

# Augmenting sustainable fashion on Instagram.

MARCELLA-HOOD, M.

2023

# Augmenting Sustainable Fashion on Instagram

Madeleine Marcella-Hood

School of Creative and Cultural Business, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen AB10 7QE, UK; m.marcella-hood@rgu.ac.uk

**Abstract:** Media discourse surrounding fashion and sustainability tends to be negative, emphasising the problems that exist across the various stages of the lifecycle of a garment. Although consumers are increasingly aware of at least some of the issues surrounding fashion and the environment, research suggests that the scale and complexity of the problem causes them to feel detached and uncertain about how to adapt their own behaviour in response. This research positions Instagram as a digital media platform through which sustainable fashion is communicated and experienced through augmented fashion content. Instagram is recognised for its significant impact on visual culture, particularly within aesthetic sectors such as fashion. Recent research reveals that users have begun engaging in more serious subjects and debates on Instagram, including political, social, and environmental issues. This has brought about opportunities for new voices who are championing sustainable fashion in its variety of manifestations. An open qualitative analysis was carried out using the hashtag #SustainableFashion to uncover themes relating to the types of content, stakeholders, and mechanisms that are being used to augment sustainable fashion on Instagram. The findings reveal a positive community of content creators—including vintage enthusiasts, designers, makers and brands—who are using the hashtag regularly to share proactive content in the form of specific, targeted messages around sustainable fashion solutions. The aim was to uncover the discussions that are taking place right now and provide grounding for future work in this area.

**Keywords:** augmented; fashion; Instagram; sustainability; sustainable; social; media

**Citation:** Marcella-Hood, M. Augmenting Sustainable Fashion on Instagram. *Sustainability* **2023**, *15*, 3609. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15043609>

Academic Editor: Lisa McNeill

Received: 13 January 2023

Revised: 7 February 2023

Accepted: 14 February 2023

Published: 15 February 2023



**Copyright:** © 2023 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

“Progress not perfection” was a popular mantra in 2022 that evolved from the famous Winston Churchill quote “perfection is the enemy of progress” (11 October 1952). Today, this quote is appropriated for a range of societal issues and dilemmas, often relating to self-development and wellbeing (e.g., physical and mental health), but also behavioural choices such as the adoption of sustainable shopping habits.

Media discourse surrounding fashion and the environment tends to focus on the negative, emphasising the problems that exist across the various stages of the lifecycle of a garment [1,2]. Although consumers are increasingly aware of at least some of the issues, research suggests that the scale and complexity of the problem can lead to detachment and uncertainty around how to adapt our own behaviour in response [3]. However, in the last year, there has been a shift in fashion media coverage towards exploring some of the sustainable solutions that exist, e.g., in *Vogue* [4] and *Marie Claire* [5].

Although environmental concern over the fashion industry began around the 1960s [6], the past decade has seen heightened awareness of the need for a more sustainable future for fashion—certainly amongst those with knowledge about the industry and how it operates. A turning point for the sector was the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013, which raised awareness of working conditions associated with major fashion brands and global supply chains [7]. That same year saw a rise in campaigns and initiatives designed to inform and engage consumers on the topic of sustainable fashion; for example, Fashion Revolution is a group consisting of fashion industry insiders who campaign to raise awareness of

environmental issues and provoke change [8], stating “we are the people who wear the clothes and we are the people who make them” [9]. This inclusive messaging is perhaps particularly important in engaging people and provoking mindset and lifestyle shifts in relation to complex and problematic societal issues, such as the promotion of sustainability in all aspects of fashion.

The COVID-19 pandemic saw a further increase in discussions around sustainability generally [10], as well as a heightened awareness of some of the ethical issues surrounding fashion and the environment. For example, in 2020, the “Clean Clothes Campaign” called out global fashion brands to honour garment factory workers’ wages, which gained traction online using the hashtag #PayYourWorkers [11]. This has resulted in increased media attention, consumer awareness, and academic interest in the area; for example, McMaster et al. [12] and Sarma et al. [13] explored the sustainability of global fashion supply chains and Pelikánová et al. [14] explored corporate communication surrounding sustainability and what they described as a “slowing down” of the fashion system more generally during the pandemic.

In 2016, Henninger [6] (p.411) concluded that “there [was] no one way of defining what sustainable fashion entails”. In 2022, the term “sustainable fashion” appeared to be just as difficult to define absolutely as it was appropriated as an umbrella for the plethora of associated terms relating to ethics in the fashion industry, which includes slow fashion, fair trade, etc. [15]. In 2019, Mukendi et al. [15] carried out a meta-narrative analysis of literature in the area of sustainable fashion and proposed what they described as a “working definition” (p. 2877):

*SF includes the variety of means by which a fashion item or behaviour could be perceived to be more sustainable, including (but not limited to) environmental, social, slow fashion, reuse, recycling, cruelty-free and anti-consumption and production practices.*

Indeed, to this day, sustainable fashion is quite often positioned simply as being the opposite of fast fashion. It is impossible for companies operating within the fashion sector today to overlook issues of sustainability, even if only to negate widespread impressions that they are unethical. As a result, an increasing number of brands have emerged with sustainability at their core and existing companies and brands are in the process of transitioning towards becoming more sustainable. Scepticism around the authenticity of fashion brands’ claims around sustainability continue [16], but there is increasing pressure towards a more genuine shift in business practice amongst existing companies and brands.

The current research explores sustainable fashion as a concept, focusing specifically on how it is conveyed through augmented fashion content on Instagram. The findings contribute to the contemporary understanding of how sustainable fashion is defined and communicated, evolving from the people who are actively championing this online using Instagram.

#### *Instagram as a Platform for Augmenting Fashion*

This research adopts a general definition of augmentation, in line with the Cambridge Dictionary [17], which is “to increase the size or value of... (in this case sustainable fashion) by adding something to it”. Today, it can reasonably be argued that a significant part of the fashion industry is communicated and acted out online, through influential digital platforms such as Instagram [18]. These platforms became increasingly significant in providing a window to the outside world during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, when people were being asked to stay indoors. The pandemic also saw the rise of new platforms, such as TikTok, which continues to have a significant influence on trends, particularly amongst younger consumers [19].

The current research positions Instagram as a platform where sustainable fashion is produced, promoted, and experienced through fashion content. Instagram is recognised for its now decade-long impact on visual culture, particularly within aesthetic sectors,

such as fashion, where it has had a significant impact [20]. Instagram users may include commercial and non-commercial content creators, which comprise global omni-channel fashion brands, such as Chanel, and small independent businesses who operate entirely through the platform. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, Instagram serves as a suitable and useful example field through which to explore this phenomenon.

It has been argued by fashion scholars that digital media (firstly blogs, then platforms such as Instagram) have democratised the fashion industry by giving a voice to real people, enabling debate and discussion, and awarding consumers some control over the fashion agenda [21–23]. Fashion bloggers/Instagrammers are acknowledged to have a significant influence over consumer behaviour, particularly relating to fashion, and there is some new evidence that they are significant in leading sustainable fashion behaviour [24]. However, many of these individuals lack the credentials of a traditional fashion critic and gatekeeper, in that they may not possess a more formal knowledge or experience of the industry [25]. Therefore, although originally celebrated for their impartiality and perceived objectivity as fashion critics, bloggers-turned-influencers (now often known as content creators) have attracted increasing negative attention recently due to heightened commercialisation and promotion of fast fashion brands [26–28]. Words such as credibility, authenticity, and trust tend to be used in discussions regarding these individuals, definitions of which are difficult to pin down absolutely.

The turning point appears linked to both the increased visibility of commercial arrangements between influencers and brands, but also television shows, such as *Love Island*, where contestants are set up as overnight celebrities on Instagram, attracting thousands of followers and gaining sponsorship deals, often with fast fashion brands. Molly-Mae Hague is acknowledged as one of the most successful *Love Island* contestants; she has over 6.8 million Instagram followers and was made UK Creative Director for fast fashion brand *PrettyLittleThing* in 2021—a decision that was met with mixed responses from both fashion industry experts and consumers [29]. Interestingly, *Love Island* was at the forefront of sustainable fashion discussions again in 2022 when the show aired with *eBay* as its new sponsor and sparked interest in second-hand clothing searches amongst consumers [30]. *Love Island* is inextricably linked with Instagram and both are recognised as highly influential towards younger consumers in the UK, and so this shift away from fast fashion, whether authentic or not, is perhaps reflective of a wider recognition of the problems surrounding fashion and the environment [31].

Since 2019, there has been increased attention from academics towards the topics of social media and sustainable fashion [32–34], much of which references Instagram. Perhaps the most relevant to the current study is Milanesi et al.'s [35] research, which sought to analyse the images posted on Instagram by sustainable fashion companies. The authors looked specifically at the brands *Patagonia* and *Stella McCartney* (early pioneers of ethical/sustainable fashion) and found that *Patagonia* was using more nature-related imagery and highlighting lifestyle aspects of the brand, whereas *Stella McCartney*'s images were generally more focused towards fashion. They also found that content highlighting sustainable aspects were the most successful in generating high levels of engagement. However, they emphasise that it is important for fashion brands to convey not only the environmental aspects of sustainability but other ethical dimensions. Milanesi et al.'s research was quantitative and their findings illustrated some of the variety of ways in which sustainable fashion is conveyed from the perspectives of brands. The current study takes research in another direction by exploring sustainable fashion discourse more broadly across the variety of Instagram users who are contributing to the discussion to uncover other stakeholders and the ways in which they are shaping these conversations.

Recent research reveals that users of digital platforms, such as Instagram, have begun engaging in more “serious” subjects and debates, including political, social, and environmental issues [36]. This has brought about opportunities for new voices who are championing sustainable fashion in its variety of manifestations. The current research aims to explore the landscape of sustainable fashion discourse and agency on Instagram by

uncovering the stakeholders who are championing this and the types of content they are producing. It seeks to consider themes relating to the types and nature of the content that is produced by those who are engaging publicly in discussions around sustainable fashion. The following research questions were identified: (1) Which aspects of sustainable fashion are being augmented through Instagram? (2) Who are the stakeholders augmenting sustainable fashion on Instagram? (3) How are these stakeholders augmenting sustainable fashion using Instagram? It has already been acknowledged that there are issues of credibility and trust relating to online content creation and the current research does not seek to explore the accuracy of the content that is being produced. The purpose of the current work was to evolve theory around how sustainable fashion is being conveyed on visual platforms such as Instagram in a more open manner than has previously been attempted, where existing research has tended to focus on particular perspectives, e.g., sustainable brands [35].

## 2. Materials and Methods

As the two topic dimensions (augmented fashion and sustainable fashion) are new and evolving areas of research, the current study was designed to be open and exploratory. The purpose of this research was to explore the discussions that are currently happening on Instagram around sustainability in an open and objective manner to identify themes and ideas that can be investigated further in future work. A solid grounding of how sustainability is communicated online is currently lacking and there are a number of useful ways in which this could be researched further. This article aims to provide that grounding and a key contribution of the work is a set of recommendations for future research, which are presented in the Conclusion. It is a valuable exercise to explore the phenomenon at a time where sustainable fashion initiatives are still new and evolving, to help understand future pathways for fashion but also to observe human behaviour in relation to these and the power of visual social media platforms to progress key issues. An interpretivist approach was adopted, using an inductive qualitative method and grounded theory analysis, where the purpose was to generate data and build theory from the findings [37]. An open approach to collecting and analysing the data was employed, where a themed set of categories relating to each research question was produced.

In October 2022, when the primary data were collected, there were more than 16.5 million posts attributed to the hashtag #SustainableFashion on Instagram [38]. Given the volume of content associated with the hashtag, this was used as a sample population for the study. As this was an exploratory piece of research, the posts were checked manually and organised into themes relating to each research question. In keeping with the grounded theory approach [37], a two-step process of analysis was conducted, whereby codes were constructed from the data and, subsequently, the data were examined to evolve the theory. The analysis of images already in the public domain, which are being promoted and are, therefore, easily discoverable through a hashtag, avoids ethical issues surrounding consent. It is also in keeping with the purpose of the study, which sought to discover how sustainable fashion is being augmented on Instagram without making assumptions. The images themselves are not reproduced in this article, as consent to replicate was not sought from their creators due to the large number of posts involved. Future research might seek to explore specific themes in more detail, for example, through discussion with their producers and audiences. This would provide insights into people's feelings and motivations. Content and textual analysis are common forms of primary data collection when carrying out research in the areas of communication [3,14], particularly in relation to social media [26] and fashion [35].

Data collection involved the researcher scrolling through the #SustainableFashion hashtag over a period of one week to collect themes relating to the research questions. The data collection stopped at the point where data became saturated and no new themes were emerging in an obvious way. Collecting the data over a short period of time in a structured manner helped address issues relating to the Instagram algorithm. In line with Strauss

and Corbin [37], the themes and theories to be examined were not predetermined but emerged from the data. This meant that some unexpected theoretical concepts were uncovered, particularly in relation to RQ3, and where this occurred further literature was sought, e.g., nostalgia. As the research was qualitative and aimed to explore the hashtag in an open manner, the research findings are not generalisable and representative of every possible theme or idea that exists or may emerge in the future. However, they provide a useful grounding that does not exist at present and upon which future work can be built.

The second step in the methodological process was to analyse the data in more depth. From the themes that were generated in the data collection process relating to RQ1 and RQ2, three images were selected and analysed further for their denoted and connoted meanings [39]. This resulted in a corpus of 33 posts, which formed the data set for qualitative textual analysis using Barthes' semiotic approach [39]. Table 1 illustrates the sequential manner in which the analysis was carried out, where each post (comprising at least one image and written caption) was taken through this process. Each image was coded and then these codes were summarised descriptively to form the basis of the findings that are presented within this article. Themes relating to RQ3 were identified via a macro analysis and grouped into categories; these are discussed further in Section 3.3.

**Table 1.** Textual analysis.

Denoted meaning	Barthes describes this as the first level of meaning—the literal meaning that is immediately obvious to a viewer
Connoted meaning	Barthes describes this as the second level of meaning—suggested or symbolic meanings including ideas and feelings
Contextual meaning	Contextual parameters within which the post can be interpreted and understood, i.e., Instagram and sustainable fashion

The aim of this analysis was not to generalise but rather to explore the questions openly and generate findings that are illustrative of how sustainable fashion is being augmented on Instagram. The findings provide a conceptual picture of the landscape of how these discussions are being shaped online. As the study is exploratory, the intent was not to test the reliability of the content being produced but to map out the types of posts, stakeholders and mechanisms through which sustainable fashion is being promoted.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Table 2 presents the themes that were uncovered in conducting this research and which will be explored further in the discussion that follows.

**Table 2.** Research themes.

RQ1: Which aspects of sustainable fashion are being augmented through Instagram?	RQ2: Who are the stakeholders augmenting sustainable fashion on Instagram?	RQ3: How are these stakeholders augmenting sustainable fashion using Instagram?
The imperative	Educational accounts	Consistency
News	Vintage enthusiasts	Story telling
Sustainable brands and products	Thrifiers and second-hand consumers	Nostalgia
Vintage fashion	Sustainable designers and makers	Co-creation
Upcycling	Sustainable brands	Inclusivity
Sub-genres of fashion		Positivity

Table 3 presents a condensed example of the descriptive narratives that were produced for each post during the qualitative analysis. Only one image from each theme is included in the table for illustrative purposes.

**Table 3.** Condensed illustration of qualitative analysis.

RQ1: Which aspects of sustainable fashion are being augmented through Instagram?	
The imperative	<p>Denoted: A photograph of a garment factory with text overlay stating “reasons why [named fast fashion brand] is the devil”</p> <p>Connoted: This photograph connotes fast fashion’s association with unethical supply chains, poor working conditions, unfair pay, and calls this out as unacceptable. Positioning this brand as “the devil” connotes the idea that they represent the very worst example of all that is wrong with fast fashion.</p> <p>Context: The named brand is a global online retailer that is recognised as an extreme example of fast fashion and cheap clothing production. The post is shared by an informational account and is designed to educate followers about unethical business practice and presumably encourage consumers to boycott fast fashion. The combination of photography and text aligns visually with other content produced by this account, where a consistent font style is used.</p>
News	<p>Denoted: A photograph of a man sitting at a desk, pen poised and looking directly at the camera/audience. The words “breaking news: Patagonia founder gives away company to fight climate change” appear as text overlay.</p> <p>Connoted: This photograph connotes the reproduction of a current news story. The “breaking news” headline is attention grabbing and the man’s pose and gaze suggest action and invite the viewer to engage. Whilst the background setting of the image is homely and relaxed, the man looks serious. The named brand, individual founder, and headline are the signifiers in this post.</p> <p>Context: The brand is known and recognised in this context as a sustainable fashion brand [35]. The caption reveals the story around its founder gifting his company to the Earth, in what could be considered an act of generous philanthropy and a rejection of capitalist motivations and aspirations for the business. This story had been shared numerous times across the data set during the period of data collection (by individual users, sustainable brands, etc.), but in this particular example is being shared by a sustainable lifestyle account that describes itself as “the home of sustainability”. Its purpose appears to be to inform its followers on how to live more sustainably across a variety of topics from fashion to food. Its motivation towards sharing this story is likely to be to further engage followers on the topic of sustainability, but also to establish itself as a key source of current news. The account applies a consistent aesthetic across its posts, which are not exclusively fashion-related but always relate to sustainable topics. Much of the content offers specific tips and advice.</p>
Sustainable brands and products	<p>Denoted: A photograph of a fashion garment modelled by a young woman.</p>

	<p>Connoted: The garment and model are at the forefront of the image and can be considered the main signifiers. The background is an indoor winter-garden setting with visible cacti and foliage. The model poses in a way that draws attention to the garment. She looks directly at the camera, engaging the viewer. This could be considered an aspirational image in that the styling of the garment and model appears intentional and formal. Although the image alone connotes fashion more so than any obvious message about sustainability, the background foliage combined with the use of sustainable fashion hashtags reminds the viewer of earth and nature as driving factors of sustainability.</p> <p>Context: The denoted brand describes itself specifically as “slow fashion” and is based in Madrid, Spain. The brand produces and sells new garments in a particular and consistent style that does not appear to be trend-led, e.g., ethnic influences are referenced and cited, such as a Japanese kimono-style design. The account is curated using a consistent design aesthetic, alternating between fashion photographs and interesting, attractive locations. The prominence of physical place aligns with the idea of slow fashion.</p>
Vintage fashion	<p>Denoted: A still-life photograph denoting five long women’s dresses hanging on a rail underneath a shelf with a plate and vases of dried flowers.</p> <p>Connoted: The image represents an “edit” (i.e., curated selection) of five dresses, which have been selected from a wider group of garments. The dresses are positioned in a pattern of complementary colours, prints, and fabrics in earthy natural tones—green, brown and cream. The dresses coordinate in that they are all of a similar style and length. The post is shared by a vintage retailer who presumably is attempting to engage customers. The accompanying post is long and personal, telling/reminding followers that this is part of a regular “edit” and encouraging them to engage with future upcoming content. More information about the dresses is indicated using hashtags, e.g., #70sstyle, #70sdress, and #prairiedress. The garments as a set are the signifiers and this is reinforced by the accompanying captions. The positioning of the shelf and objects is intentional and in keeping with the 1970s, e.g., dried grass.</p> <p>Context: The account is a vintage retailer that specialises in women’s dresses and produces consistent content, e.g., weekly edits and product and lifestyle posts. A similar colour scheme is used in posts and many of the images are styled carefully in ways similar to the current example.</p>
Upcycling	<p>Denoted: A brown and beige hooded top with a duck motif is photographed on a hanger, against a background of a weathered wooden fence.</p> <p>Connoted: The garment is constructed in a patchwork design, which is suggestive of the fact it is handmade by the poster. The garment is the signifier in the image as there are no other objects visible and the background is unremarkable, perhaps adding further to the homemade, casual tone of the post. There is no</p>



	<p>attempt to complement or distract from the garment with additional styling elements. The photograph is part of a carousel of images, where additional photographs reveal further details by showing the garment from different angles. The caption provides further information about the materials used and sizing, alerting the viewer to the fact that it can be purchased.</p> <p>Context: The post is shared by a designer who makes clothing using vintage material, e.g., this particular piece was made using fabric from an old beach towel, a textile which is used in a number of other designs that are shared by the user. Designs and posts follow a consistent style and the particular styles and patterns that are used have a familiar and retro/nostalgic feel.</p>
Sub-genres of fashion	<p>Denoted: A photograph of children’s clothing styled into an entire outfit, and laid out flat on a surface with a text overlay naming the business/store.</p> <p>Connoted: The garment and store are the key signifiers within this image. The clothing is colourful and a selection of prints are positioned together, i.e., hedgehog, rainbow, and hearts—all of which individually have connotations of nature, kindness, love, compassion, etc. The address of the store is included, which promotes the call to action to visit. The garments are new but are advertised as using organic cotton as a more environmentally friendly material.</p> <p>Context: This is a promotional image, which presumably aims to attract customers, encouraging people to visit the shop and buy the products. It is in keeping with other posts on the feed, all of which feature similar styles of children’s clothing. The feed alternates between close-up shots, such as the current example, and further away pictures of the store.</p>
RQ2: Who are the stakeholders augmenting sustainable fashion on Instagram?	<p>Denoted: A graphic image containing an illustrated squirrel on a yellow background with the words “progress is making gradual steps forward” and a logo.</p> <p>Connoted: This image connotes the idea of progress in relation to sustainable fashion. The squirrel represents the significance of small but continuous effort and work, and the sunshine yellow background suggests warmth and positivity. The logo for this account appears on the image suggesting ownership over the creative and intellectual output, i.e., the illustration and the message. The squirrel illustration is retro in style, connoting nostalgia but also nature and the environment.</p> <p>Context: The account comprises a consistent set of imagery that always contains typography and usually retro/vintage illustrations in an array of vibrant colours. This account could be described as educational/informational, with the apparent aim of educating followers about issues of sustainability and ethics relating to fashion. The account appears professional in its approach and promotes a podcast on this same subject. The messages are proactive but often very specific and targeted at particular audiences. The messages are inclusive, using the words “we”, “us”, etc.</p>

Vintage enthusiasts	<p>Denoted: A photograph of a woman sitting on a garden bench looking at the camera.</p> <p>Connoted: The woman is wearing an interesting and unique ensemble (turtle-neck jumper, frilly prairie-style dress, suit jacket, lace-up ankle boots, visible frilly socks, bowler hat). She is further adorned with beaded necklaces, large earrings, broaches and badges, and wears large round glasses. The style is recognisable as “maximalist” and eclectic, i.e., with lots of layers, prints/textures and accessories teamed together in a way that looks thrown together but might actually be carefully curated. Her legs are crossed and her hands are clasped in what could be described as a dignified pose. The woman is the key signifier but her style is a focal aspect on the post as her whole outfit is visible and details are further revealed in a carousel of additional images, with detailed close up shots of the clothing from a variety of angles. More information about the vintage garments and 1970s style is revealed in the caption, including the fact that she adapted/up-cycled parts of this herself. The post is long and written in a personal manner, suggesting her and her followers are on a journey together and that she has shared a lot with them in the past. Additional hashtags, such as #sewoverageism and #styleatanyage, reveal further personal details about the wearer. Although she is alone in the photograph, she is not alone in real life as someone is taking her photo.</p> <p>Context: This poster can be described as a vintage enthusiast/up-cycler who uses the platform as a personal style journal. Her posts almost always involve a picture of herself and this post represents a signature style of photography where she is sitting on an iron bench in what appears to be a cobbled yard with some greenery spilling from pots in the background. Her personal style is consistent across her feed but she is often also pictured out and about in indoor and outdoor settings, often with historic aspects, e.g., cobbles, walls, antiques, etc. Someone is taking her photo but they do not appear on the feed.</p>
Thrifters and second-hand consumers	<p>Denoted: A photograph of a woman sitting on a doorstep posing and looking down at her clothing.</p> <p>Connoted: The woman’s pose connotes clothing as the main signifier. The top of her face is not pictured in the image. The outfit is bold in colour but casual, consisting of light-wash jeans, a bright-red top and black-patent boots. The caption further highlights the outfit as a focal point of the post, revealing the wearer’s love of second-hand clothing and her thrill/enjoyment when shopping for this.</p> <p>Context: The poster’s profile is a documentary of her personal style and most of the content could be described as fashion-related, with some lifestyle aspects. She describes herself as a “charity shop fiend”, which emphasises this user’s sustained enthusiasm.</p>
Sustainable designers and makers	<p>Denoted: A photograph of a man’s torso wearing a hoody picturing a popular cartoon character.</p>

---

Connoted: The hoody is the focal point of the image and the obvious signifier. The wearer's head is not visible in the photograph. The cartoon emblem is retro in style, which will have nostalgic resonance as well as current appeal to audiences. The garment appears handmade and has been repurposed, although there is no information about the origins of the original material that was used to construct it. The caption gives more information about sizing and the call to action is to "grab it tomorrow at 8pm". This is all suggestive of a loyal audience who are being reminded of this information rather than being told for the first time.

Context: The purpose of the account appears to be business orientated but personalised to an individual rather than a company or brand identity. The post alludes to a weekly "drop" of new items, which is a recognised scarcity marketing technique within the fashion industry, in particular amongst niche streetwear brands. The profile consists entirely of garment posts, all of which are upcycled and most of which include vintage/retro cartoons. These appear gender neutral but are often advertised using a men's sizing classification. Sometimes the garments are photographed in flat lay style format but mostly they are photographed on someone, and the face of the wearer is almost never shown. Occasionally the individual poster is pictured on the feed.

---

Denoted: A photograph of a bag.

Connoted: The photograph is high-resolution and camera quality, which suggests a professional approach. The product is a utilitarian style bag in mint-green colour, shown against a corresponding (rather than contrasting) background; the styling of the image suggests that design software has been used to create the background colour and, therefore, the photo has likely been taken in a studio. The bag is the signifier as there are no other objects or distractions within the photo. The product is branded with the company's logo, which is clearly visible and stands out as a grey patch on the bag. The caption is descriptive and highlights further product attributes, particularly relating to sustainability using hashtags including #recycledfashion and #sustainablewiconicbag.

Sustainable brands

Context: The profile is that of a brand, which specialises in one concept product in a variety of colours. The profile is colourful (e.g., pinks, greens, blues, yellows, oranges) and engaging, using a combination of graphics and illustrations. The profile feed comprises close-up product shots against plain backgrounds and more vibrant shots with lifestyle details including people and illustrations. The purpose of the account appears to be mostly promotional, designed to attract new customers and engage with existing customers.

---

### 3.1. Which Aspects of Sustainable Fashion Are Being Augmented through Instagram?

The findings reveal that a range of topics and ideas relating to sustainable fashion are being augmented through Instagram, which reflects the idea that sustainable fashion is used as a broad definition for a variety of ideas, activities, and initiatives [6,15].

The imperative (i.e., pressing need to engage with ethical issues relating to fashion) emphasises the problems surrounding fashion and the environment and/or the importance of engaging with sustainable fashion. Sometimes this was highlighted in a general manner but often it was more specific and related to particular aspects of the problem (e.g., fast fashion brands named and shamed for greenwashing and the dangers of plastic-based fibres) or the solution (e.g., buying fewer garments, seeking sustainable solutions, and making small behavioural changes). These kinds of posts generally contain an image of something fashion-related (e.g., a garment being made) and typography (i.e., graphically designed text that has been added to an image) conveying the message. These posts are often presented as a carousel of images, where more information about the problem and/or solutions are revealed as the user swipes through the images; this appears to be a commonly used technique where the main image (which is immediately visible) contains the headline and the user needs to swipe actively through the image set to reveal the full message. In these types of posts, more information about the problem and/or solutions is also frequently included as part of the accompanying caption.

Sustainable fashion news was also a key theme in the findings. The timing of this research coincides with the Patagonia founder, Yvon Chouinard, gifting his company to the Earth [40], and this featured strongly in the posts that appeared under the #SustainableFashion hashtag. This suggests that Instagram is being used to augment big news stories, where the producer can add their own commentary; in this case the Patagonia story was being reshared and commented upon in a congratulatory manner.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, sustainable fashion brands and products were being promoted through the hashtag. However, what is more surprising is that these were not even more prevalent in the data. This might be indicative of a genuine shift in mindset, where users of the sustainable fashion hashtag recognise that to encourage excessive consumption of fashion garments and products (even if the garment is produced in a more sustainable manner) could shift the fast fashion problem onto sustainable brands. Where sustainable fashion brands and products were presented, the garment (e.g., clothing, accessory, etc.) was the focal point of the image—often photographed in still-life or as part of a more stylised photoshoot.

In relation to sustainable brands, often the content was consumer-driven, i.e., an individual consumer sharing a sustainable fashion garment or product as part of their own Instagram feed. In these instances, the brand was usually signalled through a clickable tag and within the caption of the post. In these examples, the individual was promoting the brand and also identifying themselves as a sustainable fashion consumer. This could be seen as virtue signaling, as the user who is posting that brand may not normally shop sustainably, in a similar manner to that where fashion brands may make exaggerated claims about sustainability [6,16]. The current study did not set out to prove or disprove such claims, to test the credibility of content, or to assess the underlying motivations of Instagram users. However, the findings suggest that whilst some might be engaging in sustainable fashion discussions in a one-off and possibly superficial manner, many are using the hashtag more frequently, signifying sustainability as a more authentic lifecycle choice.

Vintage fashion was a strong feature of the hashtag and not only vintage fashion retail, but also more general messaging around vintage and the ways in which to procure and shop for second-hand clothing sustainably. There seemed to be some recognition that not everyone enjoys or finds this process easy and so content containing tips for how to do so successfully and responsibly were offered. Charity shop retail is something that has incurred some criticism over the past few years, where these stores are often used as a means for consumers to alleviate guilt associated with buying new garments and where

it is now known that many items end up in landfill eventually in any case [41]. Some posts referenced these critiques and encouraged audiences to purchase from charity shops and not to be put off buying fast-fashion garments that are often found in charity shops.

Upcycled garments or upcycling as a solution to the fast fashion problem is another way through which sustainable fashion is being augmented on Instagram in a compelling manner. Some of the producers of that content signalled that they themselves had learned to sew using social media. Some had built this into a small business and were selling garments, while others appeared to be hobbyists who hoped to inspire others in the way they themselves had been inspired.

Sub-genres of fashion were also uncovered as a theme and these included childrenswear, knitwear and accessories.

### 3.2. Who Are the Stakeholders Augmenting Sustainable Fashion on Instagram?

Previous research suggests Instagram content that signals sustainability would be engaged with and trusted by followers [35,36]. Perhaps, therefore, it is surprising but also reassuring that the hashtag contains a significant lack of fast fashion brands and so there was no obvious evidence of greenwashing, which is so frequently associated with sustainable fashion communication [6,16].

In recent years the idea of being an influencer has been linked most strongly with sponsored content and encouraging people to overconsume, to the extent that the idea of a fashion influencer, in the more widely associated definition of the term, contrasts oppositely with sustainable fashion. Therefore, in this context, the use of the term “influencer” becomes potentially quite problematic. However, it could reasonably be argued that all the stakeholders who were identified during this analysis and who commentate publicly using the hashtag are influencers in a more literal sense of the term. Users of the sustainable fashion hashtag appear to be interested in promoting a shift in the consumer mindset, lifestyle, and behaviour, rather than promoting specific garments and brands by, for example, focusing on minimalism, thrifting, and so on. Educational accounts, vintage enthusiasts, thrifters and second-hand consumers, sustainable designers and makers, and sustainable brands were all found to be frequent users of the hashtag.

Educational accounts uncovered in the current research can be defined as those that produce specific messages and information relating to aspects of sustainable fashion, where the sole purpose appears to be to inform other users. Sometimes these accounts were attributed to a single author and other times they assumed a corporate identity. Often these were linked to other media outside of Instagram, such as podcasts, perhaps to signal credibility and expertise. Personal and relatable language and biographical descriptions are often used by these accounts; for example, one individual referred to herself as “the Elle Woods of the Slow Fashion Movement”; this use of intertextuality relates to the 2001 movie *Legally Blonde* and signifies this commentator as a trailblazer and somewhat unlikely observer. Another referred to their profile as “mindful media for the thoughtful living”, placing significance on their followers. These educational accounts target messages towards a variety of audiences, including fashion consumers, brands, teachers, and academics.

Vintage enthusiasts were a significant group of users in terms of their number. Their posts tend to stand out as vibrant and colourful. They position themselves as unique or quirky, often through describing themselves in interesting ways; for example, one described herself as a “wearer of big frocks”, while another presented himself as “drifting into the Edwardian”.

“Thrifters” and second-hand consumers are also frequent users of the hashtag, but these individuals do not tend to profess expertise or knowledge about their garments and instead appear to enjoy the process of shopping second-hand. One, for example, described herself as a “charity shop fiend”.

The sustainable designers and makers that were identified tend to use vintage fabrics and materials as part of their designs, for example, upcycling old, damaged, and

discarded clothing into new styles. Some of these individuals run small businesses and others are hobbyists. Most share and sell clothing as a finished artefact, but some share and sell sustainable materials, for example, sewing patterns and wool that is naturally dyed. A range of creative output was uncovered and styles tended to be unique and individual; for example, one maker sold upcycled clothing incorporating retro cartoon characters. There were some more trend-focused examples, such as with one maker who focused on sportswear, specifically upcycling branded clothing. The latter example raises some interesting questions about the use of logos in the upcycling process and issues of intellectual property, which are outwith the scope of this project but another avenue for future research in this area.

Sustainable brands selling new products and garments are not a particularly dominant group of users of the hashtag, but some stakeholders with a more corporate identity were uncovered. Normally these brands focus on a core concept garment or accessory that is produced ethically, for example concept bags made from recycled plastic or ethical sneakers made from non-toxic natural ingredients.

The output from designers and makers (which tended to be more individual and unique, but often used a consistent element such as design aesthetic or sustainable material) versus bigger brands and companies (who had set up an outwardly corporate brand identity and tended to focus on a more simple aesthetic) demonstrates how sustainable fashion can be individual and unique, trend-led and also classic, catering to potentially diverse target audiences and addressing a number of critical issues and questions relating to the future of fashion.

The follower count varies for these users of the sustainable fashion hashtag, but most are at the nano or micro level of influence with up to 50,000 followers [42], and many are on the lower end of that spectrum. The individual stakeholders were based across a broad range of geographic locations, including the UK, US, India, Australia, Finland, Germany, and Tokyo. It should be noted that some countries are restricted in their use of platforms such as Instagram and, therefore, would not be represented in the analysis. Further research would be needed involving different platforms to investigate how sustainable fashion is augmented across a broader range of geographic settings.

There is some cross-over between the stakeholder groups that have been identified and many individuals fall into more than one category, e.g., an individual could be a maker/designer/retailer/influencer and a consumer. Some users had more than one account and signalled these within their biographies. Many of the stakeholders who contribute to the #SustainableFashion hashtag appear to be doing so frequently, which suggests that they are engaging with sustainability in a meaningful and authentic way.

### *3.3. How Are These Stakeholders Augmenting Sustainable Fashion Using Instagram?*

As with other profiles on Instagram, users tend to adopt a *consistent* aesthetic that is recognisable to them as an individual or company. Almost all the posts that were uncovered during the research contained entirely original imagery rather than reproduced imagery of something or someone else, apart from fashion news such as the Patagonia example. Those stakeholders from the vintage enthusiast and designer/maker categories regularly feature themselves personally; for example, using the self as a model or mannequin dressed in a sustainable garment and highlighting aspects of the garment itself as the key signifier, or out and about dressed sustainably in a lifestyle setting and narrating aspects of their experience.

Storytelling is a common feature of brand communication on Instagram; in fact, much of Instagram's early success within the luxury fashion sector was attributed to its storytelling mechanisms [43]. This is due to the way in which profiles can be curated and viewed, but also through more recent behind-the-scenes functions such as Instagram Stories, where users can share additional content that is available to their followers for 24 hours. Humanised content is regarded as instrumental in the success of social media more generally [44], and this was evident in some of the storytelling mechanisms that were

uncovered in the analysis. Sustainable fashion brands, for example, tended to draw on the people behind the brands, emphasising values such as family and belonging, using photographs and video content to visualise these experiences. Often, these stories were revealed within the caption of a post or in additional images as part of a carousel. Sometimes, reels were used to show back-stage aspects, such as studios and workshops. Other times, they were used to showcase physical places, e.g., landscapes. These stories tended to include intertextual references, suggesting they had developed over time and that the audience had been involved in this journey and understood these references.

Another way that sustainable fashion was being augmented on the platform was through nostalgia. The use of what could be described as nostalgia-evoking content was uncovered, e.g., the use of retro cultural references, icons and artefacts, humour, and in the styling or design of graphics and imagery. Nostalgia is recognised as one of the most attractive features of Instagram as a platform [45]. It can evoke different feelings for different people, but within this context it might connote feelings of familiarity and comfort, which is perhaps particularly engaging when applied to a complex and contested real-world problem such as sustainable fashion [46]. Sustainable fashion has some obvious aspects that connote nostalgia, such as vintage and second-hand retail. However, the use of nostalgia as a communication mechanism was not exclusive to these types of content, where, for example, educational accounts used nostalgia in the styling of their imagery and applied this across a range of content, which included current, up-to-date statistics and information.

Those who engage with the hashtag on Instagram could be considered part of a virtual community who are co-creating and augmenting sustainable fashion. Obvious examples of co-creation were uncovered, with, for example, makers and brands seeking direct design input in the colour and pattern of new creations. However, co-creation as a theme was also revealed in more subtle ways; for example, consumers' promotion of sustainable fashion brands, and the cross-over of roles within the community, where a user of the hashtag might be a designer, influencer, and a consumer. Co-creation is another recognised benefit of social media communication [47] and one that has been linked with community and place [48].

A sense of involvement and inclusivity was noted across the variety of stakeholder groups who are augmenting sustainable fashion. Even those who appeared most knowledgeable on the subject used relatable language such as "we" and "us", showing that they themselves were still learning and positioning themselves on an even footing with their followers. Their sensitivity towards the complexities surrounding sustainable fashion comes back to the idea of progress over perfection.

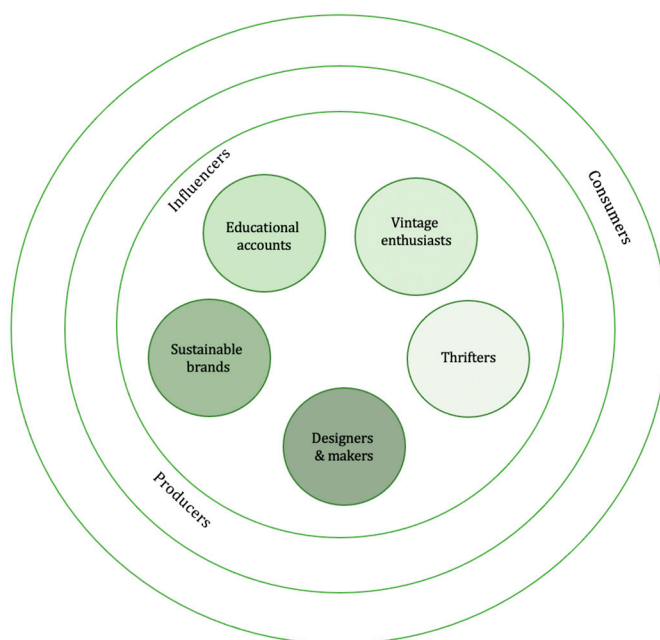
One of the most significant overarching themes in the findings is that of positivity and hopefulness. This is at odds with how sustainable fashion and environmental issues are projected by traditional media, where it sometimes feels like it is too late for action to have much impact. On Instagram the often very specific messages relating to sustainable fashion tend to be pro-active and helpful. Although there is some exposure of the problems, the focus is very much towards the solutions.

#### 4. Conclusions

The range of content and variety of stakeholders—and the cross-over of roles within the identified groups—suggests that the sustainable fashion community on Instagram is enthusiastic and highly engaged. This is not a particularly commercialised area, and the findings illustrate a shift towards a different definition of influencer within this context, moving away from the more problematic practices with which fashion influencers have become associated. An organic movement of sustainable fashion commentators appears to have emerged on Instagram, which is reminiscent of early discourse around the first wave of independent fashion bloggers that emerged in the early 2000s on platforms such as Wordpress and Blogger [22,25]. The sustainable fashion movement on Instagram, as demonstrated through this analysis, is an international effort, and those creating content

and sharing it using the hashtag appear engaged and passionate. They seem to be aware of the power of social media platforms, such as Instagram, and are using their influence to develop targeted messages for a range of audience types. The credibility of information and opinion on the platform remains an issue and something that future researchers should keep in mind. However, the purpose of the current research was not to assess the accuracy of the content or those who created it, but rather to explore very openly the nature of the discussion and uncover the types of people who are shaping this.

Within the identified stakeholder groups there is a crossover of roles, where users of the hashtag could be argued to fall into three broad categories: (1) influencers of consumer behaviour; (2) producers of sustainable fashion—whether designing and manufacturing tangible garments, curating vintage retail, or creating content; and (3) fashion consumers—something that many acknowledge at the forefront of the content they produce. Figure 1 presents a visual typography which illustrates the stakeholder groups and the crossover of roles relating to their position on sustainable fashion.



**Figure 1.** Typography of sustainable fashion commentators on Instagram.

The findings show that there are a number of ways in which sustainable fashion is being augmented on Instagram and evidence of what might be seen as more traditional communication tactics. The nature of the messaging is clear and helpful and messages are often targeted towards quite specific audiences. The prevalence of positive content and inclusive messaging, which fosters a “we’re-all-in-this-together” attitude, are reassuring and engaging in this context. Social media platforms increasingly face criticism for their negative effects on users’ self-esteem and for their damaging impact on society, but the types of content and creators that were uncovered in this study highlight more positive benefits and effects of these platforms.

Sustainable fashion is a broad topic that is evolving rapidly. There are aspects of the debate, such as fashion ethics generally [49] and the garment lifecycle specifically [50], which could provide specific direction for future research in this area, for example, around how these particular issues are communicated on visual platforms such as Instagram.

This exploratory research illustrates some of the ways in which discussions around sustainable fashion are being shaped and future research should involve talking directly to some of these stakeholder groups about their motivations and experiences. Future work might also seek to analyse some of the more specific hashtags relating to sustainable fashion on Instagram, which could reveal the intricacies of what is going on within particular



communities or geographic contexts. Another productive area for research would be to explore the impact of positive versus negative messages on an audience in terms of how these impact beliefs and future plans in relation to sustainability.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** Data used for this project were collected through an open analysis of the hashtag #SustainableFashion on Instagram in October 2022. Posts were analysed qualitatively and the themes that were generated are presented within the Discussion section of this paper.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

1. BBC. Fashion's Dirty Secrets. 2018. Available online: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0bn6034> (accessed on 2 June 2019).
2. Greenpeace. The UK's Fast Fashion Habit Is Getting Worse and It's Destroying the Planet. 2022. Available online: [https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/the-uks-fast-fashion-habit-is-getting-worse-and-its-destroying-the-planet/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwkOqZBhDNARIsAACsbfIA7w59DKpgFYZplw6SL2UvRKTRw2kmY03npavHG0FOYdWQdWq1pzI-aAkg-EALw\\_wcB](https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/the-uks-fast-fashion-habit-is-getting-worse-and-its-destroying-the-planet/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwkOqZBhDNARIsAACsbfIA7w59DKpgFYZplw6SL2UvRKTRw2kmY03npavHG0FOYdWQdWq1pzI-aAkg-EALw_wcB) (accessed on 3 October 2022).
3. Evans, S.; Peirson-Smith, A. The sustainability word challenge: Exploring consumer interpretations of frequently used words to promote sustainable fashion brand behaviours and imagery. *J. Fashion Mark. Manag.* **2018**, *22*, 252–269.
4. Chan, E. 16 Things Everyone Should Know about Sustainable Fashion. *Vogue*, 2022. Available online: <https://www.vogue.co.uk/fashion/article/sustainable-fashion> (accessed on 3 October 2022).
5. Goldstone, P. The Best Online Vintage Clothing Stores to Shop More Sustainably This Autumn. *Marie Claire* 2022. Available online: <https://www.marieclaire.co.uk/fashion/best-online-vintage-stores-128388> (accessed on 3 October 2022).
6. Henninger, C.E. What is sustainable fashion? *J. Fashion Mark. Manag.* **2016**, *20*, 400–416.
7. Fairtrade International. Eight Years Later: From Rana Plaza to a Sustainable FASHION future. 2021. Available online: <https://www.fairtrade.net/news/eight-years-later-from-rana-plaza-to-a-sustainable-fashion-future> (accessed on 3 October 2022).
8. British Fashion Council, Fashion and Environment. 2019. Available online: <https://www.britishfashioncouncil.co.uk/uploads/files/1/NEW%20Fashion%20and%20Environment%20White%20Paper.pdf> (accessed on 3 October 2022).
9. Fashion Revolution, *About*, 2022, available online: <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/about/> (accessed on 1 September 2022).
10. Hakovirta, M.; Denuwara, N. How COVID-19 redefines the concept of sustainability. *Sustainability* **2022**, *12*, 3727. <https://doi.org/>
11. Byrne, A. The Clean Clothes Campaign Launches “Pay Your Workers”. *Fashion United* 2020. Available online: <https://fashionunited.uk/news/business/the-clean-clothes-campaign-launches-pay-your-workers/2020092851099> (accessed on 8 September 2022).
12. McMaster, M.; Nettleton, C.; Tom, C.; Xu, B.; Cao, C.; Qiao, P. Risk management: Rethinking fashion supply chain management for multinational corporations in light of the COVID-19 outbreak. *J. Risk Financ. Manag.* **2020**, *13*, 173.
13. Sarma, P.R.S.; Kumar, A.; Choudhary, N.A.; Mangla, S.K. Modelling resilient fashion retail supply chain strategies to mitigate the COVID-19 impact. *Int. J. Logist. Manag.* **2021**, ahead-of-print. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJLM-03-2021-0170>.
14. Pelikánová, R.M.; Němečková, T.; MacGregor, R.K. CSR statements in international and Czech luxury fashion industry at the onset and during the COVID-19 pandemic—Slowing down the fast fashion business? *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 3715.
15. Mukendi, A. et al. Sustainable fashion: Current and future research directions. *Eur. J. Mark.* **2019**, *54*, 2873–2909.
16. Adamkiewicz, J.; Kochańska, E.; Adamkiewicz, I. and Łukasik, R. Greenwashing and sustainable fashion industry. *Curr. Opin. Green Sustain. Chem.* **2022**, *38*, 100710.
17. Cambridge Dictionary. *Augment*. 2022. Available online: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/augment> (accessed on 8 September 2022).
18. Moatti, V.; Abecassis-Moedas, C. How Instagram Became the Natural Showcase for the Fashion World. *Independent* 2018., Available online: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/features/instagram-fashion-industry-digital-technology-a8412156.html> (accessed on 3 October 2022).
19. Hoffower, H. 4 Gen Z Fashion Trends Revived on TikTok in Response to the Pandemic. *Insider*, 2022. Available online: <https://www.businessinsider.com/gen-z-fashion-trends-y2k-indie-sleaze-old-money-twee-2022-1?r=US&IR=T> (accessed on 3 October 2022).
20. Ahmed, O. How Instagram transformed the fashion industry. *i-D Magazine*, 2021. Available online: <https://i-d.vice.com/en/article/bj9nkz/how-instagram-transformed-the-fashion-industry> (accessed on 3 October 2022).
21. Allen, C. Style surfing: Changing parameters of fashion communication—Where have they gone? In Proceedings of the 1st global conference: Fashion exploring critical issues, Mansfield College, Oxford, UK, 25–27 September 2009.

22. Rocamora, A. Personal fashion blogs: Screens and mirrors of digital self-portraits. *Fash. Theory* **2011**, *15*, 407–424.
23. Abidin, C. Visibility labour: Engaging with influencers' fashion brands and #OOTD advertorial campaigns on Instagram. *Media Int. Aust.* **2016**, *161*, 86–100.
24. Zhang, B.; Zhang, Y.; Zhou, P. Consumer attitude towards sustainability of fast fashion products in the UK. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 1646.
25. Rocamora, A. Hypertextuality and remediation in the fashion media. *J. Pract.* **2011**, *6*, 407–424.
26. Horton, K. Just use what you have: Ethical fashion discourse and the feminisation of responsibility. *Aust. Fem. Stud.* **2019**, *33*, 515–529.
27. Hoose, F.; Rosenbohm, S. Tension between autonomy and dependency: Insights into platform work of professional (video) bloggers. *Work Glob. Econ.* **2022**, *2*, 88–108.
28. Lee, S.S.; Johnson, B.K. Are they being authentic? The effects of self-disclosure and message sidedness on sponsored post effectiveness. *Int. J. Advert.* **2022**, *41*, 30–53.
29. Ng, K. Shoppers take to TikTok to complain about Molly-Mae Hague's PrettyLittleThing line. *Independent*, 2021. Available online: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/prettylittlething-molly-mae-hague-tiktok-b1914235.html> (accessed on 3 October 2022).
30. Douglass, R. eBay's Love Island collaboration causes surge in pre-loved popularity. *Fashion United*, 2022. Available online: <https://fashionunited.uk/news/culture/ebay-s-love-island-collaboration-causes-surge-in-pre-loved-popularity/2022071164035> (accessed on 3 October 2022).
31. Marroncelli, R. Love Island ditches fast fashion: How reality celebrities influence young shoppers' habits. *The Conversation*, 2022, available online: <https://theconversation.com/love-island-ditches-fast-fashion-how-reality-celebrities-influence-young-shoppers-habits-183771> (accessed on 4 October 2022).
32. McKeown, C.; Shearer, L. Taking sustainable fashion mainstream: Social media and the institutional celebrity entrepreneur. *J. Consum. Behav.* **2019**, *18*, 406–414.
33. Salem, S.F.; Alanadoly, A.B. Personality traits and social media as drivers of word-of-mouth towards sustainable fashion. *J. Fash. Mark. Manag. Int. J.* **2020**, *25*, 24–44.
34. Testa, D.S.; Bakhshian, S.; Eike, R. Engaging consumers with sustainable fashion on Instagram. *J. Fash. Mark. Manag. Int. J.* **2021**, *25*, 569–584. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jfmm-11-2019-0266>.
35. Milanese, M.; Kyrdoda, Y.; Runfola, A. How do you depict sustainability? An analysis of images posted on Instagram by sustainable fashion companies. *J. Glob. Fash. Mark.* **2022**, *13*, 101–115.
36. Marcella-Hood, M.; Marcella, R. Purposive and non-purposive information behaviour on Instagram. *J. Librariansh. Inf. Sci.* **2022**, online first. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09610006221097974>.
37. Strauss, A.M.; Corbin, J. *Grounded Theory in Practice*; SAGE Publications Ltd.: Southend Oaks, CA, USA, 1997.
38. Instagram. #SustainableFashion. 2022. Available online: <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/sustainablefashion/> (accessed on 30 October 2022).
39. Barthes, R. *Image/Music/Text*; Editions du Seuil: Paris, France, 1957.
40. Patagonia. Earth Is Now Our Only Stakeholder. 2022. Available online: <https://eu.patagonia.com/gb/en/ownership/> (accessed on 2 November 2022).
41. Textile Consult. Why Donating Your Unwanted Clothes Isn't Always the Sustainable Solution. 2019. Available online: <https://www.textileconsult.co.uk/2019/04/12/why-donating-your-unwanted-clothes-isnt-always-the-sustainable-solution/> (accessed on 3 November 2022).
42. Ehlers, K. Micro-Influencers: When Smaller Is Better. *Forbes*, 2021. available online: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2021/06/02/micro-influencers-when-smaller-is-better/?sh=109846b4539b> (accessed on 2 November 2022).
43. Lim, H.; Childs, M.L. Brand Storytelling on Instagram: How Do Pictures Travel to Millennial Consumers' Minds? In *International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference Proceedings*; Iowa State University Digital Press: Ames, IA, USA, 2016; p. 73.
44. Picard, R. The humanisation of media? Social media and reformation of communication. *Commun. Res. Pract.* **2015**, *1*, 32–41.
45. Chopra-Gant, M. Pictures or it Didn't happen: Photo-nostalgia, iPhoneography and the representation of everyday life. *Photogr. Cult.* **2016**, *9*, 121–133.
46. Cuervo, H.; Cook, J. Formations of belonging in Australia: The role of nostalgia in experiences of time and place. *Popul. Space Place* **2019**, *25*, 2214.
47. Cassinger, C.; Thelander, Å. Co-creation constrained: Exploring gazes of the destination on Instagram. In *The Routledge Companion to Media and Tourism*; Månsson, M.; Buchmann, A.; Cassinger, C.; Eskilsson, L. Eds.; Routledge: Oxford, UK, 2020; pp. 165–175.
48. Kádár, B.; Klaniczay, J. Branding Built Heritage through Cultural Urban Festivals: An Instagram Analysis Related to Sustainable Co-Creation, in Budapest. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 5020.
49. Thomas, S. *Fashion Ethics*; Routledge: London, UK, 2017.
50. Bedat, M. *Unravelling: The Life and Death of a Garment*; Penguin: New York City, USA, 2021.

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.