



Study on sustainable certification

Zeba Yasmin* & Vasundhara Saluja2

Fashion Design, Department Of Art and Design, Faculty of Fashion Design, Sharda University, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, 201310

Abstract

This article introduces some of the top ethical and environmental standards, certifications, and other programs related to the fashion business. There are several standards and certifications available to help manage sustainability in supply chains. Some are environmental, some are social, some are about the goods, and some are about the process. While a certification is a legal or contractual requirement, a standard is a set of requirements, criteria, or guidelines that specify how something should be made or how processes should take place. In light of this, a material or process may be certified in accordance with one or more standards that relate to social and environmental issues. Due to the popularity of ethical fashion, numerous fashion companies are utilizing greenwashing strategies to expand their customer bases. But if a company makes claims about the sustainability of its products to entice you to buy from them but, in reality, they are not all that sustainable, this practice is known as "greenwashing." Brands that overstate their commitment to sustainability run the risk of misleading a customer with the best of intentions. A common instance of "greenwashing" is the labelling of clothing with certificates that may make it appear more ethical than it actually is. But certifications can also show you whether businesses are genuinely ethical and environmentally friendly.

Key words

Labelling, Sustainability, Ethical fashion and Sustainable certification.

Research Objectives

- Awareness on sustainable fashion Certification.
- Study on sustainable fashion industry.
- Study on sustainable supply chain.
- Sustainability concern of fashion companies and their policy.

Research methodology and limitations or implications of the research

Research is done through secondary sources. The limitations of this study are associated with the secondary sources for our literature review that were openly accessible

Paper type: Literature review

1 Introduction

1.1 Sustainable fashion

Sustainable fashion is defined as clothes, footwear, and other items that are manufactured, marketed, and used in the most sustainable way possible, taking both environmental and socioeconomic factors into account." In reality, this involves on-going efforts to enhance all phases of a product's life cycle, from design to raw material production, manufacturing, transportation, storage, marketing, and final sale, as well as usage, reuse, repair, remake, and recycling of the product and its components [1].

1.2 Ethical fashion

The term "ethical fashion" refers to a variety of topics, such as poor working conditions in factories, labour exploitation, fair trade, environmentally friendly product development, and animal welfare. Ethical fashion is defined as fashion that places a high priority on limiting harm to both people and the environment. In the best-case scenario, it benefits those who are employed along the whole supply chain and enhances everyone's future. The word "ethical fashion" serves as a catch-all for ethical fashion design, production, retail, and purchasing. A wide range of issues are addressed, including labour conditions, exploitation, fair trade, sustainable production, the environment, and animal welfare [1].

2 Literature Review

2.1 Sustainable Certifications

Sustainability certifications are optional certifications awarded to a company, product, or service by an independent, second- or third-party organization. To be certified, a company must demonstrate that its business methods and goods meet particular criteria, demonstrating that it is committed to excellent environmental, social, and ethical practices.

Due to the growth of ethical fashion, many fashion companies are utilizing greenwashing strategies to expand their customer bases. But when a company makes claims about the sustainability of its products to entice you to buy from them but, in reality, they are not all that sustainable, this is known as "greenwashing."

Brands that overstate their commitment to sustainability run the risk of misleading a customer with good intentions. Labelling clothing with certificates that may make it appear more ethical than it actually is one instance of greenwashing. However, certifications can also show you whether businesses are genuinely ethical and sustainable [2].

2.2 Sustainable fashion certifications are divided into four easily consumable categories

2.2.1 Holistic

There is no question that fair trade and environmental certifications are useful. But while they build trust with consumers, they don't always tell the full story. Businesses that seek to be sustainable in the long term must weave social responsibility into every aspect of their process, from corporate environment to textile sourcing to waste reduction.

2.2.1.1 Remake

- Remake works to turn the fashion industry into a "force for good". Their high level of scrutiny and emphasis on empowering women so that they can uplift their communities makes their stamp of approval reliable. They encourage buying less, and instead, buying quality goods from sustainable designers.
- Remake's sustainable brand criteria works on a point system from 0 to 100 points, where brands need 50 or above to pass. The criteria has 5 main categories: transparency, maker well-being, environmental sustainability, sustainable fabrics, and leadership.

- When evaluating brands Remake's criteria takes into account any and all certifications mentioned in this guide including Fair Trade, SA8000, GOTS, Blue sign, WRAP, and more.
- Takeaways: This holistic approach to sustainability includes high environmental and ethical standards, making approved brands among the most sustainable brands out there.

2.2.1.2 *Eco-Stylist*

- Eco-Stylist believes that for sustainable fashion to become the norm the products must meet and exceed the quality and aesthetic of conventional fashion. For that reason, any Eco-Stylist approved brand is first evaluated to meet that standard.
- In terms of ethics and sustainability, Eco-Stylist's research is powered by Remake's sustainable brand criteria. This holistic approach to sustainability, outlined above, includes both people and the planet.
- Takeaways: Eco-Stylist approved brands pass Remake's sustainable brand criteria, one of the highest bars for determining if a brand is ethical and sustainable.

2.2.1.3 *The Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC)*

- The Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC) provides guidance through the Higg Index to encourage apparel, footwear, and textile industries to incorporate sustainable practices. The tools created by the SAC measure the impact on the environment, society, and labor by type of industry. With the data provided by the SAC an industry can then "address inefficiencies, resolve damaging practices, and achieve the environmental and social transparency consumers are demanding."
- Takeaways: While the SAC provides guidance to industries that want to incorporate sustainable practices, that doesn't mean that they can enforce those guidelines or totally guarantee that they're being followed.

2.2.2 **Labour**

Sewing is one of the most labour-intensive phases of production. It's also the phase where the most labour problems are. So labour certification is one of the ethical fashion certifications that focuses on practical changes for garment workers.

Children under 15 are not employed; equal opportunities are given to all employees; workers have a right to unionise; all employees have the right to equal opportunities, collective bargaining, a living wage, a safe environment, regular employment and reasonable hours. In short, it's all about the human factor in production.

2.2.2.1 *Fair Trade certified*

- Fair Trade focuses on economic empowerment and sustainable living. This is done by working closely with producers and companies to ensure that the people making Fair Trade Certified goods have safe working conditions, protect the environment, build sustainable livelihoods, and earn additional money so that they can empower their communities. Being Fair Trade Certified means abiding by rigorous standards that are tailor made for each industry to ensure that everyone is working together towards the same goals. Fair Trade is best for identifying brands who place an emphasis on garment labourers in their supply chains.
- Takeaways: Product or from a brand that uses a Fair Trade certified factory means no slave labour, no child labour, safe and fair working conditions, and fair pay. Fair Trade certified factories also have to do work on the environmental side like invest in water efficient technology, waste reduction, and reduced chemical usage.
- If a product has Fair Trade certified sewing it means the final stage of manufacturing is certified but not the stages prior.

2.2.2.2 *Ethical Trading Initiative*

- The Ethical Trading Initiative, also known as the ETI, is made up of companies, trade unions, and non-governmental organizations that work together to promote the rights of workers through lobbying and assisting brands in creating and enforcing fair codes of labour.

- The ETI Base Code covers freedom of employment, freedom of association, and the right to collective bargaining. The ETI Base Code also ensures that working conditions are safe and hygienic, child labour is prohibited, living wages are paid, discrimination is prohibited, employment is regular, work hours are limited. Harsh or inhumane treatment is also prohibited by the ETI Base Code.
- Takeaways: When considering buying from companies in the ETI, it's important to remember that even though they are working towards a good goal and have great initiatives, there are brands like H&M who pass because of the ETI's low level of scrutiny.

2.2.3 Environment

While fair trade certifications operate under a unifying set of values regarding labour rights and sustainable empowerment, environmental certifications tend to be more specific.

Environmental certifications deal with a particular environmental concern and, as a result, eco-friendly companies are often certified under more than one standard.

2.2.3.1 Global Recycled Standard

- The Global Recycled Standard or GRS is an international, voluntary standard enforced by the Textile Exchange that tracks recycled raw materials throughout the supply chain. With the goal of enforcing and ensuring that at least 5% of recycled products are actually used in products that claim to contain them, the GRS works to provide consumers with the assurance and confidence to make informed decisions.
- Takeaways: GRS is a good way for consumers to know the products they are buying actually contain recycled materials.

2.2.3.2 GOTS

- GOTS stands for Global Organic Textile Standard. Not only does it demonstrate that a fabric is certified organic, but it also tells a much bigger story. GOTS certification ensures that the whole supply chain meets strict social and environmental standards. This means that everything from the raw materials to the finished product are included in the certification.
- A few examples of considerations in the GOTS certification are: labour, chemicals used, fiber type, wastewater treatment, and packaging. GOTS considers "fair labour" to be fair wages, no child labour, and no slave labour.
- Takeaways: GOTS certified means not only that the cotton is organic, but the whole process of making the cotton is ethical and sustainable.

2.2.4 Vegan

- A Vegan is a person who consumes no products that come from animals and who abstain from using animal products that contribute to animal exploitation in their day-to-day routine (i.e. beverages, food, cosmetics, clothes, businesses, etc.). For this reason, buying decisions are more strict, thoughtful, and conscious.
- Being vegan certification means no animal ingredients or animal by-products used in the product, in the manufacturing of the product, and no animal testing of the product. being vegan certification helps you to increase consumer trust.
- Consumers are embracing vegan for multiple reasons: Compassion for the animals, environmental sustainability, and/or for the scientifically proven health benefits.
- These labels can assess a brand's sustainability efforts in several parts of production and the supply chain, including raw materials, finished goods, and/or procedures. Some organizations just undertake evaluations, while others additionally offer educational programs, business help, and lobbying. There are fashion sustainability certifications that focus on fiber standards, chemical control, labor rights, circular standards, and fair trade.

2.2.4.1 PETA

- PETA certifies apparel, accessories, furniture, or home decor products to be animal-free.
- PETA defines “vegan” as no animal-derived materials, including but not limited to fur, leather, silk, down, and wool.
- Issued by PETA (a US-based animal rights organization).
- Certifies individual products, collections, or an entire brand.
- Does not require renewal once approved.

2.2.4.2 The Vegan Trademark

- The Vegan Trademark logo applies to individual products. To carry The Vegan Trademark, companies must ensure “the manufacture and/or development of the products, and where applicable its ingredients, must not involve, or have involved, the use of any animal product, by-product or derivative.”
- Issued by the Vegan Society (a UK-based registered charity)
- certifies individual products, not entire companies
- Not just for clothing and accessories; they also certify and use the same logo for vegan food items, cosmetics, retailers, etc.
- Cost an annual fee to use their Vegan sunflower trademark logo.
- Requires an annual renewal.

2.3 Importance of sustainable certifications

Sustainability certifications are significant because they promote best practices, encourage transparency, and demand responsibility. There are advantages for both customers and manufacturers and sellers of products and services.

2.3.1 Consumer Benefits of Sustainability Certification

- A quick and simple method to find items and services that match your preferences and beliefs
- A simple approach to finding items that meet many criteria without having to undertake product research or read all of the fine print
- A straightforward method for determining whether a product or service has been reviewed and approved by an impartial third party
- A quick approach to determining how dedicated a company is to the ideals and practices it claims in its marketing (as opposed to vague, broad assertions and outright greenwashing).

2.3.2 Sustainability Certifications Have Many Advantages for Makers and Sellers

- Demonstrating a commitment to sustainability: By obtaining a sustainability certification, makers and sellers can showcase their dedication to sustainable business practices. This can help to attract environmentally-conscious customers who prioritize sustainability in their purchasing decisions.
- Increasing marketability: Sustainability certifications can increase the marketability of a product. Consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the environmental impact of their purchases, and they may be more likely to choose products that are certified as sustainable.
- Enhancing brand reputation: Sustainability certifications can help to enhance the reputation of a brand. This can lead to increased customer loyalty, repeat business, and positive word-of-mouth referrals.
- Meeting regulatory requirements: Some sustainability certifications are required by law or by certain retailers. By obtaining these certifications, makers and sellers can ensure that their products are compliant with regulations and can be sold in certain markets.
- Improving supply chain efficiency: Sustainability certifications can help to improve supply chain efficiency by encouraging the use of sustainable materials and production methods. This can lead to cost savings, as well as improved relationships with suppliers and customers.

3 Conclusion

These labels can assess a brand's sustainability efforts in several parts of production and the supply chain, including raw materials, finished goods, and/or procedures. Some organizations just undertake evaluations, while others additionally offer educational programs, business help, and lobbying. There are fashion sustainability certifications that focus on fiber standards, chemical control, labour rights, circular standards, and fair trade. Overall, by looking for these certifications or labels, consumers can quickly and easily identify products and services that align with their values and preferences. Sustainability certifications can provide makers and sellers with a competitive advantage in the marketplace by demonstrating their commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility.

4 References

- [1] Hellmeister, A., & Richins, H. (2019). Green to gold: Beneficial impacts of sustainability certification and practice on tour enterprise performance. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 11(3). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11030709>
- [2] Mori Junior, R., Franks, D. M., & Ali, S. H. (2016). Sustainability certification schemes: evaluating their effectiveness and adaptability. In *Corporate Governance (Bingley)* (Vol. 16, Issue 3, pp. 579–592). Emerald Group Publishing Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CG-03-2016-0066>
- [3] Hellmeister, A., & Richins, H. (2019). Green to gold: Beneficial impacts of sustainability certification and practice on tour enterprise performance. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 11(3). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11030709>

