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Analysis of Sustainable Development Issues in the Fashion Industry

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Abstract

With the proposal of the goal of carbon peak and carbon neutrality, China's clothing industry has entered the sustainable development stage of industrial transformation and upgrading. The article analyzes the sustainable fashion development of the global clothing industry under the dual carbon goal from three aspects: the relationship between the dual carbon goal and the sustainable development of China's clothing industry, the meaning of sustainable fashion, the principles and concepts of sustainable fashion design, and the practices, difficulties, and paths of sustainable development of the global clothing industry. With the rapid development of the social economy, environmental pollution has become increasingly serious, and sustainable development has received widespread attention from all sectors of society. Faced with the serious environmental pollution problem in the fashion industry, many fashion companies are gradually applying the concept of sustainable development to supply chain operations.

Keywords: Climate change; carbon neutrality; policy recommendations; fashion industry.

1. Introduction

The Pollution Status of the Fashion Industry the fashion industry has always been one of the most polluting industries, with pollution levels second only to the petrochemical industry and ranking second globally. The fashion industry wastes a large amount of resources every time a piece of clothing is made, and improper recycling of clothing can also lead to secondary waste of resources. Especially in recent years, the rise of fast fashion brands has greatly increased the speed of clothing updates. Old clothes are quickly discarded, and discarded clothing takes 200 years to degrade, posing a huge burden on the environment. Although the fashion industry has brought great value, it still leads to serious environmental pollution and social issues.

1.1. The impact of environmental climate change

The impact of global warming and the COVID-19 has made people pay more attention to the relationship with the

surrounding environment, and the awareness of environmental protection has gradually increased. From 2023, Europe will be fully electrified. China has announced that it will achieve carbon peak in 2030 and carbon neutrality in 2060. Social development is also undergoing a comprehensive green transformation, including clean low-carbon, resource recycling, etc. The burning of waste clothing in the fashion industry will aggravate the greenhouse effect, which is not only detrimental to ecological stability, but also harmful to people themselves, and will increase the incidence rate of cardiovascular, cerebrovascular and respiratory diseases. The use and discharge of chemicals in the fashion industry can cause damage to both biology and the environment, leading to land pollution, water pollution, and air pollution, all of which ultimately have a direct impact on the living environment of humans. Based on this, the pressure of the fashion industry in various sectors of society. We are gradually emphasizing the impact on the environment and promoting the concept of sustainable fashion.

1.2. Differentiated needs of brands

With the exposure of pollution issues behind the fashion industry on social media, consumers have begun to enhance their awareness of sustainable consumption, and their liking for brands with severe waste and deep pollution has decreased. Therefore, some brands, in order to maintain and improve their brand image, have begun to introduce sustainable fashion concepts, develop and adopt sustainable fabrics, and plan brand sustainable development goals. Simultaneously promoting the concept of sustainable fashion can create a difference from traditional clothing brands and reduce the moral burden on consumers when consuming. Sustainability has become a survival solution for many brands in the fashion industry in differentiated competition.

2. Method

Fashion brands have always been one of the important sources of environmental pollution, and after disclosure by social media and environmental protection organizations, people's criticism of the fashion industry, especially the fast fashion industry, has intensified. In order to maintain brand image and regain consumer favor, various fashion brands have launched environmental slogans, adopted sustainable fabrics, sponsored public welfare undertakings, and improved worker benefits through a series of measures. But with the increasing awareness of environmental protection among consumers, some brands are also engaging in more and more "greenwashing" behavior. These brands often only contain a small amount of recyclable ingredients in their products, but publicly claim that their products meet sustainable development standards. However, general consumers are not careful about the specific ingredients when shopping, leading to being misled into placing orders. In addition, there are still many problems that need to be solved urgently in the path of sustainable fashion brands.

2.1. Sustainable marketing or leading to excessive consumption

Nowadays, sustainable fashion has become a differentiated survival solution for fashion brands, but some brands often promote their products through "degradable, recyclable, and renewable" aspects, hoping to win the favor of consumers. However, the principle that sustainable fashion should adhere to is to reduce waste. When fashion brands promote the sustainability of their products, they will correspondingly reduce the psychological burden and moral pressure on consumers, making them believe that purchasing the product is beneficial for environmental protection, but instead promoting consumption. This is not only detrimental to sustainable development, but also causes certain damage to the environment. The brand's promotion of "degradable and recyclable Recycling and recycling" require a certain amount of time and not 100% degradation and recycling, but brands often overlook the technical barriers, environmental limitations, and actual environmental footprint involved in the actual degradation and recycling process when promoting these, which are much larger than imagined. Over time, sustainable fashion will only become a marketing slogan and means for fashion brands, and cannot achieve true sustainable development.

2.2. Sustainable products with high prices and small audience

The biggest challenge faced by the sustainable development of the fashion industry is that adopting sustainable development measures usually means investing more costs in technological innovation to eliminate pollution, reduce emissions, increase worker wages, and improve working conditions. In other words, the required costs are higher. Therefore, within a certain period of time, the profitability of enterprises may decrease, so sustainable development transformation is not an easy task for enterprises. Brands, in order to maintain their own interests, price some sustainable products on the market at a higher price. However, most consumers are unwilling to pay more than the value of the products due to factors such as limited consumption levels or different consumption concepts, which hinders the circulation of sustainable products. It can be seen that sustainability is crucial for fashion brands challenging.

2.3. Difficulty in product recycling and utilization

Nowadays, consumerism is prevalent, and people are constantly pursuing a lifestyle that can meet their own consumption, while the consumption of fashionable products is often the choice of most consumers. The emergence of fast fashion meets people's desire for novelty and is in line with the concept of consumerism. Fast fashion clothing is usually presented to the public with first-class design, second-rate quality, and third-rate prices. More consumers do not have clear purchasing goals, but enjoy fashionable and affordable consumption experiences, thus purchasing a large number of fashion items. Continuous production and sales can bring huge profits to fashion companies, so companies constantly introduce new products and marketing methods to stimulate consumers' shopping desire. However, the quality of the product is at the middle and lower levels, resulting in huge waste. Many clothing items are thrown away after being worn several times, resulting in a high loss rate of used clothing fabrics and difficulties in large-scale recycling.

3. Results

3.1. Sustainable Development Status of Fashion Brands

With the increasing reduction of social resources and the current attention to sustainability from all sectors of society, various industries are starting to embark on a sustainable development path. The fashion industry has also launched various measures to reduce the consumption of resources and environmental damage caused by products. Some relatively niche brands themselves are positioned as green and sustainable, such as Rejuvenating Bank of Clothes and ICICLE Zhihe; Fast fashion giants such as ZARA and UNIQLO, which update their clothing products quickly, have also launched sustainable measures in order to regain the favor of consumers and establish brand image; Luxury brands are also continuously building their own green and sustainable brand image. The shaping of green clothing brand image can not only promote sustainable social and economic development, but also guarantee the long-term development of enterprises. The trend of green sustainability is becoming increasingly popular in the fashion industry. The trend is getting stronger.

3.2. Sustainable commitment of fashion brands

3.2.1. Sustainability of niche fashion brands

In a fiercely competitive market, many niche brands differentiate themselves from traditional mass brands by positioning themselves as sustainable and winning development opportunities. At present, niche fashion brands promote their sustainable stance from aspects such as brand philosophy, product materials, worker benefits, and brand influence. For example, the Swedish children's clothing brand Mini Rodini was founded by artist Cassandra Rodin in 2006, dedicated to creating children's clothing that is completely different from the existing market. In addition to emphasizing design and aesthetics, it also injects sustainable concepts into the brand's soul. In terms of materials

for children's wear, Mini Rodini mostly uses biodegradable environmental materials such as organic cotton, organic wool, modal, recycled polyester, etc. On the official website, each material section has a detailed introduction, and on the recycled polyester page, all materials listed for recycling have passed the GRS certification (global recycling standard). In addition, Mini Rodini has also released the "Mini Rodini Living Wage Plan" to ensure the rights and quality of life of factory workers. Mini Rodini promises that "our goal is to have a living wage for all of our sewing factories, not a minimum wage. Since 2014, Mini Rodini has released its sustainability report every year, showcasing the brand's commitment and achievements in sustainable work to consumers.

In recent years, with the increasing awareness of environmental protection among Chinese consumers, the number of sustainable fashion brands in China has gradually increased. For example, Zai Yi Bank - a sustainable fashion brand founded by independent designer and founder of the FAKE NATOO women's clothing brand Zhang Na in 2011. The original intention of the brand was not to focus on environmental protection, but to use design to connect the memories of the past, present, and future carried in old clothing. But Zai Yi Bank itself has a strong environmental gene, with three series of brands: "Zhong, Le, and Zai". Each series adopts sustainable methods and principles. Starting from the selection of materials, it is necessary to evaluate whether there will be pollution to the environment and excessive energy consumption. Zai Yi Bank promises to be a brand that fully adheres to sustainable fashion, while niche brands such as Zai Yi Bank and Mini Rodini that are based on sustainable fashion include ICICLE Zhihe, FoDays, Da Yi Yan, REVERB, Abasi Rosborough, Patagonia, and others.

3.2.2. Sustainability of fast fashion brands

The main measure taken by fast fashion brands is to accurately identify the latest trends when they appear, and introduce relevant clothing styles. They design clothing as quickly as possible and sell it at a lower price, while maintaining first-class design. The core principles of second rate quality and third rate price are based in the market. However, with the exposure of social media on the huge pollution and energy consumption issues behind fast fashion, it has become less glamorous and has been condemned by various sectors of society.

According to data from consulting firm McKinsey, the global clothing industry manufactures 100 billion pieces of clothing annually, accounting for 10% of the global carbon emissions caused by clothing manufacturing. In the face of difficulties, the fast fashion industry quickly proposed sustainable solutions. In July 2019 Zara's parent company, Inditex Group, announced that 100% of the products of all brands including Zara, Pull&Bear, and Massimo Dutti will be made of sustainable fabrics by 2025. All brand stores will be equipped with old clothing recycling devices, and the group will use these materials and innovative technologies to remake clothing and put it into the market. In April 2022, UNIQLO released the 2022 Sustainable Development Report, which described the sustainable development policy of Fast Retailing Group and promoted the spread of the brand concept that "LifeWear suits life" represents "sustainability". Global Retail Apparel Leader Gap.

4. Discussion

4.1. Sustainable development solutions for fashion brands

Actively assume social responsibility and eliminate the phenomenon of "greenwashing". Fashion brands should actively take on the social responsibility of protecting the environment and saving resources, and strive to integrate sustainable concepts into the entire process of fashion product selection, production, and circulation. Starting from the material selection stage, it is necessary to consider whether the material is sustainable, minimize the harm to nature, and implement the concept of sustainability in subsequent treatment, striving to achieve maximum sustainability. When promoting products, it is important to comprehensively introduce product information and refuse to use sustainable fashion as a gimmick or marketing to change one's brand image. To achieve a green and healthy environment from the inside out, rather than "drifting green", allowing consumers to pay for unnecessary greenery.

4.2. Increase investment in technology research and development, seek sustainable new fabrics

Du Yijia, the manager of the Sustainable Fashion Laboratory, said in an interview: “The rapidly changing innovative technology has become the driving force and key technology for innovation in the fashion industry. The relationship between technology and fashion is inseparable and mutually successful. Fashion, as a carrier, has always demonstrated technological innovation, and technology will in turn affect various aspects of the fashion industry such as design and retail. The most important aspect of sustainable fashion is the research and development of technology. Currently, many technologies are applied to search for new fabrics and improve the service life of clothing fabrics. The application of some biological fibers requires high technical requirements and requires continuous investment from brands.

4.3. Develop efficient recycling plans to improve resource utilization

The recycling of old clothing and textiles has existed since ancient times, especially in times of material scarcity, where people would maximize the effectiveness of their use, whether in Western countries or China during World War II. But with the stability of society and the improvement of people’s living standards, people have begun to enter the consumption era. After a large amount of waste textiles lose their use value, they cannot be effectively recycled, and most of them are buried or burned, seriously polluting the social environment.

The recycling of waste textiles is a major project that requires the joint efforts of relevant government agencies, consumers, and fashion brands. For fashion brands, establishing a recycling mechanism for branded products is a more effective method. Since 2006, UNIQLO, the world’s third largest fast fashion brand, has achieved remarkable results in recycling old clothes of its own brands through the “full commodity recycling activity”, and has realized a closed-loop recycling system of production sales consumption recycling recycling. This move can effectively practice sustainable fashion and is worth learning from by other fashion brands. For fashion brands, redesigning after recycling is an effective way to revitalize recycled products, including secondary design, upgrading and reuse, redesign, and regenerative design. The redesign concept has gradually been recognized by fast fashion brands, independent designer brands, as well as young artists and fashion enthusiasts, and has been put into practice, which is of great significance for the development of sustainable fashion.

Sustainable fashion has become an inevitable choice of the times. If the Earth is not green and the future is not sustainable, then fashion will inevitably disappear. Therefore, taking the path of fashion sustainability is not only the social responsibility of fashion brands, but also the path of self-help. But the sustainability of fashion requires active participation in every aspect of society, and consumers need to raise their awareness of sustainable ethics and reduce unnecessary consumption; Environmental protection agencies should play a supervisory role; Fashion brands also need to bear social responsibility, adhere to the sustainable path of fashion, and make a difference. Although enormous waste and pollution have already occurred, actively taking effective measures to restore the status quo can reduce losses and promote sustainable progress. The above brief overview of the current status of sustainable fashion is hoped to provide some inspiration for the development of domestic fashion brands.

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