clothing companies should slow down the speed of launching new products to the market and extend their product cycle.

Of course, it does not mean that companies should decelerate innovations. They should balance innovations and the need to make the change towards carbon neutrality in Europe. And companies should avoid Greenwashing, which refers to a company’s practice of marketing green efforts but failing to share information on its business practices that are damaging to the environment.

## 3. Conclusion

The World Economic Forum’s own analysis puts nature’s value to the global economy at \$44 trillion – more than

half of the global GDP. With the business case clear, what more can clothing companies do to reverse nature loss and realize the promise of a nature-positive global economy? They can commit to protecting nature and natural systems by setting science-based targets for nature and ambitious greenhouse-gas emissions reductions. They can deliver on these commitments by protecting nature and natural systems in the landscapes where they operate, or from which they source commodities, by using tools and approaches such as the Accountability Framework, and importantly, through reshaping markets. And during this big energy transition, consumers should take their own responsibilities to change their old psychological and behavioral patterns and help to build a more environmentally friendly market. Further, clothing companies and consumers can call for an ambitious Paris-style global agreement for nature that helps secure a nature-positive world by 2030.

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