

Stories that we wear

Storytelling as a tool for communicating fashion sustainability and raising consumers' awareness in terms of sustainable fashion

MORNING TO
MAKE HIS
WAY TO THE
GARMENT
FACTORY.
WHEN HE
WORKS, IT
WILL BE DARK
WHEN HE
ARRIVES AND
DARK WHEN
HE LEAVES.
HE DRESSES
LIGHTLY
BECAUSE THE
TEMPERATURE
OF THE ROOM
HE WORKS IN
REACHES 30
DEGREES. THE
DUST IN THE
ROOM FILLS
HIS NOSE AND
MOUTH. HE
WILL MAKE
LESS THAN
A DOLLAR.
FOR A DAY
SPENT
SLOWLY
SUFFOCATING
A MASK
WOULD COST
THE COMPANY
TEN CENTS.

THE LABEL
DOESN'T TELL
THE WHOLE

MA Thesis Arts and Culture | Specialisation in Creative Industries |
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Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been a period of intense learning for me, not only in the academic arena but also on a personal level. I would like to reflect on the people who have supported and helped me so much throughout this period.

First of all, I would like to thank my family that despite the kilometres between us, motivated me every step of the way. My mom and dad, Iwona and Aleksander, who encouraged me to reach for the stars and taught me to never give up. Also, my partner Robin for providing me with unfailing support and motivational speeches.

Secondly, I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. dr. Anneke Smelik for sparking my interest in fashion sustainability. I still remember the lecture that you gave in Pre-master programme in Creative Industries pertaining to this topic. It was a real eye-opener! Thank you for your valuable guidance throughout the process of writing. You definitely provided me with the feedback that I needed to choose the right direction and successfully complete my thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank all my teachers and colleagues from Radboud University for insightful discussions, unforgettable group works and enriching experiences we have shared.

Thank you!

Antonina

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Introduction

Ever since I can remember, I have loved listening to my mother talking about clothes she used to wear in her youth. These stories were always full of details and engagement. Today she can still easily describe her favourite skirt or beloved coat from those times. As she explained it to me, it was not easy to be fashionable in communist at that time Poland. There was a severe scarcity of products on the market and only the elite could keep up with the latest fashion trends. Nevertheless, some of the ordinary people did manage to stay fashion savvy. In order to do that, they needed to be creative and self-sufficient, to evoke a proverb “necessity is the mother of invention”. Therefore, getting new clothes involved numerous challenges, like arranging a fabric, coming up with a design and eventually sewing it. Because of the close connection to the production process and the previously mentioned scarcity of products, clothes were treated literally as treasures and worn until they fell apart. The common phenomenon of today where women exclaim in front of their wardrobes: “I have nothing to wear!” simply did not exist.

Since 1950s, the stories pertaining to clothes have profoundly changed. Today they are filled with references to overabundance and overconsumption (Hawley, p.206-207). The production process is rapidly shrinking in time and hence the number of collections is increasing and the clothes become cheaper and cheaper (Hethorn and Ulasewicz, 2015; McCarthy, 2011; Cataldi et. al., 2013; Dickson, 2009). It even has reached a point that a package of cigarettes is more expensive than a single t-shirt coming from brands such as H&M or ZARA. Taking into consideration the fact that the first one is manufactured by machine and the latter is made by human hands, the practices within the industry seem to be profoundly suspicious and alarming. To evoke Lucy Siegle’s words, “Fast fashion isn’t free. Someone, somewhere is paying” (Bellini, 2016). International Labour Organisation estimates that around 170 million children are engaged in labour, “with many making textiles and garments to satisfy the demand of consumers in Europe, US, and beyond” (Moulds, n.d.). In India, a child working on a cotton farm earns less than \$1 per day (12h) (Jalava, p.8). In Bangladesh, the majority of garment workers earn around \$32 per month (the living wage is \$57) (War On

Want, n.d.). On top of that, they work in hazardous conditions which often lead to work injuries and factory fires (Dickson et. al., p.3-4).

As a matter of fact, people are not the only ones suffering in this scenario. The fashion industry leaves a huge environmental imprint on the earth. “The apparel industry accounts for 10% of global carbon emissions and remains the second largest industrial polluter, second only to oil” (Conca, 2015).

Luckily, there are more and more sustainable fashion brands emerging from this grim reality, producing and selling products in sustainable and ethical ways, helping people to consume consciously. By the same token sustainable fashion constitutes one of the most accelerating trend these days (Mason et. al, p.6). Nevertheless, as research has shown such brands are struggling with the consumers’ low awareness and their lack of understanding of the problems in the industry (Shen et.al., 2013). Additionally, since being ‘green’ correspond with the current trends in other products, numerous companies tend to use ‘green’ marketing strategies solely for ingratiation purposes. That is to say, they focus predominantly on investing in certificates and fair-trade labels but they are not followed by deeper values or true meaning (Sheth et. al., 2011). No wonder consumers have difficulties to tell the real sustainable actions from greenwashing practices. Because of the doubtful character of these green campaigns the reputation of the entire sustainable fashion sector suffers by facing problems pertaining to credibility and sincerity of its actions. As a result, consumers in spite of their eco-friendly attitudes, do not always act accordingly (Clow and Baak, p.329; Shen et. al., p.135; De Pelsmaker et. al., 2005). Drawing from research conducted by Globescan for National Geographic, they do not understand the problem that sustainable fashion is trying to solve (Eurobarometr295, p.29). Therefore, in my thesis I want to identify the ways in which the brands can possibly raise the customers’ awareness as well as increase their knowledge and consequently present them the benefits coming from the consumption of the sustainable products.

In their book *Made to Stick* (2010) Chip and Dan Heath suggest that in order to make people act, one needs to tell them the right stories (p.206). As they contend, stories provide “simulation (knowledge about how to act) and inspiration (motivation to act)” (ibid). As a matter of fact, the idea to use

narratives as a communication tool has been borrowed by the marketing world a long time ago (Fog et. al., 2010, Smith and Wintrob, 2013). However, as Kadembo emphasizes, the fashion brands still seem to struggle with a lack of knowledge concerning the construction of the stories that would elicit sustainable consumption (2012).

In this thesis I analyze the practice of storytelling in the communication of two sustainable fashion brands. Based on the literature review, I expect that storytelling is a useful tool for brand for communicating fashion sustainability. Moreover, I am highly interested in how storytelling can contribute to broadening people's literacy in terms of sustainability and changing their preconceptions. Since there are several sustainable companies using storytelling in their marketing communication I will specifically look at their practices and draw conclusions pertaining to constructing narratives. This thesis aims to answer the research question: ***How do Dutch fashion brands use storytelling to communicate fashion sustainability?*** Additionally, the study tries to inquire into ***how Dutch fashion brands can educate and enhance customers' awareness through storytelling.***

In order to test out the theory and most importantly to answer the research questions, I will carry out a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995) of the marketing communication of two Dutch apparel brands. I made this choice because of the fact that the Netherlands has a good framework for sustainability. That is to say, 35% of the Dutch population expresses willingness to purchase sustainable products or services, which makes it the second European country right behind Sweden (46%) (Tandberg, 2007). Moreover, the country is the first one to endorse the *Agreement on a Sustainable Garment and Textile Sector* that brings together industry organizations, trade unions, civil-society organizations and the Dutch government (Made-by, 2016). As the Social and the Economic Council of the Netherlands explain, "In this agreement, these parties combine forces in an effort to achieve practical improvements in and ensure the sustainability of the international garment and textile supply chain" (SER, 2016).

In the following chapters, I will analyze the storytelling practices of the fashion brand *O My Bag* as well as elucidate the marketing communication

approach of Studio JUX. I chose these two particular brands because they are acknowledged by the Dutch fashion industry as the enterprises known for having a sustainability ethos at their core. While researching the topic, I found out that both of the brands take part in Dutch Sustainable Fashion Week (DSFW) in Amsterdam. Moreover, their names frequently appear on blogs dedicated to slow fashion and sustainable style (The Green Scene, Catching the Glow, Fair Fashion Style). The purpose of this study is to understand how these two brands use storytelling to convey sustainability. I am particularly interested in their tone of voice, aesthetics and the visual content of their websites, which profoundly contribute to the brands' storytelling discourse.

My study aims at providing insights pertaining to marketing communication for sustainable fashion retailers. It elaborates on the importance of storytelling practices for this particular industry. By looking at the marketing communication practices of two acknowledged sustainable Dutch brands I try to identify possible ways of engaging the customers and making them aware of the process of production of apparel.

With the analysis of storytelling discourses of the two selected case studies, I build on knowledge I acquired in the courses "Fashion" and "Things: Material Culture and the Politics of Identity", which were incorporated in my Master programme in Creative Industries, using methods of analysis learned in courses such as "Creativity in Context".

The thesis consists of four chapters. In the first one, I introduce a theoretical framework that supports my hypothesis and provides background for the further analysis of the concerned issues. In order to understand the concept of storytelling for sustainable fashion, several terms will be put forward, such as *fashion sustainability*, *attitude-behaviour gap*, *biographies of objects*, *storytelling* along with its characteristics and finally the theory of *discourse*. Additionally, the first chapter elaborates on the methodology used in this study, Critical Discourse Analysis, coined by Fairclough (1995). In the next two chapters, I conduct critical discourse analyses of storytelling practices of O My Bag and Studio JUX, presented on their websites. As Fairclough argues, his methodology helps to identify "the way in which language tends to impose on the addressor's view of the world on the addressees" (1992, p.139). Transposing it

to marketing communication, in my thesis, I identify how brands use verbal and visual language to communicate its stories so that they could influence their customers. Finally, in the last chapter I compare the results retrieved from the two analyses to draw conclusions and answer my research question.

Chapter I: Theoretical framework

Introduction

Sustainable fashion is not a recent phenomenon. As a matter of fact, the great concern about planet Earth and social equality started in 1970s, resulting in the environmental movement of the 1990s (Welters, 2011, p.573; Lundblad and Davies). Its current popularity owes to the rapidly progressing scarcity of resources as well as to the widely spread cruel working conditions in fashion textile factories in Asia. Unfortunately, these two major issues cannot be fixed over night. Due to the industry's complexity and its fragmented nature each change within the system requires overcoming numerous challenges. As Welters and Lillethun write, the fashion industry can be viewed from miscellaneous perspective (p. xxvii). For instance from an economic point of view, fashion is a system driven by supply and demand, from a sociological angle it could be seen as a form of communication, whereas from a political stand it is an industry that exerts power (p.xxvii). Consequently, fashion not only influences people's tastes and trends, but also greatly changes their behaviours and their environment. Therefore, one can say that the intricacy of the fashion system is responsible for the fact that sustainability trend still has not been fully adapted by people. It seems that the application and the further adaptation of the sustainability concept remains up till this day a significant challenge both for people as well as the apparel companies.

In order to answer my main research question that is: ***How do Dutch fashion brands use storytelling to communicate sustainability***, first I need to build a theoretical framework that will give me a strong research base and provide support for the rest of my dissertation. Therefore, in this chapter I elucidate concepts of *sustainability, storytelling, marketing communication, biographies of objects, commodity fetishism* and *discourse*, the knowledge of which will be important for analysing the case studies in the following chapters. What does the concept of sustainability exactly entail? Drawing from the Brundtland Report, which was created by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987, sustainability is a "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the

ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (p.41). Transposing it to the fashion industry, sustainable fashion celebrates longevity of garments, pays attention to ethical treatment of employees and causes little environmental impact so that the next generations would have decent living conditions (Lundblad and Davies, p.149). This concept can sound indeed oxymoronic, because as Elizabeth Wilson wrote, “fashion is the child of capitalism”, which basically feeds on fleeting trends, exploitation of labour and conspicuous consumption (p.13). In the end of the day, any kind of brand, whether it is fast fashion or sustainable one, aims at driving sales and generating profits. The difference between these two lies in the fact that the former does it solely to please the end customers’ pockets and needs by providing the new designs for advantageous prices. While the latter takes more aspects into consideration by extending its stakeholders group to employees and the environment. As McCarthy explains, “The fast fashion business model rests on the ability to capture and respond to shifts in consumers preferences quickly through proximity to fashion markets and fashion makers”(p.542). In order to meet customers’ ever-changing demands the brands design and produce their garments faster and faster. For instance, for Zara it takes only seven weeks to introduce new designs in the stores (ibid).

Attitude-behaviour gap

Although sustainable fashion has not become a standard yet, it is according to Mason et. al. one of the most accelerating consumer trends (p. 6). As they contend, because of the broad accessibility of information, today’s customers expect full transparency from companies. That is to say: where and how the clothes are made? By whom? In what kind of conditions? This demand is the result of an attempt to consume more consciously and guilt-free, because in the end people want to have “a positive impact on the world, or at least avoid having a negative impact” (ibid, p.19). As statistics indicate, consumers in rapidly developing and developed countries — in particular Australia, China, Sweden and USA — exhibit the willingness to purchase products or services from sustainable companies (Figure 1). Additionally, in the study of European Union (Figure 2), 75% of respondents agreed that they would pay more for

environmentally friendly products (Tandeborg, 2017). As a matter of fact, only 5% of interviewees expressed a total disagreement.

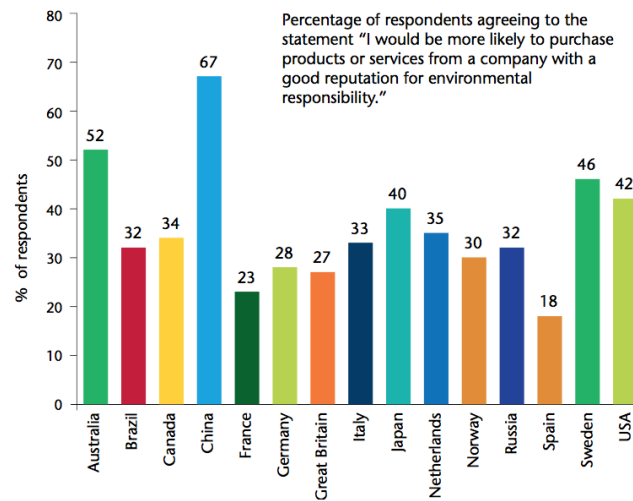


Figure 1. Consumers report on the attitudes towards companies with a reputation for environmental responsibility (Tandberg, 2007).

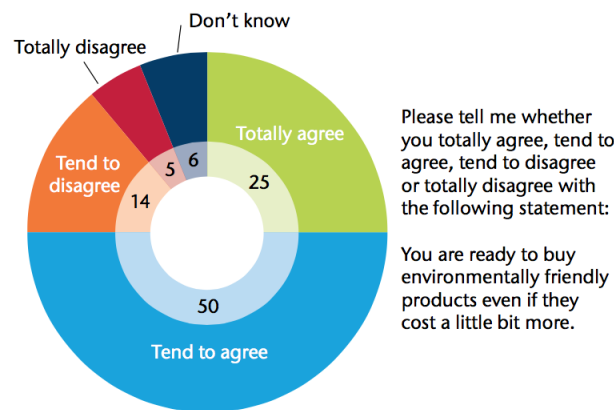


Figure 2. Attitudes of European citizens towards the environmentally friendly products (Eurobarometer 295, 2008).

Consequently, there has been an apparent change of symbolic values that are attributed to the clothes in the process of marketing communication, as well as in the process of production (Crane and Bovone, p.320). As a result, "some ads make a show of environmental concern, of support for social justice, of wishing to improve public health" (Cook, p.3).

The results revealed in the surveys above shed undoubtedly a positive light on sustainable consumption, but unfortunately do not reflect reality. That is to say, in Europe evidence shows that 50 % of consumers claim that they are eager to spend more money on sustainable products (De Pelsmaker et. al., 2005). **However, the problem is that only 1% out of these 50% actually does it** (ibid). Drawing from Shen et. al. this problem of incongruity comes from a lack

of knowledge and a low level of awareness in terms of sustainability (p.144). There seems to be a strong hesitation and resistance to actually perform actions consistent with one's claims about sustainable movement, which creates an **attitude-behaviour gap** (Arbuthnott, 2009).

How does the gap come into being? Each innovative idea, in this MA thesis the case of sustainable fashion, needs to provide people with a certain kind of knowledge in order to be adopted by the masses (Hartley et. al., p.113). While analysing sustainable fashion through Roger's model of diffusion of innovation, it could be said that it is mainly practiced by innovators (2,5%) and early adopters (13,5%) (Rogers, p.247). For a relatively old concept like sustainability this is not an impressive score. This slow process of diffusion of the sustainable fashion concept is not necessarily based on people's deliberate reluctance towards the movement, but on the contrary, it is created by the general paucity of knowledge and lack of adequate awareness among the customers (Shen et. al., p.144). What is more, the consumers' illiteracy is perfectly used by some companies which take advantage of catchy eco slogans solely for promotional/marketing purposes to ingratiate themselves with customers (Black, p.219). In fact, "Eco-fashion simply becomes a short-term way to capitalize on a passing trend, and may end up doing more damage than good." (Gagnon, p.37-38). By such greenwashing practices, the brands raise doubts among consumers, and generate reluctance towards sustainable products. As a consequence, they impact the general reception of genuine sustainable fashion brands (ibid).

If consumers are willing to buy sustainable fashion products as well as the companies are eager to provide such items, why does this system still not work properly? According to a survey conducted by the National Geographic Society, this *lack of understanding* comes as the most significant factor (30%) causing the attitude-behaviour gap (Figure 3).

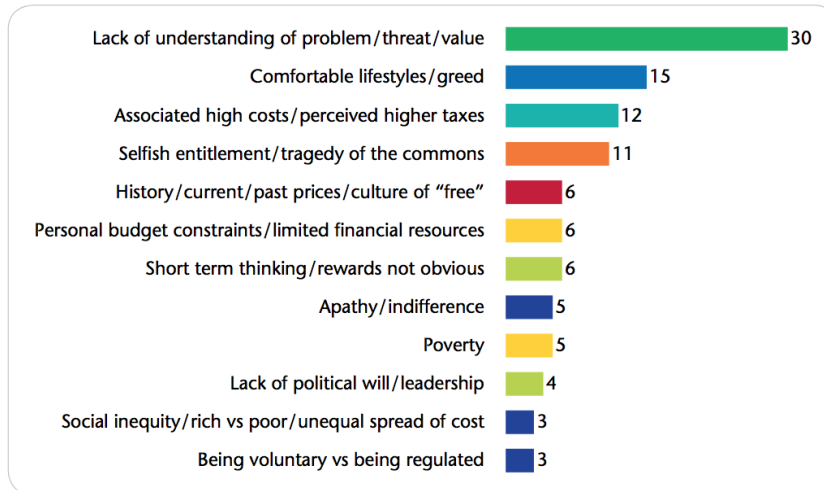


Figure 3. Reasons behind consumers' unwillingness to pay more for environmental performance (National Geographic Society, 2008)

The second aspect is the *comfortable lifestyle/greed* (15%). There are negative perceptions about sustainable fashion, namely people tend to associate it with hippies who are not necessarily fashion savvy (Schneider, 2014). Generally speaking, people want to surround themselves with beautiful and up-to-date things. This phenomenon is to a great extent caused by marketing, which profoundly fetishizes products and creates a feeling of desire in people's minds. That is why the cliché-ridden associations with hippies can possibly prevent them from buying the sustainable products. The third factor that explains people's unwillingness to buy sustainable items is *high cost* (12%) that is usually associated with this category product. Drawing from the survey's results, it seems that the main challenge is to transform people's green attitudes to green behaviour (Eurobarometr 295, p.29).

According to Dixon "certain characteristics of storytelling could be applied in creating ways to overcome certain barriers to sustainability" (p.7). Therefore, I shall argue that the usage of storytelling in marketing communication could serve as a tool to bridge this attitude-behaviour gap and therefore make sustainable fashion brand more appealing to a large-scale audience. My point of inquiry is: how do Dutch apparel brands use storytelling to communicate sustainability? Furthermore, this thesis tries to delve into educational aspects of storytelling as well as into its capacity to broaden customers' awareness in terms of sustainable fashion.

The concept of storytelling

Since the dawn of time, storytelling has been playing a significant role in the history of humankind (Fog et. al., p.4). Its purest form has originated at the glow of a campfire (Fog et. al., p.18). These stories greatly influenced a tribe's sense of identity as well as profoundly contributed to the dissemination of prevailing attitudes and values (ibid). As a result, they "helped humanity communicate and share knowledge, influence decision-making, entertain, dream and ultimately help us make sense of the worlds around us, both seen and unseen" (Leinaweaver p.16).

Simply put, storytelling is an art of consciously building relations through impacting listeners' imagination and emotions by means of telling true-life stories and metaphors. It is a method of communication. Leinaweaver distinguishes three different kinds of stories:

- The *big stories*, which appeal to "our sense of awe and wonder of being", and operate on mythic level,
- The *middle stories*, which explain the socio-cultural organizational aspects of our life, i.e. "how the world ought to be, and how our culture shapes our collective sense of 'the normal'", and function on the "us and them" level,
- And finally, the *little stories*, which are the stories of an individual life, and therefore pertain to "I" level (p.16-17).

Often, each type of story does not function alone, quite the contrary, these stories co-exist and their levels are intertwined. It is therefore sometimes difficult to tell them apart (ibid). Especially because of the fact that each story consists of the same elements, that is to say *characters*, *plot*, *conflict* and *message* (Fog et. al., p.33). In his book, Leinaweaver expands this list to *setting* and *memory* (p.20). According to him, memory is one of the most crucial elements of a story because it influences the way the story is being told (ibid, p.19). Namely, each telling of a story is different, since due to the passage of time we tend to forget some details or sometimes even embellish some facts for the sake of a compelling story. Hence, as Leinaweaver explains, any story could be viewed as "a dynamic equation: {fact + fiction=faction}" (p.20).

Storytelling is primarily a method of communication, which aims at exchanging stories between the *storyteller* and the *audience*. Leinaweaver calls it “a coordinated management of meaning between the storyteller, the listener and the story itself” (p.21). By way of illustration, he introduces the model of *storytelling triangle* (Figure 4). The figure draws attention to the relative nature of stories, that is to say, they depend on the storyteller’s imagination, ethic and interpretation (ibid). Each of the elements of the triangle influences one another and is equally important. The *storyteller* is the one who interprets, creates and articulates the story. The audience receives the story as told by the teller, and uses its cues to make sense out of the shared content, on top of its own life experience. According to Packer, “While a story may exist before it is told by the storyteller, even in written form, the primary and most important place a story exists is in the individual minds of the audience during the story experience.”(2014). Thus, it does not matter whether the content comes from the tellers’ own experience or not, it is their choice of words, tone of voice and body language, which make that story uniquely theirs. The last element is the actual story, which rests in a space between the storyteller and the audience. For Packer, stories are both containers as well as triggers (2014). By containers, she draws attention to the story’s capacity to carry and send a certain message. Whereas by viewing the stories as triggers, they provide food for thought for the audience. That is to say, the listeners often identify themselves with the characters and events of the story, thus having an opportunity to view their lives differently and consequently learning something from it.

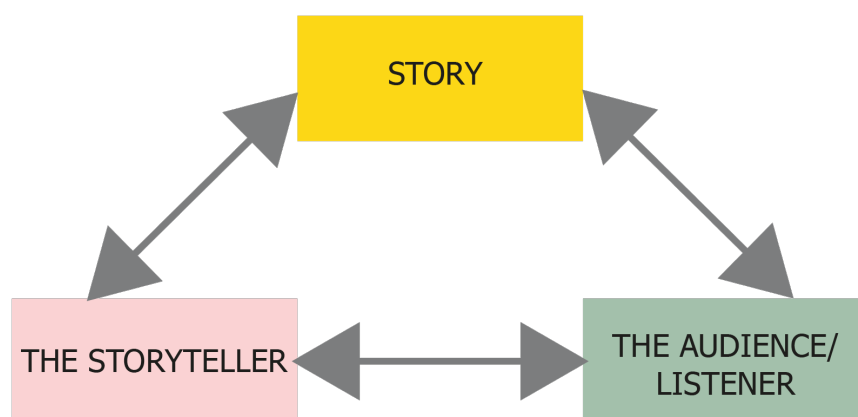


Figure 4. Storytelling triangle (model: Leinaweaver, p.21, illustration: Siekierczak, 2017).

Storytelling as a method of marketing communication

Since stories are so appealing to people and most importantly influence their behaviour, they are greatly used in marketing communication practices. As Fog et. al. explain, “storytelling is an indispensable tool for activating and making the company’s DNA visible and creating a shared direction” (p.9). Apart from supporting the brand, storytelling contributes to enhancing the company’s culture (ibid). Also, according to Clow and Baack, brands use it in order to place themselves “more at the periphery rather than at the centre of the ad” (p.191). As they argue, this approach allows the customers to draw their own conclusions about the products instead of being literally told what are the brand’s benefits and features by means of a *hard-sell*. It can thus be said that storytelling helps brands to establish a closer connection with their audience by translating its values into tangible narratives.

As I explained in the previous section each story consists of characters, plot, conflict and message. However, despite of the same structure each serves different function and creates distinct engagement (Eriksson and Karlsson, p.12). In the marketing communication there are four types of stories: *heritage*, *contemporary*, *folklore* and *vision narratives* (Eriksson and Karlsson, p.12). The first one harks back to the origins of the brand and its founders, e.g. in the marketing communication of *Chanel* the character of Coco Chanel is greatly emphasized. According to Eriksson and Karlsson, “Such stories connect the consumer with the founding ideas of the company and the passion in the creation of the brand.” (p.13). The next type is *contemporary* stories. They are embedded in modern reality and focus mainly on communicating the brand’s image. They are also used to enhance the brand’s foundation and put across its message. Another type is *folklore*, which entails stories that are “created, driven and spread by the customers themselves” (ibid). In other words, in this case, people are not only consuming content but also creating it. This phenomenon is often called as “prosumption”, which entails both production and consumption rather than focusing on either one (production) or the other (consumption) (Hesmondhalgh, p.316). Due to today’s Internet and social media technology such stories are especially popular. However, because of their organic nature they can be difficult to control. Lastly, *vision narratives* disclose the brand’s

mission to the public. These stories are characterized by a high level of transparency that “enables consumers to join the brand movement or fight against it while challenging the brand to constantly double check that they have indeed acted in accordance with their promises (Eriksson and Karlsson, p.13).

Storytelling falls under the umbrella of advertising, which is one of the oldest, the most visible as well as the most important tool of marketing communication. The advertising message aims at persuading people into buying certain products or services. The main assumptions of advertising are the following: informing, persuading and recalling customers about a brand (Clow and Baack, p.143). As a matter of fact, advertising tries to make it easier for customers to make decisions and help them in relating to the products. Another goal of ads is to elicit a feeling of need in customers’ minds by means of fetishizing the products (Woodwards, p.42). Advertising actions can take numerous forms starting from traditional paper ones through TV ads and ending up with online ads. In the same vein, stories can be told on various platforms. As Leinaweaver emphasizes, choosing the right platform to tell your story plays a crucial role, because it is basically possible to tell it through multiple platforms “the trick is knowing which platform serves your story the best at the time it is told” (p.24). In the digital world, it is possible to convey a story through radio, film, mobile applications, websites or blogs and most importantly through social media e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube.

Storytelling for sustainability: biographies that we wear

Transposing the model of *storytelling triangle* to the communication of the sustainable fashion brand and the customers, the storyteller in this case would be the brand and the audience – the customers. Some brands try to equip their customers with knowledge pertaining to their products and the fashion sustainability discourse so that people would not be lured by “empty buzzwords” but rather meaningful stories. As a response to a growing demand for transparency they incorporate a lot of information not only about a product itself but also about its maker (Mason et. al., p.11). This strategy aims at bridging production with consumption by unveiling a generally disguised labour.

In order to understand this phenomenon, I turn to Karl Marx's notion of 'commodity fetishism', which is profoundly embedded in the field of fashion (1867). According to Marx "A commodity is, in the first place, an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another." (p.27). In other words, people tend to acquire goods in terms of desire. As he further explains, commodities respond to wants of 'stomach', in other words our practical needs, and also to wants of the 'fancy' or imagination (ibid). In the context of fashion, we wear clothes not only because of their function but also due to their aesthetic appearance. For instance, a bag apart from being a container for various items, therefore serving functional purposes, can also cater for "social, symbolic and aesthetic" needs (Sullivan, p.36).

For Marx the commodity comes as a result of the peculiar transformation that things, created by labourers, undergo when they enter a single economic system based on quantifiable exchange (p. 48). In this exchange, the commodity object signifies both the development of humankind and exploitative principles of capitalism. Since the industrial revolution workers in the textile industry have been struggling with problems of alienation, which according to Marx is a loss of control of the labour (cited in Sullivan, p.31). In textile manufacturing, work is tedious, repetitive and therefore it does not use the human creative potential (ibid). The workers are alienated from the objects they produce because they are owned and disposed by the capitalist; as a matter of fact they simply have no control over their own productive activity (p.48). "Rather, their labour power is sold to, controlled and exploited by these same capitalists in return for the wages necessary to subsist" (Sullivan, p.29).

Some people indeed do not know how clothes come into being but many consumers also buy clothes regardless of their 'true cost' (True Cost, 2015). What is more, very often they purchase things, not because of their use value, but because of their symbolic or emotional meaning. Marx calls this phenomenon "commodity fetishism", which entails human relations with material objects characterized by a high difference between their use and exchange value (p.47). For Marx, use value of commodity pertains to its level of usefulness, whereas the exchange value refers to the degree the commodities are sold and compared on the market (ibid).

Marketing nowadays extensively uses the fact that people tend to buy things on account of their symbolic meaning. That is to say, fashion campaigns tap into people's minds and desires and invite them to immerse themselves in the delights of looking (Sullivan, p.54). The apparel brands depict fashion items as commodities that possess a magical or spiritual power, which has an ability to improve or sometimes even change people's lives (ibid, p.40). By doing so, they sugarcoat the aspects of labour as well as its environmental implications and therefore they operate solely on a superficial level of meaning.

In order to go beyond this glamorous image of fashion and display its "backstage", I shall introduce Igor Kopytoff's anthropological concept of "biographies of objects" (1986), which is a suggestion to follow the objects and get familiar with their makers as well as their places of origin. As a matter of fact, these biographies are in fact stories, which could in a skilful way engage the audience. Also, studying objects' social lives tells us something about their owners and the possible relationship between them. Drawing from Igor Kopytoff, things like humans have their biographies. That is to say, while working on the biography of objects, we can ask the same question as we pose whilst asking about human beings, e.g. where does this thing come from and who made it? How does the usage of a particular object change over time? Or, what happens to the objects when they become useless? (Kopytoff, p. 66-67). As Crane and Bovone point out, "Material goods express values; consumption of these goods is a means for the customer to communicate messages about the values she holds" (p.320). In other words, we are not only defined as people by what we say, but also what kind of material things we possess. Bill Brown elaborates on "thing theory" in relation to objects. As he emphasizes, there is a continuous, invisible exchange happening between us, our objects and the environment we live in (p.4). To a certain extent, we can look through objects because they are invested in meaning (codes), which due to knowledge of a social context can be unwrapped (Brown, p.4).

As a matter of fact, the biographies of objects are in fact stories, which could in a skilful way engage the audience. Introducing them to the fashion industry could possibly bring people closer to the creators, and also make them more aware of the conditions in which clothes come into being. As in the

storytelling framework, the biographies of objects also include characters, plot, message and a possible conflict (Fog et. al., p.33). According to Miller “traditional storytelling has the potential to create a direct link to the concepts of sustainability and change over time among diverse locations across the globe” (p.8). Hence, Kopytoff’s concept of biographies of objects could serve as an appropriate tool to fill in this attitude-behaviour gap by providing the connection between the concept’s objectives and its adaptation as well as its possible impact. This method of communication introduces people to numerous layers of meanings, codes of conduct and practices which try to answer the “why” questions. In Leinaweaver’s words, “The story of sustainability is relevant because it is a journey of human development and change, and is not about meta-narrative but many stories that are told and retold in order to participate in the constant making and remaking of the world” (p.18). What is important, stories do not always originate at the top of the companies. The fashion sustainability story belongs to the category of *big stories* but is often told through the lenses of *little stories*, which are viewed to be more personal and therefore more relatable for people. For instance, it is possible to tell the sustainable fashion story through the eyes of workers or through the perspective of the environment. In others words, in order to make people respond to the sustainability plea, brands need to create the stories in such a way that they trickle down into people’s individual storylines and their personal mythologies (Leinaweaver, p. 29). By turning to the *little stories* the companies can prevent the phenomenon of *statistical numbing*. Statistical numbing is characterized by insensibility to a failure or a disaster of masses e.g. in the fashion’s context it could be the number of exploited people in the textile factories or the number of casualties in the collapse or the Rana Plaza garment factory in Dhaka (Sullivan, p.41). According to Batson, “we are more likely to help someone in need when we ‘feel for’ that person...” (p.339). A human’s mind is lazy and it always takes the easiest route and this is why when people need to choose between statistical data and a story of an individual, they will probably be persuaded by the story due to its emotional touch. As a way of illustration, Slovic uses a model to show what this process looks like (Figure 5). As he points out, the story of an individual person accompanied by a visual content is more likely going to elicit a feeling which will

motivate helping behaviour than a description of a phenomenon represented simply as figures and statistical numbers (2007).

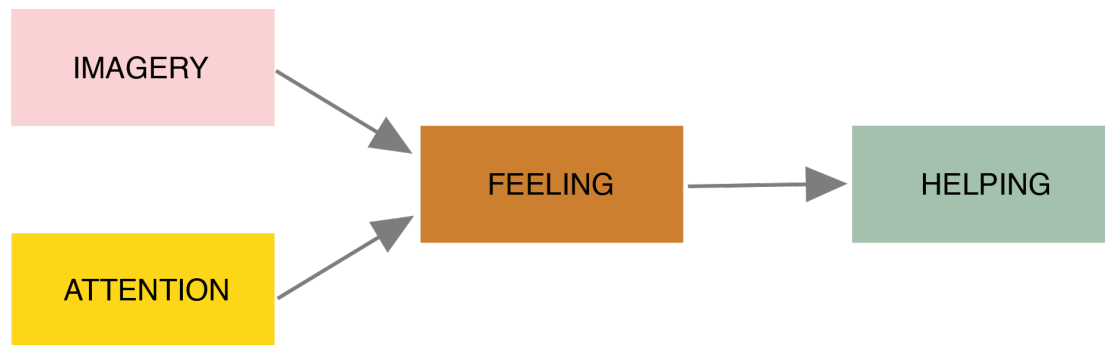


Figure 5. Slovic's model (model: Slovic, 2007; illustration: Siekierczak, 2017).

The story of sustainable fashion as a discourse

Storytelling falls under the umbrella of discourse. In this section, I will elaborate on the concept of discourse and explain its relevance to the research question.

The concept of discourse is entangled and multifarious (Howarth, p.1). The complexity of this term derives from its varied applications and interpretations in many different fields, for instance in linguistics and literary theory (Coulthard, 1997), in anthropology (White, 1978; Jenkins, 1991), in cultural studies (Hall, 1997) or in social psychology (Burman and Parker, 1993). In Michel Foucault's post-structuralist account, discourses are "Systems of thought composed of ideas, attitudes, and courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak." (Foucault, 1972, p.49). Due to the fact that they are culturally and historically defined, they are always fixed in time and space (Foucault, 1998, p.94). By disseminating prevailing system of thoughts they construct the area of knowledge and various social practices, which have an impact on people's perception of reality. Interestingly enough, for Foucault social control is not imposed from above through outright coercion, but by disciplining people (Foucault, 1998, p.95). Instead of using violence the institutions use rules, procedures and images to regulate the behaviour of individuals (Tynan, p.187). Hence discourses are usually discussed in terms of structures of power (Howarth, p.77). Foucault understands power as diffused and embodied in discourse, which in turn is determined by language and social practices (Tynan,

p.186). At the same, discourse refers to the creation and organization of knowledge, which determines how and what we know, as individuals and as a society. Consequently, power lies in the accumulation of knowledge: only through the discursive formations that make speech possible, subjects and objects come into existence (ibid).

As Tynan observes, Foucault's point of enquiry was how power is enacted through bodies (p.185). In the case of fashion, a Foucauldian perspective enables to notice the multifarious demands fashion makes on our bodies (ibid). That is to say, "fashion constructs dominant narratives about health, gender, sexuality, class and race" (Tynan, p.186). By using storytelling in the marketing communication of sustainable fashion, brands have control over the general narratives regarding sustainable apparel. In the same vein, they acquire power in terms of creating their own definitions of the sustainable fashion. As Foucault emphasizes, "Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points" (1998, p.94). To put it differently, power is not something that someone possesses, but something that circulates in society. Thus it is not simply a top-down phenomenon. As a consequence, for Foucault, people cannot easily locate power: power manifests itself at many different sites. What is more, discourses as well as stories through language "reproduce and transform the material world" (Parker, p.1). Therefore, in order to convey a certain message, brands in their marketing communication need to carefully choose language that will be appealing to their target groups. As a matter of fact, companies "use the tool of language to persuade and attract consumers to buy their products" (Asghar, p.225). They incorporate it in a certain manner to underline the superiority of their brand by the same token "changing and modifying the general trends in all walks of life" (ibid). In other words, by means of language brands create discourses, which are forms of power.

Methodology: Critical Discourse Analysis

Foucault did not develop a clear methodological approach for the concept of discourse. Therefore, in order to examine how apparel brands use storytelling to communicate sustainability, I will use Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis

model. Fairclough’s model for analysis examines relations between texts, events, practices and social structures. His Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is embedded in Foucault’s notion of discourse. Fairclough introduces a ‘three-dimensional’ framework (Image 1) where the purpose is to draw three separate levels of analysis onto one another:

1. “Text analysis — analysis of (spoken or written) language texts,
2. Processing analysis — analysis of discourse practice (process of production, distribution and consumption)
3. Social analysis — analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practices” (1995, p.2).

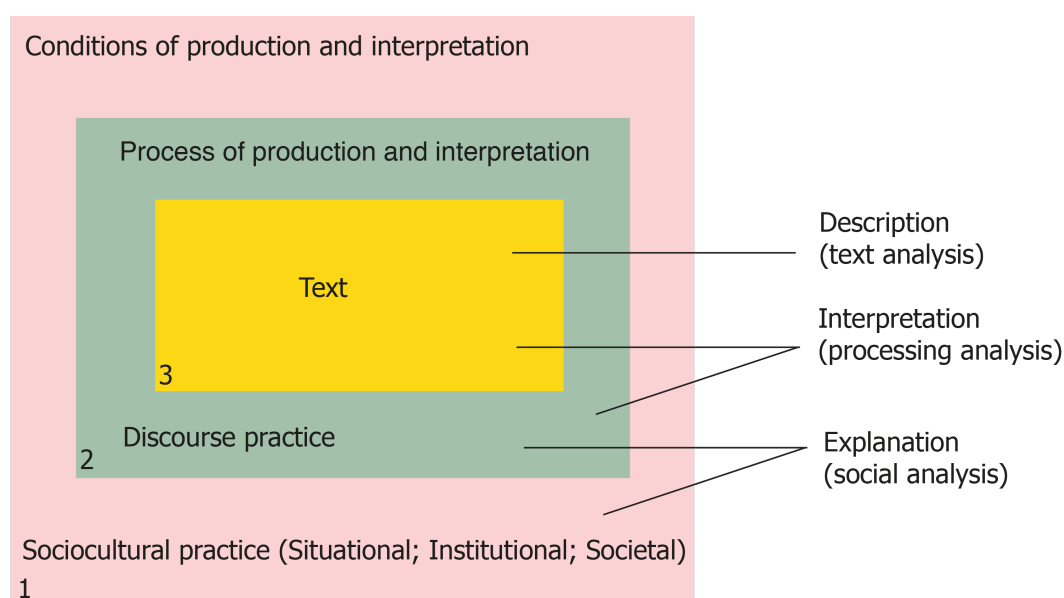


Figure 6. Fairclough’s three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis (model: Fairclough, p.98; illustration: Siekierczak, 2017).

In the context of marketing communication, the text analysis pertains to describing the written text from websites, social media profiles, advertising campaigns as well as giving a detailed account of semiotic dimensions such as videos, pictures and typography (van Dijk, p.18). In other words, the term “text” refers not only to written text but also to any cultural artifact, such as spoken language, visual images, music and sounds effects (Fairclough, 1995, p.4). Critical Discourse Analysis “sees the use of language as a form of social practice” and it focuses on representation, construction and signification (Fairclough, 1989, p.105). Hence, it allows to look beyond the superficial meaning of a text and

brings to light hidden ideologies, which are interwoven in the phenomenon (ibid). As Fairclough contends,

“CDA provides a way of moving between close analysis of texts and interactions, and social analyses of various types. Its objective is to show how language figures in social processes. It is critical in the sense that it aims to show non-obvious ways in which language is involved in social relations of power and domination, an ideology” (2001, p.229).

This approach enables an analyst to converge on the signifiers that create the text, the particular linguistic choices, their juxtapositioning, their layout and their sequencing (Janks, p.329). According to Janks, Critical Discourse Analysis serves as a practical research method because of its numerous points of analytic entry (ibid). That is to say, the order of the analyses does not matter, as long as all of them are included. In Wodak’s et. al. sense, this approach “attempts to integrate a large quantity of available knowledge about the historical sources and the background of the social and political field in which discursive ‘events’ are embedded” (p. 65).

While Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis model is useful for my research it is still fairly general. I therefore additionally use Cook’s analysis of the context of communication, in order to delve into advertising oriented discourse. As Fitchett and Caruana point out, “Marketing and consumption depend largely on discourse for the creation, dissemination and reinforcement of product knowledge” (p.1). In fact, marketers charge products with culturally powerful knowledge by means of shared discourses. Therefore, the marketing communication practices can be viewed as socially constructed phenomena (Tharp and Scott, p.49). Consequently, the term “discourse” is increasingly used for discussing advertising (Cook, 2001). For Cook “the words in advertising are not viewed in isolation, however, but in complex interaction with music, pictures, other texts around them, and the people who make and experience them” (2001). Therefore, in order to grasp the advertising discourse one needs to take into consideration various texts. In the case of marketing communication it could be the layout of the brands’ websites, choice of images and colours, the tone of voice as well as the typography they use.

Through the analysis of the historical and social context, discourse analysis helps to understand how meanings are constructed and how a broader social reality is formed, maintained and experienced by people (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). In Cook's sense, discourse is an interaction of a text and a context, which is recognized as meaningful by all the participants, who not only take part in the context but also observe it (p.4). As he emphasizes, "language without context is like a journey without destination" (p.5). Taking context into consideration plays a crucial role in grasping the meaning of a phenomenon. By delving into a particular context we can decipher things that are often not explicitly said or displayed. Cook's analysis of context of communication distinguishes eight elements:

1. substance: the carrier of the text,
2. mode: music, pictures, language
3. paralinguistic: "meaningful behavior accompanying language", such as body language, voice quality or typography of writing,
4. situation: the relation of participants (human and non-human actors) in reference to the text,
5. co-text: "text which precedes or follows that under analysis, and which participants judge to belong to the same discourse",
6. intertext: a text which is related to a particular text,
7. participants: who are they and what kind of intentions/beliefs/knowledge do they have?
8. function: what is the function of the text (Cook, p.4).

In the chapters dedicated to the case studies of Dutch sustainable fashion brands using storytelling in their marketing communication, I will first use Cook's analysis of context of communication. The analysis will allow me to ascertain "who is communicating with whom and why; in what kind of society and situation; through what medium; how different types and acts of communication evolved, and their relationship to each other" (Cook, p. 3). Since Fairclough's CDA views context as central in the process of interpretation, Cook's method of analysis will help me to situate the brands and give a hands-on account of their backgrounds that will allow proceeding with Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis.

Conclusion

Despite its relatively long existence and noble objectives, fashion sustainability remains a movement that in fact has not been fully adopted yet by the consumers. Drawing from the statistics cited in the sections above, it is mainly caused by the general lack of understanding of problems within the fashion industry and consequently the low awareness among people. There is a huge attitude-behaviour gap, that is to say, people express willingness to buy sustainable products but eventually they do not purchase them. The second biggest reason why people do not buy the sustainable items is the assumption of its unappealing look. In this chapter, I argued that the incorporation of storytelling in the marketing communication of sustainable fashion brands could help in turning people's green attitudes into green behaviour. To wit, stories have capacity to draw humans attention and inspire them to take the action. By "storytelling" I particularly mean disclosing the biographies of brands' products. As a matter of fact, such an approach has been adopted by some sustainable fashion brands in the Netherlands. I am very much interested in how they exactly use narratives to convey sustainability. Therefore, in the next chapters by means of Cook's analysis of context of marketing communication and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis I will delve into storytelling practices of two Dutch apparel brands: O My Bag and Studio JUX.

Chapter 2: Critical discourse analysis: O My Bag

Introduction

As I explained in the introduction of this thesis, Dutch fashion brands provide a rich framework for the analysis of storytelling practices for sustainability. Due to severe competition on the market as well as confusion that is caused by *greenwashing*, apparel brands come up with better and better ways to engage their customers and consequently make them aware of sustainability issues. In order to identify these strategies and get a better understanding of how storytelling is used by sustainable Dutch fashion brands, I will analyze the storyline of O My Bag communicated on its website by means of Cook's analysis of context (Cook, p.4) and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough,1995, p.98). The purpose of this study is to understand how the brand uses storytelling to convey sustainability. I am particularly interested in its tone of voice, aesthetics and the visual content, all of them profoundly contribute to the brands' storytelling discourse. Additionally, I will pay close attention to educational aspects of the brands' narratives.

About O My Bag

O My Bag is a sustainable Dutch brand founded by Pauline Wesselink in 2010. The company designs and sells bags and accessories. The designing process takes place in the Netherlands and the products are made in India, Kolkata (O My Bag, 2017). The company's official name is "O My Bag" but in its branding practices it functions as "O My Bag Amsterdam".

During my preliminary research I have noticed that the brand is predominantly active online. As Clow and Baack contend, the Internet nowadays "serves as a communication highway" (p.244). Therefore, a lot of business initiatives move to the online world, which provides a bigger coverage. In this chapter, I will analyze the way how the brand constructs the stories on its website.

Website analysis

Trough the home page visitors gain access to five distinct categories: "New In", "Women", "Men", "Lookbook" and "World of O My Bag". As a matter of fact, the

first four display and address the bags predominantly as commodities, whereas only the last section elaborates on the company's background. When checking O My Bag's collection it becomes apparent that the style of the website harks back to design of the products. Namely, the bags are made according to the modernist principle "form follows function". Consequently, in their appearance they look ergonomic and sophisticated. Interestingly enough, each bag has been given a name that is mainly associated with women e.g. Mila, Jess, Donna. The way how I interpret it is that the brand wants to ascribe an agency to their products so that they would be perceived as more valuable and in the end more desirable. By naming the products the company tries to emphasize that the bags are not "any bags", but the products that you can have a special relationship with.

The categories on the website are clearly divided, which makes the web navigation intuitive. Each section consists mainly of pictures, which in several places are clickable and move users to another theme within the website. Additionally, the website functions as a platform throughout which people by means of hyperlinks get familiar with the brand's social media profiles such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest.

After giving my first impressions of the website, I shall begin with elucidating the context of the research material in Cook's terms.

1. First element of context is *substance*. According to Cook, the substance of a marketing communication is nothing but "a vehicle for its own linguistic and pictorial message" (p.33). When looking at O My Bag storytelling, one can say that it is predominantly carried out in the online environment by means of screens like laptops, phones or tablets (p.28).
2. Next element of the context is *mode*. In Cook's sense, modes basically refer to means of communication: music, pictures and language (p.42). On the website images constitute the dominant mode, although they are supported with some pieces of text. Also, in some sections of the platform viewers come across videos accompanied with soundtracks. What strikes me the most in terms of *language* is the fact that the platform is provided in English and German but not in Dutch. It is probably because of the international orientation of the company.

3. As Cook explains, in advertising, the meaning is not only conveyed through language but also through *paralanguage*, which he describes as “meaningful behaviour accompanying language” (p.4). In the substance such as website, paralinguistic elements can be displayed for instance by typography, choice of colour, size of font and text’s body as well as its tone of voice (Cook, p.71). At first glance, the entire website is designed in a simple manner. The visual identity is elegant, neat and minimalistic. The typography used here is modern without any decorative characteristics, which suggests that the brand oscillates towards unpretentious aesthetics. In most cases, the titles of sections and banners are written in bold capital letters that undoubtedly attracts visitors’ attention. The composition of text and visual elements is done on the vertical axis (top-down). The website’s tone of voice is quite informal and the choice of words speaks to rather fashion savvy people e.g. “O My Bag is a piece that you can flaunt without guilt”, “Mila is a sophisticated and tech friendly business shopper bag. The clean and structured aesthetic gives this bag an elegant and fashionable look. The short handle style makes the bag suitable for men and women”.
4. When analysing *situation* of the context, one can say that people visit O My Bag’s website predominantly because they want to get familiar with the brand’s products and if the items meet their needs – buy them. Thus the main relation of viewers in reference to the text is the act of purchase and from the brand’s perspective is the act of promotion.
5. Another element of the context is *co-text*, Cook defines it as “text which precedes or follow that under analysis, and which participants judge to belong to the same discourse” (p.4). In this sense, O My Bag’s accounts on Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest and Twitter could be viewed as the co-texts that contribute to the creation and dissemination of the brand’s storytelling practices. Apart from the online platforms there are also co-texts coming from the offline world such as the brand store in Hague and the showroom in Amsterdam (O My Bag, 2017). All of the listed texts complement each other and take part in the same discourse. The difference lies in their features, which provide different experiences that constitute the brand’s narratives.

6. Analysing context includes also looking at *intertexts*. While unpacking the meaning behind the brand's name I have found two intertextual relations. Namely, the name derives from a well-known exclamation of shock or surprise "Oh my God!". Here, the expression functions as a peculiar intertextual mark. As Liu and Le explain, "Advertisers often use intertextuality, which encourages readers to ponder and make association with their previous knowledge and arouse their feeling of familiarity facilitating memorization" (p.14). Instead of "God" the brand used their flag product - "Bag". Because the name harks back to the common expression, it is easily remembered as well as evokes humoristic connotations. A possible implication here is that the bags are surprising and extraordinary. Furthermore, as I already mentioned, the company refers to Amsterdam in its branding practices. Actually, this approach is applied not only to underline their place of origin. Looking at it through Cook's lenses, again we are dealing with an *intertext* in the form of allusion (2001). According to Liu and Le, "allusion gives readers the pleasure that comes from seeing similarities or hearing echoes of ideas" (p.17). These intertextual relations usually do not indicate the source texts but allow readers to make the connection themselves. By using it in the brand's name, the company wants to transfer the perception of the city onto the company. The reason may be that Amsterdam is increasingly referenced and viewed as the creative city (Linder and Meissner, 2015; Savini and Dembski, 2015). Also, the capital has been placed on the 5th place in terms of its green activity (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012) and on the 12th place for its approach and application of innovation (Innovation-cities, 2016). Drawing from these sources, one can say that the label of Amsterdam city stands for creativity, innovation and ecology; hence it is no wonder that the brand wants to be associated with it.
7. Another element of context refers to the *participants*. As I have observed, the website pertains to three groups: the employees of O My Bag, the producers from India, and the consumers. In this step of the analysis Cook pays attention to who are they and what kind of intentions/beliefs/knowledge do they have (p.4). Respectively, the O My Bag team from the Netherlands is the sender of the message and consists of six women that are in charge of tasks

connected with designing the bags, financing, product management and marketing communication. Through the website visitors gain access to information about the team's favourite O My Bag's item, sources of inspiration and "best guilty pleasure". By doing so, the brand tries to show its humane face and establish a closer connection with customers. Certainly the intention behind this approach is to warm up the brand's image and in the end sell more products. A second group consists of producers from Kolkata. On the website the viewers are exposed to information about the manufacturing process and the factories profiles. According to the website, the brand outsources the production process to four different companies: The Loyal Workshop (production of luggage tags), EMA Factory (production of bags), Springfield Factory (production of Mau's Backpack) and STC Factory (production of Classic Collection). All of the enterprises are placed in Kolkata (India) and are addressed on the platform as family businesses. Drawing from their written and video statements customers may get an impression that the production workers are satisfied with their job. For example, e.g. Krishina Naskar, an employee at EMA says, "I like the friendly atmosphere, but especially I cherish the dignity, respect and appreciation that we experience from working here" (O My Bag, 2017). When it comes to receivers of the website, by looking at the price range of the products (the average price of a bag equals €300) and their aesthetics I suggest that they are predominantly bought by upper-middle class women, who value not only the sophisticated design but also pay attention to the products' ecological status.

8. The last step of the analysis of the context, is defining the *function* of the website. The platform simply serves as a promotion tool, which is catering for customers' needs by providing an access to the online shop. Its main function is to persuade the audience into buying O My Bag's products.

By means of Cook's framework I was able to establish the context of communication of O My Bag. The analysis elucidated inter alia O My Bag's tone of voice, aesthetics and intertexts, which are important for the brand's storytelling. After getting equipped with the website's context, I will conduct the CDA in the next section.

Description (Text analysis): 'World of O My Bag'

I will first look at the subsection "About" which falls under the "World of O My Bag" section. This site is divided into six parts and each of them adds yet another brick to the whole story of the brand and elaborates on its characters. By means of critical discourse analysis I will try to unpack O My Bag's narratives, decipher their hidden meanings and finally draw conclusions, which might provide a helpful source of information for other sustainable brands.

The 'About' section consists of 3 banners, 2 infographics and a stripe with logos of well-known fashion and lifestyle magazines at the bottom. The first banner begins its story with a statement "A bag that makes the world a little better... Is that possible? We believe it is" (Image 1). The brand establishes a narrative from "WE" perspective. Borrowing from the storytelling terminology, the bag is the main protagonist. By using the verb "makes" the company ascribes an agency to its product, that is to say the bag has a capacity of improving the world. As the text explains, the brand believes that its product can make a difference in the world. Interestingly enough, for the question pertaining to the feasibility of the statement "Is that possible?", O My Bag does not simply respond "YES" but says "WE BELIEVE IT IS".



Image 1. Banner (O My Bag, 2017).

In the banner O My Bag includes a visual text depicting hands tailoring a leather label by means of fire. The main focus is directed towards the hands. A viewer cannot see the face of the person. Actually it is difficult to say whether it is a woman or a man. The fingers are captured in the moment of crafting leather looking item. When I look closely I notice that the left hand is slightly wrinkled and "experienced". The background of the picture is predominantly dark blue, which creates a contrast to the warm colours of the hands, the leather and the fire. As I scroll down the website, the story continues. This time it takes a form of

a simple infograph, which elaborates on the brand's design and the production process (Image 2). The first image explains the place of designing the bag- Amsterdam. In the short description, the brand uses words “designed with love”, which implies that the bags are worked out with a great devotion. The second step delves into the moment of production done in India. The text below the image involves a statement “handcrafted and fairly-made in Kolkata, India, from certified Fair Trade organizations”. As Hickey points out, “not just technique but location that is crucial. The craftsman, the materials, the activity of making and consequently the object are regarded as characteristic of a place” (p.91). In that sense, all of the information profoundly contributes to the creation of an authentic and unique product.

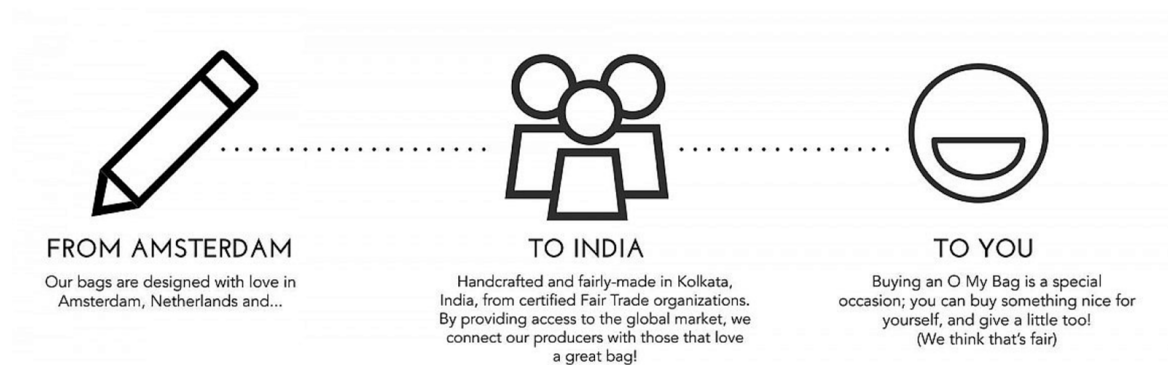


Image 2. Infograph (O My Bag, 2017).

Finally, the last step shows the end-consumer. The image depicts a smiley face, which suggests that the act of buying a new bag makes the purchaser happy. As the text explains, it does not only because of catering for his or her needs but also by supporting the sustainable production in India. By doing so, the brand tries to create a mutual feeling of receiving and giving at the same time. The text says, “You can buy something nice for yourself, and give a little too!”. In other words, it aims at creating an emotional appeal, which would also justify the purchase.

In the third banner, the workers in India are addressed as “PARTNERS” (Image 3). The text says, “As we grow we are happy to see our partners in India grow with us”. According to the text, both of stakeholders profit from this partnership. Interestingly enough, the company seems to put the producers on the first place. This is an unusual approach because usually marketing obscures the maker behind the product and “The fact that there is an individual maker

behind the object is overlooked as the object is recontextualized” (Hickey, p.95-96). In the case of O My Bag there seems to be an opposite situation, here, the main focus is set on workers.

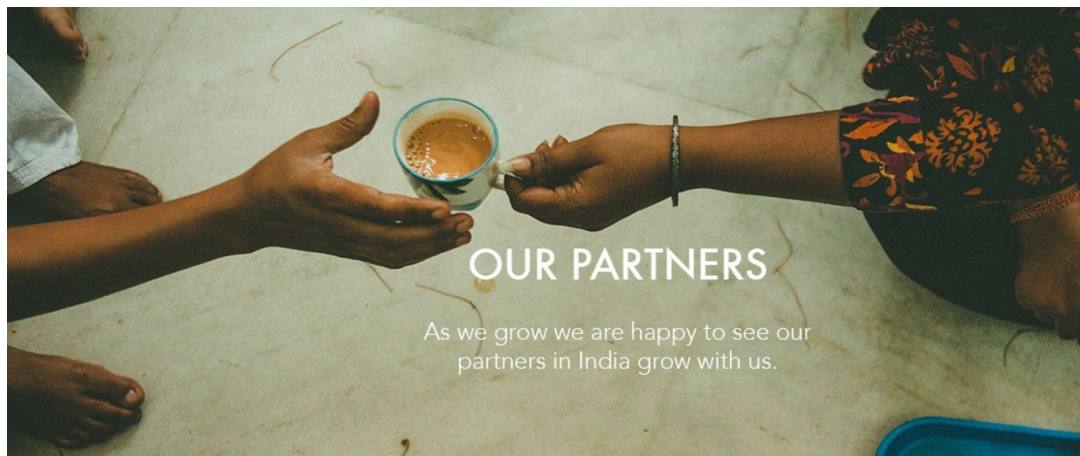


Image 3. Banner (O My Bag, 2017).

Like in the first example, the banner is supported with a picture, which depicts two people sitting on a ground. The image has soft tones and is highly aestheticized. The shot captures a moment of sharing a cup of chai tea. This movement as well as the drink itself profoundly correspond with the text. That is to say, the hands are placed on the same level, which suggests balance and therefore harks back to the “WE” narrative. Moreover, the cup of tea could be viewed as a symbol of friendship, hospitality as well as prosperity. Usually, the moment of having tea is associated with the feeling of happiness and gaining energy. Interestingly enough, because of its composition the picture serves as a peculiar intertext, it significantly refers to Michelangelo Buonarroti’s art piece “Creation of Adam” (Appendix 1). Additionally, after devoting some time to the analysis of this part, it occurs that the banner serves as a hyperlink to the section pertaining to the factory profiles. Throughout the hyperlink, the customers are exposed to information about factories locations, business models, dates of establishment and images of O My Bag workers.

In the fourth section, the brand keeps elaborating on the biographies of its bags. Respectively, O My Bag explains that their products are made out of ‘eco-leather’. By way of illustration of this statement, the company uses a widely known symbol of leather (Image 4). O My Bag’s definition of eco-leather is the following, “Made of cowhides that are sourced locally in Kolkata, India, our products are processed without the use of chemicals”. Drawing from this quote,

the brand's take on eco-leather involves retrieving it from cows but without using harmful chemicals in the process of production.



Image 4. Iconograph (O My Bag, 2017).

Box 1. Customers' understanding of a term 'ecological leather'.

However, personally, when I think about the ecological leather somehow I tend to associate it with artificial leather. In fact, by taking the context of the production, which is India, this description brings even more confusion regarding the ecological status of the bags. Namely, in this country cows are perceived to be sacred and one is not allowed to kill them (Rosen, 2004).

Because of this dubious usage of the term I decided to make a small diversion and conduct a short survey. I created the survey on www.surveymonkey.com and shared it on my Facebook and LinkedIn profiles. The duration of the research lasted one-week (1.06.2017 — 07.06.2017). By means of an online survey I asked people what they understand by the term 'ecological-leather'.

Eventually, I received 65 answers, of which 41 came from women and 24 from men. The majority of the respondents had a BA degree (61,5%), then a MA degree (23,1%), high school degree (10,8%) and college degree (4,6%). By looking at the graph (Image 5) the definition of 'ecological-leather' does not seem to be explicit. The biggest amount of the respondents, which is 35,4%, understands this term as artificial leather. The second most chosen answer is 'vegan leather e.g. made out of pineapple leaves', which constitutes 27,7%. This score could be caused by the increasing popularity of the environmentally friendly textile Pinatex, which got invented in 2013 by one London-based company- Ananas Anam (2017).

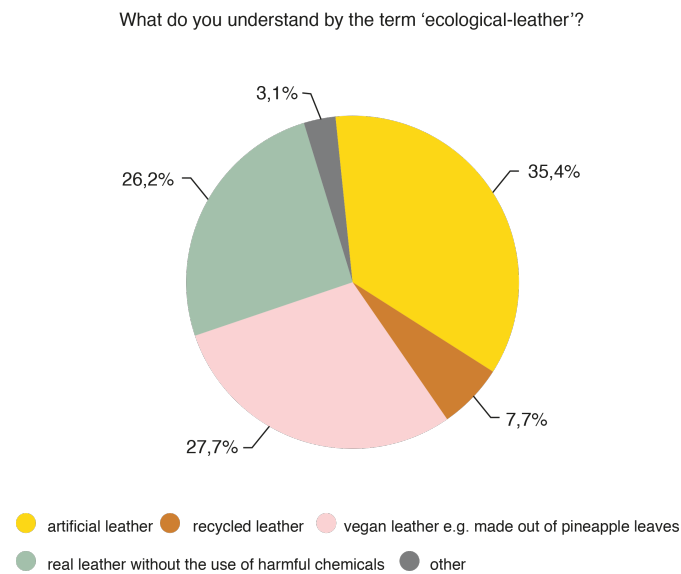


Figure 7. The survey's results (Siekierczak, 2017).

O My Bag's definition "real leather without the use of harmful chemical" was picked by 26,2% of respondents. Then, 7,7% thinks that the eco-leather implies recycled leather. Lastly, 3,1% understands it as other: "Artificial leather without the use of harmful chemicals with only renewable material".

The results show that there seems to be some confusion regarding the understanding of the term 'ecological leather'. This bewilderment could be caused by the marketing practices, which exploit the consumer's wish for eco-friendliness. As Bide writes, nowadays "Everything has some eco-credibility, and that becomes the focus. Familiar buzzwords are thrown around with little regard to what they actually mean: natural, organic, non-toxic, recyclable, biodegradable, earth-friendly" (Bide, p.578). These terms have frequently been used interchangeably, by the same token diluting any specific meaning (Gagnon, p.38). As a result, it becomes increasingly difficult for some people to tell ethical products from the rest. According to Susan and Yven Gagnon, "The most straightforward way to define an "eco-friendly" fibre is by specifying that at least one major step in its production has less of a negative environmental impact than the conventional alternative." (p.39). Whereas for Kate Fletcher "eco fashion largely denotes the design of products that maximize resource efficiency and minimize waste, largely through an ethos of making refinements to the current system." (p.285). What becomes apparent here is the broadness and vagueness

of the definitions of “eco fashion”. It seems that any brand can acquire the “eco” status as long as it incorporates some changes that pertain to the environment. One might say that this lack of specificity is used and abused by marketing practices, which overexploit the expressions from the sustainable glossary. Therefore, I think that in order to make the story more coherent and memorable, O My Bag should consider using another name to describe their materials.

The next image in the banner pertains to the fair trade production (Image 6). Above the text, there is a leaf depicted, which automatically elicits connotations with ecology. The text beneath the picture says,

“O My Bag aims to harness the power of business to create social change. Our partners provide a safe and healthy environment for their workers, where nutrition needs are met, health costs are covered and the poor, especially women, are empowered”.

The brand thus tries to reverse the common narratives within the fashion industry. In order to create a social change it aims at taking advantage of the power of business. This approach is defined in academia as a corporate social responsibility (CSR), which says that a company should “make a profit, obey the law, be ethical and be a good corporate citizen” (Carroll, p.43). In its story, the brand reassures that their partners use the best efforts to provide decent working conditions for the employees in the textile factories. The text addresses particularly the issues of women in the industry. As a matter of fact, since 70% of women are hired in the textile factories, the empowerment of women is at the foundation of many industries’ social initiative (Loker, p.260). Presumably, the majority of the brand’s customers are females; therefore this message could potentially elicit a feeling of solidarity.

The last image in the banner depicts a shopping cart and refers to a plea for customer responsibility (Image 4). The brand states, “We believe that the choices we make as shoppers can change the world”. By saying this, O My Bag makes people feel that their decisions matter and consequently, an individual is able to influence the current state of the fashion industry. In other words, throughout its marketing communication O My Bag empowers the customers and shows that the change can only be done if both parties will cooperate.

Further on the text exhorts, “We can create the worldwide demand for products made with respect for the environment and take a stand for a fairer trade”. Again, here the brand tries to inspire people to accompany them in changing the system and by the same token it includes its customers in the brand’s narratives. There is a great amount of confidence and faith that radiates from this sentence; it feels like a revolutionary manifesto.

In the last banner the story proceeds. The text informs, “We won! The sustainable leather award” (Image 6). The company thus wants to prove that the story, which they just told to their customers, has been confirmed by the outside organizations such as MVO Nederland, Hivos/Stop Child Labour, Shoestainable.

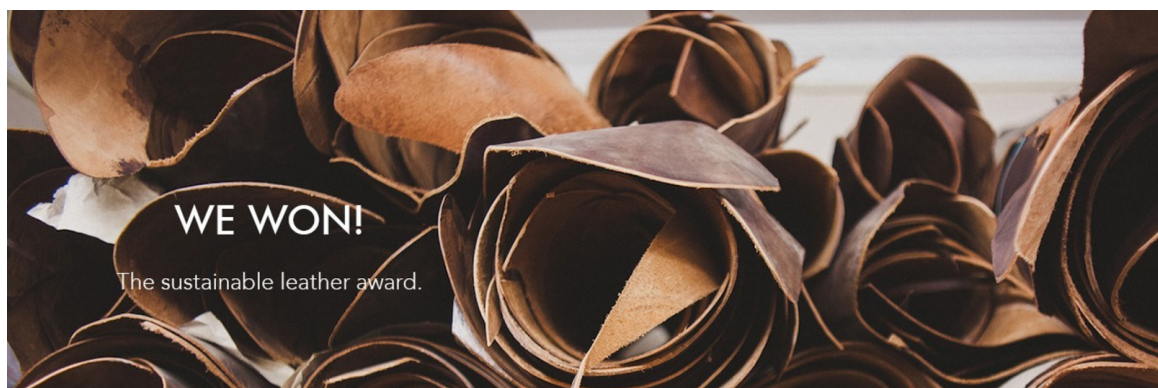


Image 5. Banner (O My Bag, 2017).

As I read on Made-by website, the Sustainable Leather Award 2015

“aims to showcase leather innovation with regards to working conditions, animal welfare and the environment in developing countries. The Sustainable Leather Award aims to reward pioneers and inspire other fashion brands, leather companies, designers and retailers to make improvements within their leather supply chains” (2015).

The award functions as a symbol of fairness, innovation and inspiration. Also, the prize challenges the previous concerns regarding the leather’s “eco” status.

The image in the background to some extent supports these connotations. The viewer is exposed to stocks of brown leather, which create a sense of roughness and artistry. The material is not extensively modified, quite the contrary, it still oscillates within its natural aesthetics. The edges of the leather rolls are not even; therefore one might say that they could be cut by a human being and not a machine. In order to elaborate on the characteristics of the eco leather, the banner is equipped with a hyperlink. The image redirects the viewer

to a text dedicated to the leather that O My Bag uses for its products. Among other things, the text clarifies the confusion connected with producing the bags out of cowhides in India,

“A common question we get at O My Bag is, how it is possible that Patrick can get a hold of cowhides in India, as it’s common knowledge that cows are sacred animals over there. The hides that are used for our bags are of cows that died of age, illness or for the Muslim community. Only few people are familiar with the fact that Islam is the second-largest religion in India. In Kolkata around 33% of the inhabitants are Muslims and eat meat”.

Interpretation (processing analysis)

Drawing from O My Bag’s storytelling, I perceive the brand as a collective initiative. I view it in such a way because of the constant reiteration of the personal pronoun “we”. By saying “we” the company has in mind not only the designers from the Netherlands but most importantly the textile workers from India. This approach leads to assumption of a friendly relationship based on equality between O My Bag and its producers. It seems that due to its horizontal structure, there is no hierarchy involved. In that sense, the production process seems to be as important as the designing activity. Also, when talking about customers’ responsibility, the brand refers to its customers as “we”. It is designed to make a viewer identify with the text and create a bond between the company and the viewer (Sturken and Cartwright, p.50). It seems that the idea behind it is to unite together against the unsustainable practices.

In the ‘About’ section the viewer is exposed to pictures which are rather unusual for the fashion industry. Instead of skinny models presenting products one encounters images in which focus is set on the hands making. Consequently, this part of the body is greatly fetishized in the entire sustainable story of O My Bag. In this context, the hands signify craftsmanship. By doing so, the brand seems to emphasize the significant role of their partners in the life of the company. What caught my attention is the fact that the text talks about the collaboration between Dutch and Indian people, but in the picture only the second group is represented. Possibly, in order to underline the equal character of their partnership, the brand uses two people from the same ethnicity. As a

result, there is no distinction between Dutch and Indian, white and dark, a designer and a maker. From a more ideological perspective, the pictures suggest that in order to make a change there needs to be a shift in thinking about fashion. That is to say, instead of considering fashion as a manufactured product one should think about it as a result of the handmade practices. In the first banner a person in the picture uses fire in the process of tailoring the leather. In our culture, the light is usually referenced while talking about hope and clarity, to evoke a saying: “the light at the end of the tunnel”. Additionally, this symbol is frequently used as a metaphor of progression toward achievement of knowledge. In fact, the flame in the picture is quite small, which may suggest that the contribution of the bag in changing the world is not that substantial. However, as another proverb says, “continual dropping wears away a stone”.

The words that keep coming back on the website are: “believe”, “love”, “happy”, “change” and “partners”. By doing so, O My Bag tries to transfer emotions and values onto its products. The way how I interpret it is that O My Bag products are marketed as the results of love, which comes from both the producers as well as from the customers, who think according to the sustainable fashion ethos. As I already explained, the brand believes in their bags’ capacity to make the world a little better. According to Cambridge Dictionary, the word *believe* means ‘to think that something is true, correct or real’ (2017). Hence, one might say that the brand is quite sure about its bag’s ability to change the world. Additionally, this expression is profoundly charged with a great amount of faith and positivity. In the bigger context, the word *believe* falls under the discourse of Barack Obama. That is to say, the expression “Change We Can Believe In” was frequently used in his winning election campaign in 2008 (Blake, 2012). Due to the text’s connotations with this political event it evokes positives associations. In my view, by using “believe” word, the brand wants to position itself as a spiritual and optimistic company. Drawing from the brand’s discourse, O My Bag is a company that produces products made out of love that make both the customers and the partners happy and by the same token it changes the world.

In the marketing communication O My Bag underlines its ecological status by mentioning the sustainable leather award. As a matter of fact, such information sends a message pertaining to credibility and authenticity of O My

Bag actions. It has been proven that people are more likely to respond to products or services, which are acknowledged by some authorities. According to Cialdini, using authority in the marketing communication can influence people's buying behaviour (p.163). As a matter of fact, human beings tend to follow the lead of real experts or people specialized in specific areas. Bringing the "authority" factor to the story helps the customers dispel their doubts concerning the genuineness of the brand's activity.

Explanation (Social analysis)

The primary aim of critical discourse analysis is to decipher connections between the texts and the broader social practice. What is important to bear in mind is the fact that the signifiers are constantly shifting (Janks, p.340). Therefore, the explanation provided today can be already out-dated in one year or even sooner. Fairclough sees the social context as central to the process of interpretation (1995). The context delves into time and place of a particular research material. I do not think that the content of the website would be fully understandable before 2011. The early twenty-first century is an era of overabundance (Welters, 2015, p.23). Fast fashion is in full swing providing people better and cheaper designs. That is why view people wonder how their clothes come into being as long as their needs are met. Simply put, customers want diversity in their wardrobes. However, since the events from 2012 and 2013 in Bangladesh, "where 118 workers in two separate factory fires and 1,129 workers dies when a building collapsed" the awareness in terms of fashion sustainability seems to be rising (Welters, 2015, p.23). Before, all the dirty secrets of the fashion industry were swept under the carpet for the sake of driving sales, thus no one was thinking about changing the system and consequently making it better. Considering this context one can respond to the website because it seems to go against the fast fashion common narratives. As Mason et. al write "Rising numbers of people feel trapped in a guilt spiral over the negative impacts of their lifestyles and they would like to change." (p.19). Hence, O My Bag tries to tap into customers' concerns by presenting its ethical background. To some extent, the brand encourages helping other people through consumption of guilt-free bags. According to Hickey, by "buying 'ecologically

sensitive' products (...), the consumer can vote with his or her dollars against the mainstream while still being a part of the consumer culture. Buying becomes an effective way of validating alternative values" (p.95).

On the website there are numerous references to the craftsmanship e.g. hands, leather, fire. However, what becomes apparent here is the change of signifiers. Since the industrial revolution and consequently innovation of the assembly line by Ford, we have been witnessing a cult of the machine (Lucic, 1991). As a result of such events, the hands started signifying imperfection and human touch. Because of the fact that nowadays the slow movement gains more followers, the handmade products get back in people's graces. According to Hickey, a handcrafted object is perceived by people to be

"special or rare because it is handmade and perhaps customized; sophisticated because the making of the object required skill; it is precious due to materials or time invested in labour; it is expensive – in terms of subject-matter, function, traditional or historical reference; and is enduring" (p.85).

Thus for some, the handcrafted product is today no longer associated with sloppiness and amateurism but with artistry and self-expression. As a result of this shift of signifiers, the handcrafted items are perceived to be more authentic and unique, therefore depicting them can possibly lead to driving more sales. This is why the advertising discourse that O My Bag creates seems to go back to the basics and celebration of the process of making.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this chapter was to answer the research question: How does O My Bag use storytelling to communicate sustainability? The results of the analysis show that the brand addresses its stories to audience which is rather fashion savvy. Through incorporation of sophisticated intertexts it tries to tap into people's desire for prestige. In its storytelling it focuses mainly on the workers in India, although it does not address them as such. Instead, in the marketing communication, they are called "partners" and are positioned on the same level as the designers in the Netherlands. By doing so, the company tries to create a feeling of fairness and equality. Also, it does so because the small stories

tend to be more appealing to the customers than the non-personal general sustainable narratives.

Furthermore, O My Bag stories involve some educational elements. The banners are quite informative, because they elaborate on the designing and production process. All of the information is supported by a visual imagery that helps the viewer immerse within the story. The brand skilfully engages the viewers by acknowledging them in the brand's narrative. In the story, it is made explicit that the change of the fashion system can be made only if the consumers will support sustainable actions. By reading the website one might sense the feeling of faith that inspires consumers to take the action. That is to say, the brand frequently uses the words like "believe", "love" and "create" that evoke positive connotations.

On a final note, the results of the CDA analysis of O My Bag's storytelling showed that in the visual imaginary, the tailors' hands are greatly fetishized. By doing so, the story zooms into the notion of craftsmanship and therefore contributes to authenticity, which is nowadays particularly "in fashion". Another reason behind making tailors' hands visible to the public eye is an attempt to draw consumers' attention to the human contribution to the process of production of O My Bag products. This approach aims at making the audience aware of how their bags come into being.

Chapter 3: Critical discourse analysis: Studio JUX

Introduction

My second case study of a sustainable fashion brand is Studio JUX. I chose this brand because of its unconventional marketing communication practices. Namely, the brand makes it possible for the customers to digitally connect with the tailors that made their clothing. It does this through printing the tailor's name on the labels and offering 'a digital handshake' on the website that allows consumers to 'meet' the tailor of their clothes (Toussaint, p.323). As I find this approach interesting and quite original, I decided to take a closer look at the brand's marketing communication.

In this chapter I will analyze the storyline of Studio JUX communicated on its website by means of Cook's analysis of context (Cook, p. 4) and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995, p.98). These two will help me to answer my research question, 'How do Dutch fashion brands use storytelling to communicate sustainability?' As I have argued in the first chapter storytelling can be used in order to enhance consumers' awareness in terms of sustainability. I will therefore pay close attention to the customers' education aspects. Moreover, the results from the research will provide data for the comparison of storytelling practices of O My Bag and Studio JUX that I plan to conduct in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

About Studio JUX

In 2008, after seeing exploitative practices of the fashion industry, Jitske Lundgren decided to set up Studio JUX (Toussaint, p.232). Carlien Helmink joined her and took the company's manager position. As the founders of Studio JUX explain, the entire idea of setting up a sustainable fashion brand came up when Jitske Lungrens was on her trip in India. The story of the brand begins from the moment when she saw an Indian man who "was responsible for dyeing the fabrics. He stood in a bath filled with purple dye and his skin had the exact same purple colour. This was not her idea of fashion being fun". This event triggered Lungrens to change the current state of affairs in the fashion industry by establishing her own company. The brand has a wide range in its portfolio of eco-friendly products: from clothes, shoes, bags, accessories to beauty products.

As in the case of O My Bag the designing process of goods takes place in the Netherlands, but the production is in this case located in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Website analysis

The home page features six different sections: “Sale”, “Women”, “Men”, “Gifts”, “Lifestyle” and “Our Philosophy”. While navigating throughout the website it becomes apparent that Studio JUX sells not only its products but also items from other brands, which are consistent with the brand’s aesthetics and philosophy; e.g. Jan ‘n June, Beaumont and Kings of Indigo. Studio JUX provides information about the production process of these brands, but does not provide stories of their workers as they do for their own brand. My first impression of the website could be described as “humble chaos”. That is to say, the pictures and texts are not conspicuous but their large amount and different aesthetics can possibly fragment viewers’ focus. The website is kept within white and grey colours palette with a significant predominance of text.

As I did it in the first case study, in order to establish the context of marketing communication of Studio JUX that will equip me with a broader picture of its storytelling, I will look at the website through Cook’s eight elements of context.

1. When conducting a comparison between storytelling practices of two brands, it is required to look at the same medium as in O My Bag’s case – the website. Thus, the *substance*, which is basically the carrier of the text is the website itself (Cook, p.4).
2. When analysing the *mode* of the research material that deals with means of communication (language, pictures and music) (Cook, p.42), I notice that the website consists of numerous pictures, both black-and-white as well as colourful (Image 6). Most of the images are accompanied with texts that give more information. In the sections pertaining to Nepali workers there are short videos elaborating on their life. When it comes to the language, the website caters solely for English speakers. However, the name of the brand is in German. If it had not been for the explanation of the term provided on the website, I would not have known its meaning. For people not familiar with

the German language the brand explains that “JUX’ literally means “fun’ or ‘having a laugh” (2017).

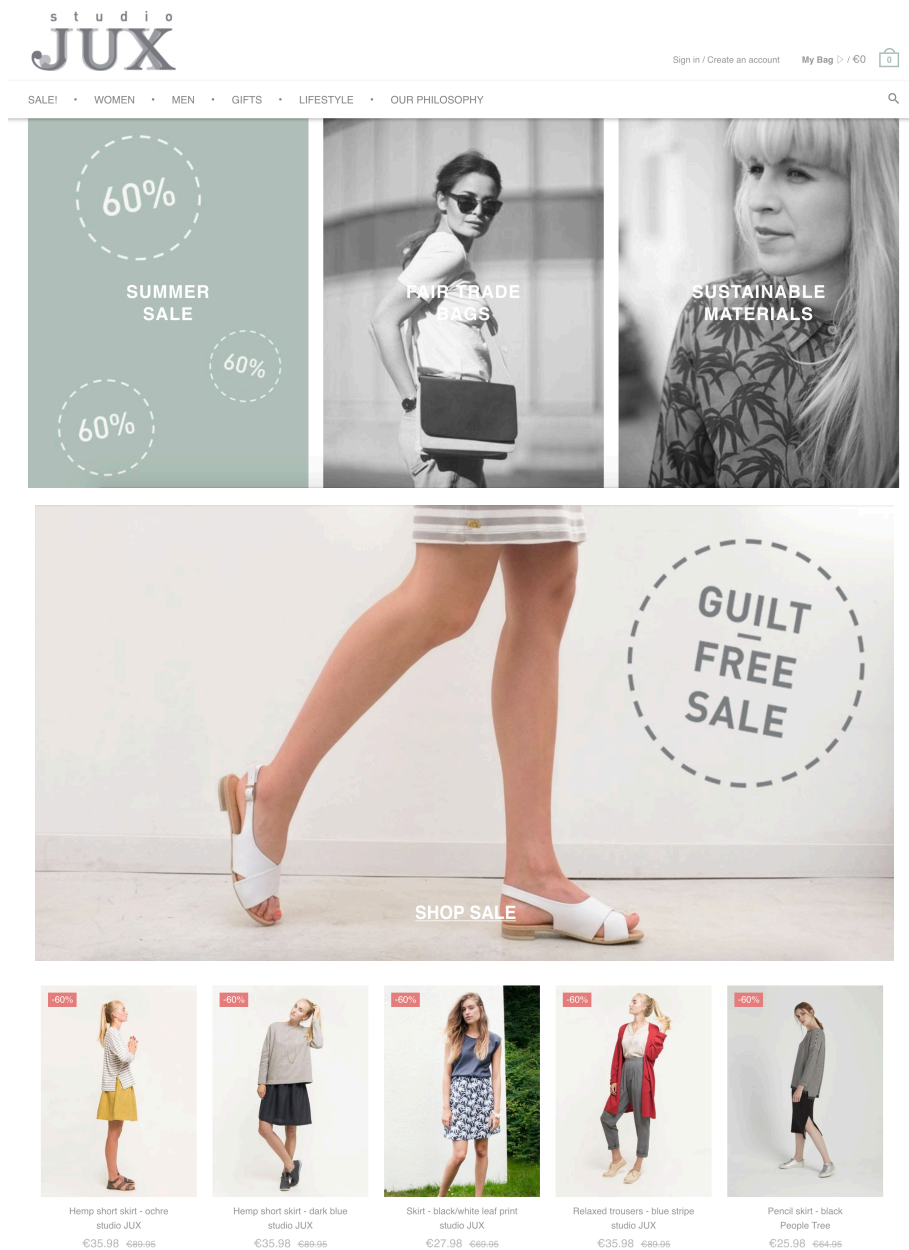


Image 6. Studio JUX’s home page layout (2017).

- Proceeding to the *paralanguage*. When analysing the paralanguage, Cook pays attention to elements such as typography, choice of colour, tone of voice and text’s body (p.71). The template of the website is quite simple, it has grey and white tones. Nevertheless, the body of the website is filled with images that are diverse in terms of aesthetics. That is why I perceive the website as slightly chaotic. Additionally, the composition of the pictures and texts is done not only vertically but also horizontally, which contributes to the creation of a confusing structure. The typography used by Studio JUX is sans

serif (with no projecting lines at the ends), which evokes minimalist connotations. The simplicity of the website and the focus on the textual content are also visible in the website's layout. The white and grey palette of colours most likely underscores the mission of Studio JUX of being as transparent as possible. The titles of banners and sections are written in bold to grab the customers' attention. In terms of the website's tone of voice, I think it is adapted to a group of ecological fashion enthusiasts. By looking at the kinds of clothing that the brand distinguishes in its offer: "sustainable fashion", "ethical fashion" and "vegan fashion", I assume that Studio JUX's target group is familiar with the sustainable fashion glossary and is able to tell the difference between these three terms. The tone of voice of the website is thus quite informative and tends to avoid the exuberant marketing buzzwords.

4. Drawing from Cook, the next element of context is *situation*, which he calls "the relation of the participants in reference to the text" (Cook, p.4). In the case that I am currently analysing, the website functions as the text. Certainly, the website caters mainly for the customers thus the situation would be the act of purchase. Whereas when looking at it from the brand's perspective, the situation involves promotional activities.
5. The fifth element is *co-text*, which focuses on the other texts that belong to the same discourse (Cook, p.4). In Studio JUX's website case, the brand's Instagram and Facebook accounts could be seen as co-texts. Due to their interactive character and a broad access, they profoundly contribute to the dissemination of the brand's values and mission. Also, the flagship store in Amsterdam could be viewed as a co-text because it provides a physical experience that brings another layers of meaning into Studio JUX's discourse.
6. The next element to analyze is the intertextuality of the advertising material (Cook.p.4). According to Liu and Le "intertextuality refers to the relationship between a given text and other texts existing in a given text." (p.13). The first *intertext* that catches my attention is the brand's name. As the readers already know by now, the company's name when translated into English means 'Studio FUN'. The word "fun" here is written in capital letters and is not accidental. Looking at the fashion industry "backstage" one encounters

“forced labour, low wages, excessive work hours, discrimination, health and safety hazards, psychological and physical abuse, lack of awareness of workers’ rights and lack of worker representation for negotiations with management” (Dickson et al., p.6). These key labour concerns certainly do not fall under the definition of fun. One of the banners that is included on the website exhorts, “FASHION SHOULD BE FUN FOR EVERYONE. AND WITH EVERYONE, WE MEAN EVERYONE.” (Image 7). Drawing from the text, the brand implies that nowadays fashion is not enjoyable for everyone. By repeating “everyone” Studio JUX emphasizes the fact that all the stakeholders should derive pleasure from the fashion industry. Thus the word ‘fun’ in this context refers not only to the feeling of enjoyment of wearing the clothing but also to the pleasure connected with making them. In that sense, a feeling of activism radiates from the brand’s name. Therefore, the intertext here takes a form of allusion, which functions as an echo of ideas (Liu and Le, p.17). The brand’s objective is to make fashion fun for everyone.

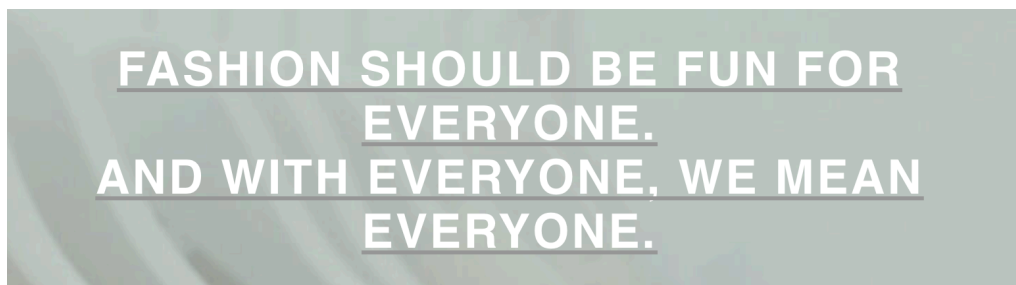


Image 7. Studio JUX's banner (2017).

7. The website involves three groups of *participants*: the employees of Studio JUX, the workers from Nepal and the consumers. As mentioned above, the brand is an initiative of two women, with the first one in charge of design (Jitske Lundgren) and the second one responsible for the marketing communication (Carlien Helmink). It could be said that the owners believe in clothes with a “guilt-free status”. This becomes apparent in the constant reiteration of words like “ethical”, “enjoyable for everyone” and “guilt-free”. Most importantly, and quite unique for the fashion world, the website provides a significant amount of information about the producers from Nepal. Not only are they addressed by their names and surnames, but their pictures are also included. Reading their short statements, readers get the impression that the workers are contented with their work for Studio JUX. As

one worker — Dil Maya Tamang — for example says, “I learned stitching at a small atelier in Kathmandu. After some years, I decided to look for something new and found studio JUX. I’m very happy here with my working conditions and I made some new friends as well”. Finally, the third group of the participants are the customers. Toussaint calls Studio JUX’s target audience ‘the network generation’, which basically entails “higher educated, idealistic youngsters of about 25 to 35 years old” (p.232). I must say that it is indeed corroborated by the website. It is visible by looking at the informative tone of voice as well as the simple aesthetics of the platform that are appealing to this kind of people.

8. Lastly, in order to establish the context of the research material, its function needs to be elucidated. Generally speaking, the website functions predominantly as a shop, but it also contains a vast amount of information about the brand, the textile factory and the Nepali workers.

After establishing the website’s context, I will proceed to the critical discourse analysis of the research material. Cook’s analysis helped me to grasp a bigger picture of the brand’s marketing communication, which will enable me to inquire into the brand’s storytelling more thoroughly.

Description (Text analysis): ‘Our Philosophy’

My main focus of the CDA analysis will oscillate towards the section ‘Our Philosophy’. I chose this subject matter because of the fact that it explains the brand’s values and its sustainable mission. I am very much interested in how the brand communicates its ethical activity because it is claimed to be highly successful (Toussaint, p.232). The CDA will help me to inquire into how Studio JUX uses storytelling to convey sustainability.

The section ‘Philosophy’ consists of four different categories: “About Studio JUX”, “People +planet”, “Handshake” and “Our brands” (Image 8). The first one functions a bit like a home category for the rest within “Philosophy” and it is therefore quite general. The categories are mutually connected by means of hyperlinks and inform each other. For instance, through the category “About Studio JUX” one can gain access to “People + planet” and so forth. This is why in

my analysis I will be sometimes going back and forth between the hyperlinks in order to capture the brand's narratives.

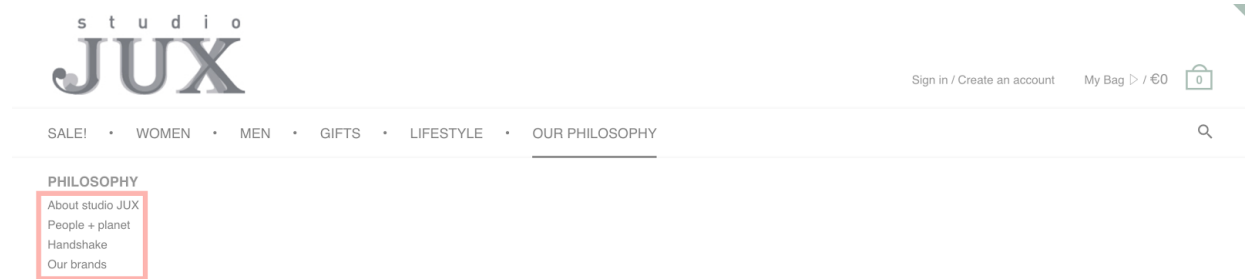


Image 8. Studio JUX's website: "Philosophy" categories (2017).

What becomes apparent at the first glimpse is the significant amount of text in the entire section. Pictures are sometimes incorporated, but they constitute the minority. The logo of the brand consists of different shades of grey that contributes to a feeling of both depth and transparency (Image 9).



Image 9. Studio JUX's logo (Studio JUX, 2017).

Through the incorporation of various shades a structure of layers has been created. In the text, I notice the "We" pronoun, which is characteristic for the manufacturers (Cook, p.157). In the category 'About Studio JUX', the brand explains, "We started studio JUX in 2008 because we believe fashion should be fun and enjoyable for everyone; for the designers, the people working in factories and everyone wearing and using the products". In other words, the reason behind establishing the company was to make fashion enjoyable for all the three parties (designers, producers and customers) and by the same token change the current state of affairs within the fashion industry. The text informs a reader about the brand's core values, which are embedded in fairness and enjoyment. The brand calls its products "our favourite guilt-free goods", which are "sustainably and ethically made". Other expressions to describe the items are: "from recycled yarn", "made of vegan silk" and "organic".

When scrolling down the page, customers get a better understanding of the brand. They are exposed to an image depicting the flagship store in Amsterdam (Image 10). In the picture I identify the characteristic elements of visual signifiers, which are typical for the sustainable fashion discourse. First there is a clear dominance of white colours, which hark back to modern aesthetics. Next, there is the incorporation of non-processed wood in the interior design of the shop e.g. the fitting rooms, bookcases and the tables in the middle. Additionally, the partially glass ceiling enables natural light to fill out the space. Consequently, the light bulbs function in the store more as a decoration rather than as sources of light.



Image 10. Studio JUX's flagship store in Amsterdam (Studio JUX, 2017).

As I mentioned before, from the category “About Studio JUX” the customers can move to other categories. The next section provides hyperlinks to the information about backgrounds of Studio JUX (“People + planet”) as well as the brands that it has in its store (“Our brands”). Each brand’s background is depicted in a form of “passport”. The usage of a term “passports” here is rather strange since it is usually used when identifying people and not brands. To some extent the brands’ passports resemble the human ones. Studio JUX discloses: a brand’s name, a picture of a model presenting the brand, a short promotional text, a country of production, specificity of a company, the information about working standards and the brand’s contribution to the planet and society (Image 11). Notwithstanding, the information provided is rather general, meaning there are no exact cities given, website addresses displayed or statistics included. In

my view, Studio JUX provides meaningful information, for instance “European standards for wages + social security” or “Social integration programs”, in a rather dry and unappealing way.

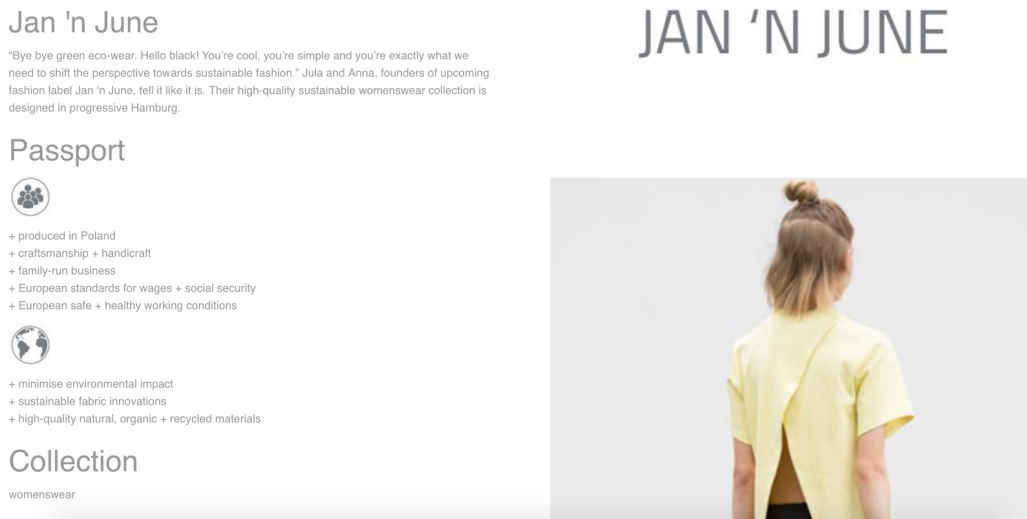


Image 11. An exemplary passport- Jan 'n June (Studio JUX, 2017).

The passport of Studio JUX, which is placed in the section “People + planet” is obviously an exception. Instead of just stating certain characteristics of production the brand provides an elaborate explanation of its activity. Because of the rich source of information I will mainly focus the analysis on this section of Studio JUX’s passport. The page does not contain any pictures, quite the contrary, it only consists of grey text, which is divided into ten topics (Image 12). The text is rich with information.



Image 12. Studio JUX’s passport topics (Studio JUX, 2017).

The first topic (“Own Factory in Nepal”) states that Studio JUX has its own factory in Nepal, called Studio Nepal, where “70% of studio JUX collection is made there. 25% is knitwear made by the GOTS certified factory called Yeti Fashion Design. The remaining 5% is jewellery made in women empowerment projects”. Because the company does not outsource the production process, it

guarantees to have a full control over making the products. Studio JUX claims that it can:

“ensure social impact, safe and healthy working conditions and minimize our environmental impact at the same time. This also ensures that every single piece is handmade with love and dedication. The handshake inside each garment connects you to the tailor who made it. All of our employees are rockstars, who we continually support” (<https://studiojux.com/pages/people-planet>, 2017).

As a matter of fact, this piece of text functions as a testimony. The brand keeps using the word “ensure”, which can create a feeling of certainty in the readers’ minds. Furthermore, the brand mentions “the handshake inside each garment”. What Studio JUX has in mind here is the number that is attached to a label and through which the customers can gain access to the information about the person who made their clothing. The numbers that people can find in their clothing are from one to fifteen and disclose the tailor’s face and a short description that can be viewed through the “Handshake” section (<https://studiojux.com/pages/handshake>, 2017). Interestingly enough, another thing that could catch customers’ attention in the quote above is the way in which the brand addresses its employees from Nepal; it calls them “rockstars”. Drawing from the fashion advertising discourse it is a rather unusual practice. The brand keeps reassuring its customers about the support that it provides to the Nepali workers. As the text explains, “With every piece of studio JUX purchased, we support over 40 Nepali employees and their families. We hope this makes you extra proud of your studio JUX item”. The brand emphasizes here its contribution to the economic improvement of Nepal and points out the benefits of purchasing the products, i.e. helping the Nepali and being proud of spending the money on a good cause.

The second topic on “People + planet” pertains to women’s empowerment and fair trade. The brand explains its objective to make women more independent. To some extent it brings customers closer to the reality of Nepalese women working for Studio JUX:

“Approximately 15% of the studio JUX collection is hand knitted in a women empowerment project in Nepal. After marriage, most Nepalese

women move in with their in-laws and take care of them. It's not common for these women to have a job. We cooperate with a women empowerment project that offers women the opportunity to hand knit the garments at home." (Studio JUX, 2017).

As the text suggests, the brand puts strong emphasis on improving the lives of women in Nepal. It gives them an opportunity to develop themselves through familiarizing them with craft techniques. Studio JUX gets women involved in the process of making jewellery and ceramics. It collaborates with the Nepalese Association for Craft Producers (ACP), which focuses on "up-grading existing basic skills through training on the job to unleash the full potential of their workers.". Thanks to such initiatives Nepalese women are able to earn a salary to supplement family income and consequently become more independent.

From "People + planet", customers find out that the brand cooperates with *Terre des Hommes*, which specializes in training "vulnerable young people". The company's aim is to educate Nepalese by teaching them "how to tailor and read, manage their financial situation and personal hygiene". The question is why Studio JUX has chosen Nepal to locate its production? According to another topic of the section "people + planet", the main objective behind placing the factory in Nepal is to maximize social-economic impact. Such an approach is viewed to be at the heart of every company incorporating CSR activities (Carroll, p.43). The brand provides a short list of information about Nepal:

- "Approximately 25% of the Nepali population, over 7 million people (!), live below the poverty line.
- Approximately 35% of the children in Nepal are employed. In our factory we only work with adult employees and we select suppliers that do the same.

As this quote illustrates, the company uses a lot of numbers and percentages in its marketing communication. By doing so, it gives the readers serious information and backgrounds. It conveys the information by means of bullet points that make it easier for people to digest information.

Interestingly enough, the brand is also transparent about the wages it pays to the employees. On the website it says, "our starting wage is 13.000 roepies + travel + 10% pension + 13th month + social securities. The highest

wage is 38.000 roepies + travel + 10% pension + 13th month + social securities". In the fashion industry, it is rather an unusual practice to disclose the wages since most of the companies take advantage of their employees and do not reward their staff properly (Dickson et. al., p.3-4). Looking at the amount of perks that the employees receive, one might say that Studio JUX provides its Nepali workers with decent salaries. Moreover, the brand only produces two collections per year, which basically entails less stress and pressure for the employees in comparison with the fast fashion designing process.

In relation to the brand's take on the environmental issues, Studio JUX tries to minimize its footprint as much as possible. The website says, "100% of our electricity is generated from renewable resources. The factory runs on Nepali hydropower, our office and store run on green electricity from wind and water generated in The Netherlands, free from any CO2 emissions".

The next topic that the brand raises in the section 'About' is Studio JUX's mission and vision. The company does not see itself solely as a NGO or as a commercial initiative, but claims to combine the best of both worlds. Therefore, in order to describe its activity it uses the term "social enterprise". According to Macmillan Dictionary, a social enterprise is "a business that is a combination of a public and private company and puts its profits back into the business or community" (2017). The brand thus tries to reinforce its mission to serve people and community. On the website, the company includes its own definition of success, which "means growth for everyone involved in the value chain; success for our employees, stakeholders, key suppliers, customers, lenders and shareholders". In its view of success the brand includes basically all the parties involved in the process of production, distribution and consumption. There is a strong emphasis on equality, which is apparent throughout the word "everyone" that in fact comes back quite often in the brand's narrative.

Finally, at the bottom of the category "About Studio JUX" there are topics pertaining to awards, partners and media. The first as the name suggests, informs on the titles that the brand won:

"the Ethical Fashion Award in Paris (2010) and the Green Fashion Competition (2012), an initiative of Amsterdam Fashion Week and the Dutch ministry of Economics. In 2013 the foundation studiojux.org won the

ASN World Prize in the category 'fair trade'. Studio JUX was rewarded with an investment of Village Capital in 2014 and won the Social Enterprise Audience award by Elsevier Juist in 2016”.

By looking at this quote, the customers can see that the brand’s sustainable activity has been widely appreciated by numerous institutions from and outside the fashion world. The awards function as confirmation of the brand’s noble mission. Another thing that contributes to Studio JUX’s credibility is the group of partners that the brand cooperates with. The first one – Terre des Hommes - as was already mentioned is specialized in training vulnerable young people. The second one - Stichting Doen - is a foundation that supports sustainable initiatives. Another one - Alvanon - is “a company that applies science to help the apparel industry increase efficiency within its product development processes”. Drawing from these backgrounds no wonder that Studio JUX wants to work together with them. All of the partners have the sustainability ethos at their core and by supporting Studio JUX they give the brand a mark of approval. The same goes for media. On the website there are three magazines mentioned that also enhance the image of Studio JUX. These are: Vogue, fd. Persoonlijk and Glamour.

In this part of the critical discourse analysis, I have conducted a text analysis of the section “Philosophy” with a particular emphasis on the categories: “About Studio JUX” and “People + planet”. These two elaborate on the brand’s take on sustainability as well as communicate its mission. The text analysis allowed me to gather useful information about the company’s marketing communication that help me understand Studio JUX’s narratives, which I will interpret in the following section.

Interpretation (processing analysis)

Drawing from the text analysis of Studio JUX’s website, I interpret the brand predominantly as a social initiative. On the website there are only a few marketing buzzwords like “Guilt-free sale”. Mostly, the customers encounter a vast amount of information pertaining to the background of the company and its philosophy. This technique is known as *soft selling*, which “relies more on mood than on exhortation, and on implication that life will be better with the product” (Cook, p.15). By doing so, Studio JUX wants to draw customers’ attention to the

social activities within the enterprise. As Clow and Baack point out, “companies engaged in positive activities generate quality publicity and engender customer loyalty.” (p.390). Therefore, unveiling the biographies of objects could be used in order to enhance the firm’s image. The company hopes that the customer can be proud of their purchases at Studio JUX. It could be said that this premise of being proud enhances a good feeling about oneself.

In its storytelling the brand frequently uses vocabulary such as “philosophy”, “believe” and “growth”. These words contribute to a spiritual image of the company. Drawing from the kinds of the clothing that the brand has in its offer, these are: “sustainable fashion”, “ethical fashion” and “vegan fashion”, the brand assumes that its customers are familiar with the sustainable fashion glossary and are able to tell the difference between these three kinds. What I find interesting is the fact that the term “sustainable” already implies being ethical (Carroll, p.43). Hence, I do not understand the choice of the divisions of sustainable fashion introduced by Studio JUX. To a great extent this distinction seems to be blurred and in consequence could be confusing for the readers. Another reason why I think that the brand’s target group consists of sustainability enthusiasts is the fact that the primary focus of the website is set on the “dry” text and not on the images. This may also be a strategy to invoke seriousness. As a matter of fact, Studio JUX provides elaborate information about its design and production process that could not necessarily be understood by an average Joe, because to some extent its noble mission and message may get lost within the amount of data that the website gives. Instead of focusing on storytelling the brand is paying more attention to “fact telling”. As Leinaweaver contends, “People ask for data, but believe stories” (p.48).

The results of my analysis show that Studio JUX builds its marketing communication around three pillars of corporate social responsibility (CSR). That is to say, it incorporates content about actions that are environmentally sensitive, socially equitable and economically sound (Giddings et al., p.187-196). Each brand’s decision is explained and preceded by a description of a current state of affairs. By doing so, Studio JUX wants to position itself as a countermovement towards the common practices within the fashion industry. In other words, the brand creates a certain feeling of fairness. The company’s story

is being told in a narrative “They” (the industry) versus “We”. By way of illustration I gathered in the Table 1 several quotes from Studio JUX’s passport that depicts this phenomenon.

THE FASHION INDUSTRY	STUDIO JUX
<p>“Over the last few years, the price of fashion and clothing has decreased, however, unfortunately, the human and environmental costs have grown dramatically.”</p>	<p>“We started studio JUX in 2008 because we believe fashion and a sustainable lifestyle should be fun and enjoyable for everyone; for the designers, the people working in factories and everyone wearing and using the products.”</p>
<p>“The minimum wage in Nepal is 8.200 roepies.”</p>	<p>“our starting wage is 13.000 roepies + travel + 10% pension + 13th month + social securities.”</p>
<p>“Because fast fashion brands compete for market share, factory workers are required to work overtime in badly managed buildings and poor conditions so they can meet strict deadlines.”</p>	<p>“At studio JUX we consider this unhealthy and unacceptable working conditions. We specifically choose to produce two collections each year, instead of every six weeks. This allows us to offer consumers a fashionable, ethical and sustainable alternative in a demanding market that is under a lot of pressure.”</p>
<p>“Although offering a contract and steady income might sounds like a common thing to do, it is not common at all. Most fashion brands pay per piece (piece rate).”</p>	<p>“Next to contracts, we offer tailored solutions to 60% of our employees including tuition fees, mediation, medical facilities and more. We cooperate with local NGO’s to support our employees in improving their living and housing situation.”</p>

Table 1. Studio JUX’s activity versus the common practices of the fashion industry (content: Studio JUX, 2017; illustration: Siekierczak, 2017).

By juxtaposing itself to the rest of the fashion brands, Studio JUX aims not only at enhancing its image but also making people aware of the grim reality that is hidden behind the apparel labels. The texts that the brand provides function as eye-openers for the readers, who are not familiar with the process of production of the clothing. Hence, the content clearly serves educational purposes.

The words that keep coming back throughout the website are: “women”, “ensure”, “support”, “love” and “connect”. Such a vocabulary is common for pro-social marketing, which “involves advertising that focuses on the values, behaviour, and beliefs of the company” (Clow and Baack, p.390-391). Especially the words “support” and “connect” help Studio JUX to be perceived as an activist rather than a commercial initiative.

What most drew my attention in the analysis is the term “rockstars”. The brand uses it while referring to the workers from Nepal. Here, this word functions as a peculiar intertext. Namely, it assigns to the Nepali tailors the attributes characteristic for rockstars. By doing so, Studio JUX tries to change the way in which society perceives textile workers and thus make them more appreciated. The word “rockstar” in this context implies being cool, in the centre of attention, acknowledged and important. In that sense, the company puts its employees in the spotlight and encourages the customers to do the same by wearing t-shirts with a statement ‘MY NEPALI TAILOR IS A ROCKSTAR’ (Image 13). What becomes apparent here is the change of the usual narratives. Instead of common practices of putting designers on a pedestal, Studio JUX embraces the physical workers without whom the production of the apparel would not be possible. Simply put, its marketing communication is original and the Nepali “rockstars” constitute the company’s unique selling position (USP).



Image 13. ‘My Nepali tailor is a rockstar’ t-shirt (Studio JUX, 2017).

Another distinctive marketing communication practice that I identified is the previously mentioned digital handshake. It could be said that the handshake functions here as a symbol of connectivity and the customers’ appreciation of the tailors’ work. Also, it could suggest something tangible that is solely reserved for humans. Throughout the handshake the customers can “meet” the Nepali tailors. However, the meeting is just initiated from one side - the consumers. In my view, the possibility of the digital handshake arouses curiosity among the customers

and triggers questions like “Who made my clothes?”, “In what kind of conditions my clothing was made” and “How does the tailor look like?” etc. By means of an attached to a label number, people gain access to the tailors’ stories. In my view, this approach elicits a certain sense of empathy and certainly contributes to the increase of the sustainability awareness by making people aware of who stands behind their labels. Thanks to the handshakes and the passports the customers get a better understanding of the biographies of the brand’s products that in fact enlarge their knowledge about products and could possibly influence their buying decisions.

Explanation (social analysis)

Zooming out from the interpretation of Studio JUX’s marketing communication, I need to provide an explanation of such discursive practices (Fairclough, 1995, p.98). The focus on transparency could be explained by a recent rapid dissemination of dubious sustainable practices among apparel brands. In order to avoid being associated with *greenwashing* Studio JUX provides biographies of its products that elaborate on their production process. By doing so, Studio JUX clearly wants to stand out from the rest of the fashion enterprises that for instance get involved in child labour, harmfully impact the environment and exploit their physical workers. Through constant juxtaposition with the general practices in the fashion industry it seeks to enhance its image and reassure the customers that Studio JUX acts fair. Another reason why the brand is profoundly transparent is the fact that these days the customers highly demand such approach and want to know everything about the companies (Mason et. al. p.11). As Mason et. al. explain, “armed with a smartphone, no matter where the customers are or what are they seeking, the views and the experiences of others — and with them, the security of pre-purchase confidence — are but a tap away.” (p.11). Therefore, in order to avoid the situation in which people get information from unknown sources the brands disclose their backgrounds in their marketing communication. By doing so they basically send a message: “We have nothing to hide”.

The idea behind the digital handshake could be explained with Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism that I discussed in the first chapter. Because of

the fact that these days people purchase products predominantly on account of their symbolic meaning the labour work tends to be disguised and generally invisible for the public eye (Marx, p.47). Hence, the concept of handshakes aims at bridging the production with consumption by allowing the customers to digitally connect with the tailors and consequently acknowledge their work. It could be said that by means of the digital handshakes the brand “brings the workers back to the fashion picture”. By doing so, Studio JUX tries to change this current fashion discourse and introduces the new ways of telling stories pertaining to their employees.

On a final note, it is important to bear in mind that Studio JUX’s discourse is rooted in a broader context of ‘sustainable brands’. Therefore, the fact that the website oscillates towards simple aesthetics is not accidental. The unpretentious style is aimed at putting the focus not only on the products but most importantly on the company’s actions. Another thing that derives from the context of sustainable brands is the amount of background information about the production process.

Conclusion

The primary aim of this chapter was to answer the research question: “How does Studio JUX use storytelling to communicate sustainability?” With the critical discourse analysis of Studio JUX’s marketing communication it is possible to say that the brand wants to be seen as a company that performs actions consistent with its attitudes. It does so by means of disclosing the biographies of their products. Throughout the digital handshake that redirects the customers to the narratives of the makers of their clothing the brand establishes a connection between these two parties. Thus, the customers become aware of the fact that there are actual people behind their favourite jeans.

While analysing the storytelling of the brand, I have identified numerous facts and figures that reassure people about Studio JUX’s noble mission. Interestingly enough, by means of short stories depicting the lives of the Nepali workers, the brand invites its audience into the world of the tailors from Nepal. These videos function as diaries of the makers and get customers acquainted with their routines. Another advantage which can arise as a result of providing

the information about the tailors is the fact that the brand not only makes people connect with the production but also with the clothing itself. Thanks to elaborate biographies of objects provided by the brand, the customer can relate to the things more easily. In other words, it is no longer “an average t-shirt made by someone in Asia” but for instance, a t-shirt made by Yelisha Limbu, who is a tailor in Studio JUX and next to her work, she studies. In my view such details profoundly influence the way how people treat the clothing. Suddenly, they realize that it does not come out of nowhere, but it derives from the hard work of particular people. Such approach is incredibly unique in the fashion industry. Usually the brands try to hide the tailors because they are perceived as not glamorous enough for the public eye.

Another aspect that I paid close attention to in my analysis were the educational aspects of the brand’s storytelling as well as its capacity to broaden the customers’ awareness in terms of sustainable fashion. Studio JUX raises the awareness of customers by providing them information about common practices that take place in the fashion industry. The information about the tailors is given in a quite interactive way, which makes it more playful and thus more engaging.

In order to get a better understanding of the storytelling practices of Dutch apparel brands, in the next chapter I will compare the results received from the analyses of O My Bag’s and Studio JUX’s websites contexts and the critical discourse analyses of their storytelling practices.

Chapter 4: Comparative analysis of storytelling practices of O My Bag and Studio JUX

Introduction

In the chapters 2 and 3 I have conducted a critical discourse analysis of two Dutch brands: O My Bag and Studio JUX, which are quite different in their approach. I chose these two brands for my analysis because of their high recognition in the Dutch fashion world and their active participation in social initiatives (The Green Scene, 2017; Catching the Glow, 2017; Fair Fashion Style, 2017). The critical discourse analyses that I conducted have already shown how these brands use storytelling to convey sustainability. However, I am also interested in how they compare to each other. The aim of this thesis is to acquire more holistic view in terms of storytelling for fashion sustainability that would in the end allow me to come to well-grounded conclusions. This study tries to answer the research question: How do Dutch fashion brands use storytelling to communicate sustainability? In the comparative analysis I will try to identify the points of similarity as well as the points of difference. Based on the results retrieved from the comparative analysis, in the final conclusions I will give some advice pertaining to incorporation of storytelling in the marketing communication of sustainable fashion brands.

In the analysis, drawing from the methodology from the previous chapters, I will first compare the context of the websites through Cook's lenses. In the second part of this chapter I will discuss the juxtaposition of the results from the critical discourse analyses.

Comparative analysis of the websites

By looking at the eight elements of context of marketing communication of O My Bag and Studio JUX, I notice that three elements are the same due to the character of medium. These are: *substance* (1), *situation* (4) and *function* (8). Respectively, both of the research subjects are websites that enable customers to purchase products, thus primarily serve as online shops.

The *modes* (2), which refer to means of communication of these two websites, differ slightly. That is to say, O My Bag communicates predominantly by means of pictures and short videos, whereas Studio JUX conveys its

storytelling mainly through text. Despite of its Dutch origin both of the websites cater for English speakers, in O My Bag's case the platform is also translated into the German language. This suggests that both of the companies are internationally oriented.

The websites also differ when it comes to *paralanguage* (3). O My Bag uses more contrast colours like black and yellow or red on its website. The pictures have overly bright colours that give an impression of warmth and positive feelings. Additionally, the high saturation of images creates a certain sense of roughness that pertains to authenticity. All the visual content on the website is exposed in such a way to catch the viewers' attention. In contrast, in Studio JUX's case the pictures' colours are muted rather than highly saturated. This creates a feeling of a dream or memory. By fading out the colours, I think the brand wants to draw the customers' attention to text and consequently place the images more in the background rather than in the centre of attention. When analysing tone of voice of the brands, I notice that O My Bag speaks to more fashion savvy people and businesswomen, who look for sustainable as well as fashionable bags. Instead, the tone of voice by Studio JUX seems to speak to people who are familiar with fashion sustainability and predominantly look for ethical apparel. Thus, in comparison with O My Bag, Studio JUX tends to avoid exuberant marketing buzzwords and tries to remain modest.

The *co-texts* (5) of the websites are quite similar. Both of the brands are active online and have their accounts on Facebook and Instagram. O My Bag additionally runs its account on Twitter and Pinterest. As Peterson contends, social media "allows customers to have a public dialogue directly with companies and hold them accountable for their actions" (p.76). Thanks to these channels the brands' stories can be delivered in a less commercial way to the customers. The co-texts help the brands to spread their message and reach a bigger audience. For people who still demand physical experience when shopping, both of the brands have their flagship stores in Amsterdam, where the customers can learn about the products from the employees.

The next element of the context of communication in Cook's terms is *intertextuality* (6). As a matter of fact "everything in the world is textualized" (Liu and Le, p.12). That is why in the analyses I pinpointed the intertexts that I found

particularly important for the brands' storytelling. O My Bag in its marketing communication especially underlines the city of its origin — Amsterdam. My interpretation is that the brand does it to be perceived as more prestigious and creative-minded. Moreover, in of the banners I found a visual reference to Michelangelo Buonarroti's famous art piece "Creation of Adam" in the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Thus the brand tries to hark back to classic aesthetics. Whereas in Studio JUX's case, the emphasis is placed on "FUN" and therefore it has less connotations with prestige and fanciness but rather with making fashion enjoyable for everyone. The intertexts are incorporated to "produce a sense of intimacy to readers, and attract readers' attention" (Liu and Le, p.17). Studio JUX keeps charging its story with the feeling of fun by addressing its Nepali employees as "rockstars" when O My Bag uses the word "partners", which when juxtaposed with the first expression sounds really business oriented. When comparing the intertextual relations of these two brands, I must say that O My Bag uses more sophisticated references, while Studio JUX infuses a feeling of fun in its marketing communication. Interestingly enough, Studio JUX's take on fun is delivered in a quite modest way. I would have imagined fun in more vibrant fashion instead of such unpretentious aesthetics.

The last element of context that I will compare in this section is the *participants* (7). Both of the websites pertain to three groups: the employees from the Netherlands, the tailors from India or Nepal and the customers. The first two groups I will discuss more thoroughly in the section pertaining to the characters of the brands' storytelling as they play a central role in the brand's narratives. The target groups of these two brands, they are quite distinctive. Namely, drawing from the tones of voice and the products' aesthetics, I can say that O My Bag addresses predominantly fashion savvy women. Its bags are not only sustainable but also greatly fetishized. In other words, looking at the marketing communication it can be said that O My Bag customers probably buy the products primarily because of their appealing look and secondly due to their sustainable character. Whereas Studio JUX's audience are probably more drawn to the products because of their ethical background and not their fashionable status.

The comparative analysis showed that even though both brands have sustainability at their core, the way in which they communicate differs slightly. That is to say, O My Bag's storytelling portrays fashion sustainability as something cool and fashionable as opposed to Studio JUX that depicts it more as something that requires activism and a sense of mission. The second brand also tries to exhort the customers to make fashion fun for everyone, but somehow the fun part is not that apparent. The layout of Studio JUX's website is quite simple and does not contain any surprising elements.

After comparing the brands' marketing communication contexts that basically involved looking at the tone of voice and identifying the websites' aesthetics, I will now discuss the results of the critical discourse analyses.

Comparison of the results from the critical discourses analyses

For the comparison I will mainly discuss five elements that contribute to the storytelling discourses of O My Bag and Studio JUX: language and tone of voice, incorporation of visual content, characters, emotional appeal and educational aspects.

When looking at the language of the storytelling both of the brands establish their narratives from a "we" perspective. By doing so they create a feeling of collective efforts. When I look at the frequently used vocabulary in their storytelling, words such as "believe", "love" and "connect" keep coming back. By means of such a glossary the brands charge their storytelling with positive connotations and try to communicate the sustainable mission. Even though their objectives are similar and equally noble, the incentives to purchase their products are quite distinctive. The difference lies in communicating the gains coming from the products. According to O My Bag, "O My Bag is a piece that you can **flaunt without guilt**", whereas Studio JUX stays, "With every piece of studio JUX purchased, we support over 40 Nepali employees and their families. We hope this makes you **extra proud** of your studio JUX item." What I find interesting here is the choice of words "flaunt without guilt" and "extra proud". According to Macmillan Dictionary *flaunt* means "to deliberately try to make people notice your possessions, beauty, abilities etc., because you want them to admire you" (2017). Therefore, it pertains to the phenomenon of commodity

fetishism that tends to speak to people's desires and ego (Marx, p.47). Additionally, when applying Maslow's pyramid into this case, it speaks to self-esteem needs of customers. As Maslow explains, "Satisfaction of the self-esteem need leads to feeling of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy, of being useful and necessary in the world" (p.45). In other words, by speaking to people's self-esteem O My Bag tries to tap into a basic drive within human beings, like sense of belonging. However, the word "flaunt" itself has a rather negative resonance and implies a certain sense of compunction that is why the brand adds "without guilt". As a matter of fact, the results coming out of this collation are quite oxymoronic.

When I look at the definition of the word *proud* it resonates with a more inconspicuous message. That is to say, it implies, "feeling happy about your achievements, your possessions, or people who you are connected with" (Macmillan Dictionary, 2017). Hence, the incentives to buy Studio JUX's products are more connected with feeling extra happy rather than craving for admiration from other people because of the things a person possesses. Looking at it through Maslow's lenses, I would say that the reasons behind buying Studio JUX's products are embedded in self-actualization needs, which constitute the highest level in the pyramid. According to Maslow, such needs refer to "man's desire for self-fulfilment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one idiosyncratically is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming" (Maslow, p.46). This is why Studio JUX speaks to the customers' morals and values rather than to sense of prestige.

As Clow and Baak write, "Visuals tend to be more easily remembered than verbal copy. They are stored in the brain as both pictures and words. This dual-coding process makes it easier for people to recall the message" (p.145). In other words, the visuals significantly contribute to the way in which people perceive a brand; hence they profoundly influence its discourse. Therefore in this section I will compare how do the brands incorporate visual content in order to convey sustainability. As I already mentioned while comparing the brands' paralanguage, O My Bag's images are more vivid and full of life than Studio JUX's ones. Taking into consideration the latter's name, which stands for fun, one could

say that it should be the other way around. What is more, the pictures on O My Bag's website disclose the act of making the bags by means of considerate close-ups in which the focus is chiefly set on the tailors' hands. Here, the brand tries to reiterate and consequently emphasize the significant role of the craftsmanship in the brand's narratives. To some extent, through close-ups it invites the viewers to the "backstage" of its production. In contrast, Studio JUX, does not include many visuals depicting the act of making the products. As a matter of fact, it mainly uses a text to put its message across. There are some references to the production process that are captured on the video footage although they do not constitute the centre of attention.

The characters of the stories told by O My Bag and Studio JUX mainly involve two groups: the teams from the Netherlands and the employees from India and Nepal. Drawing from the results of the critical analyses both of the brands put their tailors in the foreground. The ways in which the employees are portrayed on the websites differ. For instance, O My Bag depicts its Dutch team by means of black and white pictures and discloses their favourite O My Bag product, best sources of inspiration and guilty pleasures. Again, the topics as well as the aesthetics of the images are connected with a rather glamorous style. Interestingly enough, the pictures of tailors from India are saturated with colours and in fact they are mainly close-ups, drawing the viewer in. Quite a different approach is visible in Studio JUX's marketing communication. The pictures of the owners are in colour and the images presenting the Nepali tailors are in black and white. Unlike O My Bag, Studio JUX describes its owners more as the activists and does not talk about their "guilty pleasures", which could be perceived as trivial information in comparison to the brand's mission. The black and white tones of tailors' pictures are sophisticated and they could symbolize their significant contribution to the company. Moreover, some videos that are placed on the website show content pertaining to the Nepali workers routine outside their work. Thus, in comparison with O My Bag, Studio JUX depicts its Nepali employees more as humans rather than as workers. Also, the brand discloses their faces together with their names and surnames by the same token unveiling their identities. This approach is quite uncommon in the fashion industry. By providing information about the makers the brand equips them

with agency and therefore goes against the alienation of labour that Karl Marx analysed already a century and a half ago (Marx, p.48). O My Bag also reveals data pertaining to their employees, but it only oscillates towards their contribution to the production process.

Another significant difference in the depiction of the makers is the way in which the brands address them. That is to say, O My Bag calls their Indian employees “partners”, whereas Studio JUX refers to the Nepali tailors as “rockstars”. These two names indicate that the brands have clearly distinctive approaches towards acknowledging their employees, which are very much embedded in their tone of voice. Even though they are both charged with positive connotations, their resonance is quite different. The first one evokes more business-oriented associations and implies that tailors from India are equally important as the team from the Netherlands. The term “rockstars” elicits a certain feeling of “coolness” and importance. It also suggests that the tailors constitute the core of Studio JUX and they are the ones in the spotlight. By equating the tailors with the rockstars, the brand seems to create a sense of awe – when people wear Studio JUX, it implies, they are cool and proud because their clothing is made not by ordinary tailors. This phenomenon could be explained with words coming from Chip and Dan Heath’s book *Made to Stick*, “The most basic way to make people care is to form an association between something they don’t yet care about and something they do care about” (p.173). Drawing from this quote, Studio JUX takes the power of the concept of the rockstars and infuses it to the perception of their Nepali employees.

As a matter of fact, using the terms and concepts for their emotional connotations belongs to common practices of marketing communication (Heath and Heath, p.173). Both of the companies focus predominantly on incorporating social initiatives rather than investing in traditional brand advertising. Therefore, their marketing practices are centred upon informing the general public about the things they do aside from selling fashion items. They do so because as Clow and Baack explain, “companies engaged in positive activities generate quality publicity and engender customer loyalty” (p.390). In other words, the brands simply want to create an emotional appeal that would persuade the customers into buying their products. That is why O My Bag and

Studio JUX try to make their stories emotionally engaging. O My Bag does it by means of vivid pictures that celebrate the craft and partnership. What I notice in O My Bag's narrative is the fact that the brand tries to portray the act of purchase as a mutual feeling of receiving and giving at the same time. Thus it aims at justifying the incentives behind the purchase by speaking to the customers' sense of empathy. When it comes to Studio JUX's communication, I notice an emphasis on the elements of fun, both in the brand's name and in the text on its website. However, when looking at the website's aesthetics and the small amount of visuals the fun aspects are not really visible. To some extent Studio JUX wants to elicit sympathetic attitudes among its audience by bringing numerous facts and figures coming from the "ruthless" fashion industry and juxtaposing them with their positive contribution. By doing so it endeavours to position itself in a better and more sustainable light. Notwithstanding, according to Chip and Dan Heath, "thinking about statistics shifts people into a more analytical frame of mind. When people think analytically, they are less likely to think emotionally", which is quite important while discussing fashion sustainability (p.167). Drawing from this quote, sometimes incorporating statistics can cause more harm instead of proving the brand's point.

Lastly, I would like to discuss the educational aspects of the brands' storytelling practices. Both of the brands bring the process of production closer to the customers and explain its particulars. Most likely they do it because of the people's low awareness in terms of fashion sustainability. For instance, O My Bag elaborates on the tanning process by giving a detailed description of the stages that are involved in the development of the eco leather (Source: <https://www.omybag.nl/leather/>). What is more, it draws the customers' attention to the environmental and societal positive impact that comes out of the production of eco leather. In its storytelling, it also makes people realize that they are the ones responsible for changing the current state of affairs in the fashion industry. When looking at the educational elements in Studio JUX's communication, I think the biggest lesson that the customers can get out of the brand's storytelling is first and foremost the fact that there are real people who stand behind their clothing. The idea of the handshake, although digital, has a significant emotional appeal that can possibly lead the customers to action. In my

view, a picture of a maker of a particular clothing equipped with his or her name with a short statement can tap into people's mind even more than numerous statistics.

Conclusion

The comparison between storytelling discourses of O My Bag and Studio JUX allowed me to identify the points of similarity and the points of difference, as well as helped me to pinpoint strong and weak elements of the brands' narratives. This chapter inquired into how do these brands use storytelling to convey sustainability. The results of analysis show that the way in which O My Bag and Studio JUX communicate is profoundly determined by their target groups. Respectively, the first addresses its offer to rather fashion savvy people and the latter seems to attract more people with so-called activist attitudes. The results of my analysis show that O My Bag by means of its narratives taps into its customers self-esteem needs, whereas Studio JUX builds its storytelling more around a feeling of self-actualization and modesty. As a result, they communicate different gains coming out of purchasing the sustainable products. Drawing from the marketing communication of both brands, for O My Bag's customer the incentive behind buying the product is to simply show off without feeling guilty and for Studio JUX's enthusiast is to be proud of the product's sustainable status.

Conclusion

Despite its current popularity, sustainable apparel still remains in the shadow of fast fashion. By means of literature review, I tried to investigate the possible explanation behind people's reluctance to buy the sustainable fashion items. It occurred that there are two major factors causing the unwillingness to purchase environmentally friendly products:

1. **Lack of understanding of problem/ threat/ value** (National Geographic Society, 2008).
2. **Comfortable lifestyle/greed** (ibid).

In order to overcome these obstacles and consequently develop the consumers' tastes for products with ethical principals, in this thesis, I suggested that sustainable fashion brands should use storytelling in their marketing communication. As I explained, storytelling as a form of communication has capacity to respectively educate and entertain. By the same token it could serve as a potential tool for increasing people's understanding and making the sustainable fashion more appealing.

In order to understand these two major factors that are responsible for the consumers' reluctance to purchase sustainable fashion, I have applied theories coming from both cultural and marketing communication fields. First, I looked at the obstacles that fashion sustainability is facing through Marx's lenses (1867). Applying his way of thinking, the fact that the consumers do not discern problems in fast fashion is profoundly caused by *commodity fetishism* — the tendency of consumers to view the commodities solely regarding the characteristics of the final product while the process through which it was created remains obscured. Consequently, consumers display a lack of awareness and understanding of conditions in which their clothes come into being. So as to make them familiar with the process of fashion items production, I argued that fashion brands should raise their curtains and display their backstage. In order to ground my argument I turned to Igor Kopytoff's concept of *biographies of objects* (1986), which is a suggestion to follow the objects and get familiar with their markers as well as their places of origin. It has occurred that the idea of biographies of objects significantly resemblances the framework for storytelling, that is to say it consists of characters, plot, message and a possible conflict (Fog

et. al., p.33). In the same vein, biographies of objects could possibly be used as one of the storytelling practices.

There are already some sustainable fashion brands using this practice but as I researched the subject further, I struggled with a paucity of literature describing this phenomenon. Additionally, as Kadembo points out, retail brands find it difficult to construct narratives that would spark sustainable consumption (2012). Taking these two findings into consideration, with my thesis I tried to build on knowledge in terms of creation and application of storytelling for marketing communication of sustainable fashion brands. This study has dealt with the research question **“How do Dutch fashion brands use storytelling to communicate fashion sustainability?”** The second aim of this study was to investigate **the potential educational aspects of the Dutch fashion brands’ storytelling practices.** For the case studies, I chose two Dutch brands: O My Bag and Studio JUX. The choice of the brands was made based on their significant recognition in the Dutch sustainable fashion industry as well as their unique approach towards marketing communication of sustainable actions. I analysed their storytelling discourses by means of Cook’s analysis of context (2001) and Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis framework (1995).

The results of my analysis have shown that in order to convey sustainability, Dutch fashion brands:

- 1. Bring the little stories that talk about their employees and the process of production.**
- 2. Establish their narratives from “WE” perspective and use certain vocabulary such as “love”, “believe”, “connect” and “happy”.**
- 3. Adjust their stories to their audience’s values and tone of voice.**
- 4. Equip their stories with interactive elements e.g. the digital handshake.**

Even though both of the researched brands have a sustainability story at their core, the way how they communicate it differs. It is mainly determined by the characteristics of their target groups that require distinct approaches. Through incorporation of contemporary stories and visual narratives, brands try to disclose their mission and employ transparency. O My Bag uses storytelling predominantly to go against the misconception about sustainable fashion being

only related to hippies and the environment. Looking at the tone of voice of this brand, I can say that it addresses its message to rather fashion savvy women. By means of sophisticated references it invests sustainable bags with prestige and elegance. In my view, by doing so it tries to eliminate the second biggest reason of people not jumping onto the sustainable bandwagon — “the comfortable lifestyle/greed”. In its narratives, it portrays fashion sustainability as a desirable lifestyle, a thing that you can flaunt. This approach reflects Julie Gilhart’s way of thinking, according to her, “Customers are not going to buy something just because it is eco-friendly. It has to look great, fit properly, feel luxurious and be stylish” (p.4). In other words, the product needs to tap into the customers’ sense of self-esteem. Through its pictures and short texts O My Bag tells a story that brings forward the values of partnership, craftsmanship and support. What I find particularly interesting is the way in which it explains to its customers the act of purchasing of O My Bag products, namely it depicts it as both receiving and giving.

The investigation of storytelling practices of Studio JUX has shown that the brands can also incorporate narratives in order to increase people’s proficiency in sustainable fashion, thus tackle the first reason of attitude-behaviour gap — “the lack of understanding of problem/threat/value”. Therefore, it aims more at being informative rather than seductive. Through elaborate description of the brand’s activity Studio JUX explains its objectives and mission. Here, it is worth mentioning that incorporation of statistics and numbers in the brand’s narratives can indeed provide a serious background of the sustainability issues but can also result in statistical numbing. Hence, brands should be careful to not overload their stories with hard data. Next, by means of unique idea of the digital handshake, it introduces new ways of telling stories pertaining to their tailors. These stories disclose faces and names of people behind the customers’ clothes in an engaging and playful way by the same token making them the brand’s “rockstars”. Thus, storytelling could be also used to challenge common stereotypes in the fashion industry such as the image of “an Asian textile worker”.

The study also inquired into the ways in which Dutch fashion brands can possibly educate and enhance customers' awareness through storytelling. The research has shown that the brands by means of storytelling:

- 1. Generate interest in the sustainability issues.**
- 2. Make consumers familiar with the cruel fast fashion practices.**
- 3. Elaborate on the production process.**
- 4. Make consumers aware of their contribution to sustainable fashion.**

These findings suggest that in general, the main role of stories is putting knowledge into a framework that would be approachable for everyone. In order to make consumers act, the brands send messages wrapped with emotional appeal that touch their hearts and open their minds to sustainability issues within the fashion industry.

In my thesis, I predominantly discussed and focused on the subject of storytelling from the sustainable brands perspective. Thus, the study is limited by the lack of information on the consumers' impressions of the storytelling practices. It would be interesting to research their perception of the narratives conveying fashion sustainability as well as to study the storytelling effectiveness in the marketing communication of sustainable fashion brands.

The findings of this research provide insights for the sustainable fashion brands. Drawing from my analysis, firstly, I would advise the sustainable brands to be careful with using a lot of text in order to avoid overwhelming people with information. Remembering Slovic's model that was discussed in the first chapter, a brand should equip its message with a visual content in order to elicit a feeling that would motivate people into helping. Secondly, I think incorporating some interactive elements like "digital handshake" makes it easier for consumers to engage with makers rather than pictures or a text. Lastly, a sustainable brand needs to align its stories with audience values and adjust an appropriate tone of voice to make the story appealing.

Certainly, the stories of the sustainable fashion brands significantly differ from the ones my mother used to tell me when I was younger, but they do share a common denominator — engagement. Storytelling cannot cure all the problems that fashion sustainability is currently facing. Nonetheless, with regard to my findings, storytelling certainly has a potential to influence the two major

factors of consumers' reluctance towards the sustainable fashion: lack of understanding and lack of "lifestyle" appeal. That is to say, narratives encapsulate certain values that the customers can identify with and feel a sense of belonging. Furthermore, they explain abstract concepts in a tangible intriguing way. By incorporating biographies of products the brands invite their audience to get familiar with their backstage. By the same token they send a message "We have nothing to hide", which makes them more trustworthy and transparent.

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Figure 1.

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Figure 4.

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Figure 6.

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Image 1.

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Image 2.

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Image 3.

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Image 4.

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Figure 7.

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Image 5.

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Image 6.

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Image 7.

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Image 8.

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Image 9.

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Image 10.

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Image 11.

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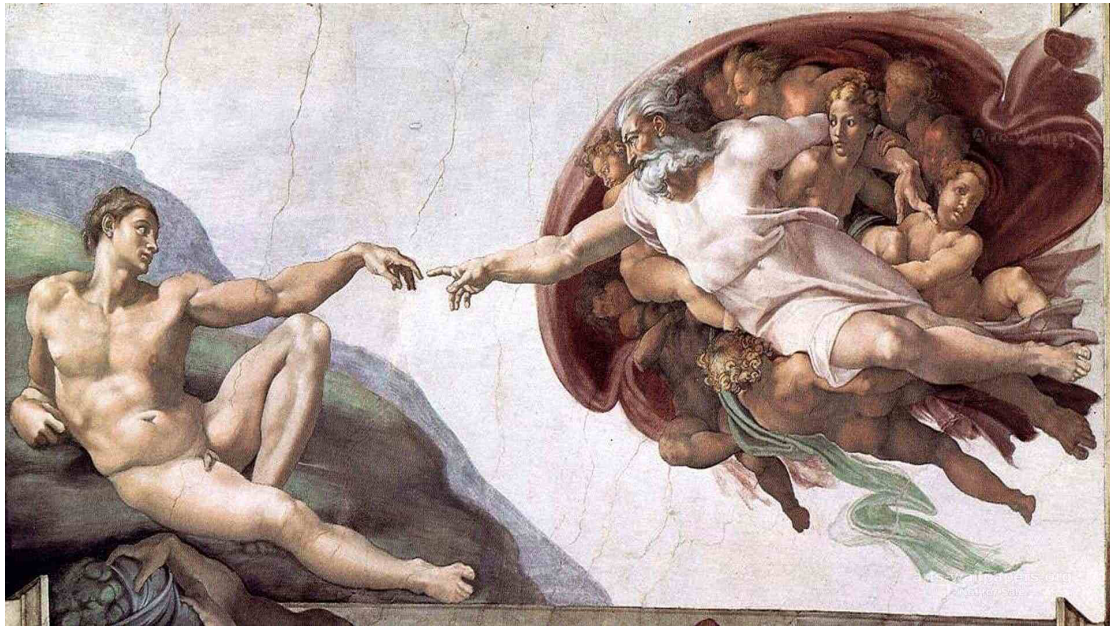
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Appendix



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