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POLICY BRIEF

Will COVID-19 support the transition to a more sustainable fashion industry?

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ABSTRACT

In this policy brief, we examine the impact of COVID-19 on sustainability initiatives in the fashion industry. We ask whether COVID-19 is likely to support the transition to a more sustainable fashion industry. In answering this question, we utilize a framework for examining sustainability along the fashion-supply chain, highlighting the opportunities and challenges for a sustainable transition with respect to design, production, retail, consumption, and end-of-life. At each step, we also consider socioeconomic dimensions with regard to social impacts, employment, and gender. In doing so, we argue that any meaningful shift toward sustainability and a just transition must recognize social and environmental challenges as interconnected, addressing structural inequalities.

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COVID-19; fashion; just transition; sustainability

Introduction

In recent months, there has been a growing discussion of whether or not COVID-19 will support new sustainability transitions (Cohen 2020; Bodenheimer and Leidenberger 2020; Goffman 2020). As Cohen (2020) writes, COVID-19, "is simultaneously a public health emergency and a real-time experiment in downsizing the economy." We have been particularly interested in the impact of COVID-19 on the fashion industry – one of the most wasteful consumer industries in the world (Bick, Halsey, and Ekenga 2018) – and if the ongoing pandemic will support a sustainability transition. In this policy brief, we explore ongoing changes within the fashion industry during the COVID-19 era, and assess their impact on sustainability initiatives and the potential for a just transition. To do so, we draw on over fifty industry and media reports addressing the impact of COVID-19 on the fashion industry between March and June 2020.[1] These reports are then grounded theoretically in the growing, interdisciplinary literature on sustainable fashion.

The sustainable fashion landscape is a highly contested terrain with a myriad of terms and definitions in circulation, including slow, ethical, green, and eco-fashion (Clark 2008; Fletcher 2010; Henninger, Alevizou, and Oates 2016; Leslie, Brail, and Hunt 2014; Thomas 2008). Of particular relevance to this study is the work of Ho and Choi (2012), who use the five "Rs" to examine sustainable fashion-supply chains, specifically referring to recycling, reusing, reducing, re-designing, and re-imagining fashion. This aligns with the concept of the zero-waste hierarchy for a circular economy, which proposes a prioritized list of initiatives including refuse/rethink/redesign; reduce and reuse; recycling/composting; material and chemical recovery; and residuals management (Dickinson 2019).

In addition to these waste hierarchy-oriented framings, the following definition of sustainable fashion formulated by Green Strategy (2020), a Stockholm-based consultancy, considers the stages of the product life cycle, along with key actions:

> [S]ustainable fashion can be defined as clothing, shoes and accessories that are manufactured, marketed and used in the most sustainable manner possible, taking into account both environmental and socio-economic aspects. In practice, this implies continuous work to improve all stages of the product's life cycle, from design, raw material production, manufacturing, transport, storage, marketing and final sale, to use, reuse, repair, remake and recycling of the product and its components.

The global fashion industry is multidimensional, as geographies of fashion are relational (Crewe 2017). In structuring our analysis, we employ a

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Table 1. Sustainability-assessment framework drawn from literature.

Our framework		Concepts incorporated from other definitions		
Stage	Actions	Green Strategy (2020)	Ho and Choi (2012)	Dickinson (2019)
Design	Rethinking design and avoiding waste	Design	Re-imagining Re-designing	Refuse, rethink, redesign
Raw material production and manufacturing	Reducing, reusing	Raw material production and manufacturing	Reducing	Reduce
Retail, marketing, and storage	Minimizing transport, stockpiling, sustainable marketing	Transport, storage, marketing, and sale		
Consumption	Use, reuse, repair, remake	Use, reuse, repair, remake	Reusing	Reuse
End-of-life	Recycling, composting, avoiding landfill	Recycling	Recycling	Recycling/composting, material and chemical recovery, and residuals management

framework for examining sustainability initiatives along global fashion-supply chains which understand global production networks (GPNs) as extending beyond stages of production and consumption alone to include considerations for design, retail, and end-of-life as spaces of potential intervention (Brooks 2013; Fletcher 2008).

Drawing upon these definitions and understandings, our framework for analysis investigates actions for sustainability practices across five interconnected stages related to global fashion-supply chains: design, production, retail, consumption, and end-of-life (see Table 1).

In presenting our findings, we highlight how the impacts of COVID-19 on the fashion industry have, thus far, varied across supply-chain dimensions of sustainability. By prioritizing certain stages ahead of others – instead of understanding the relationality between them – proposed strategies of intervention risk further exacerbating existing tensions related to structural inequalities at work across the industry. The concept of "just transitions" recognizes that shifting to "an environmentally sustainable economy … needs to be well managed and contribute to the goals of decent work for all, social inclusion and the eradication of poverty" (International Labour Organization 2015). By incorporating this concept into our framework for analysis, we argue any transition toward a sustainable fashion industry that does not address structural inequalities will not be *just*.

The structure of this article is as follows. In the next section, we provide a brief overview of the immediate impact of COVID-19 on the fashion industry on the five stages of our sustainability-assessment framework. We then investigate the implications for industry-sustainability initiatives in more detail, before providing a discussion and themes for future research in a concluding section.

The immediate impact of COVID-19 on the fashion industry

Despite early research drawing attention to a wide range of challenges associated with the fashion industry on both people and the planet (Black 2008; Brooks 2007; Clark 2008; Crewe 2008; Fletcher 2008; Kabeer 2000), industrial change has been slow to come. In recent years, however, there were some signs to suggest that the industry was beginning to come to terms with its human and environmental impacts to the point that pre-COVID-19 sustainability was arguably the fashion industry's biggest buzzword. For example, on the heels of the 2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Kingdom's Modern Slavery Act (2015), we saw the Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action presented at COP24 in Poland in 2018. This initiative was followed in 2019 with the United Nations Alliance for Sustainable Fashion (2019) – alongside a social media hashtag #UNfashion – and The Fashion Pact presented to G7 world leaders by Emmanuel Macron. Many of these initiatives were supported by some of the world's largest fashion brands, such as H&M, Inditex, Gap, Stella McCartney, and Kerring Group. There was perhaps renewed optimism that the industry was building momentum around coming to terms with its social and environmental footprints.

However, in the early months of 2020, COVID-19 ground the entire industry to a halt. Described as a "perfect storm," the pandemic had an immediate impact on fashion's global production networks (Uddin 2020). With fashion weeks canceled, stores closed, workers furloughed, and unsold inventory mounting, a growing share of the fashion industry fell into financial distress (Business of Fashion 2020). This situation has led a number of global fashion brands to renege on payments for garments that were already made and/or shipped, which has had a devastating impact on garment manufacturers facing losses into the billions (Anner 2020; Chua 2020). While retailers in some countries have been able to apply for government-wage supports, many factories are unable to pay their garment workers (Anner 2020), leaving already vulnerable workers in more precarious situations (Brydges and Hanlon 2020). The growing financial crisis gripping the industry is now also worsening the longstanding humanitarian crisis that underpins much of the fashion industry.

While it is clear the immediate impact of COVID-19 on the fashion industry was swift and severe, we look here at the implications for sustainability initiatives across five key stages within the fashion supply chain: design, production, retail, consumption, and end-of-life. The themes discussed emerged from our analysis of industry and media reporting and commentary in recent months and are thus a reflection of emerging discourses in the industry.

Design

Design processes are being reconsidered in light of COVID-19. In recent months, some of the most influential members within this stage of the fashion industry, such as the British Fashion Council, Council of Fashion Designers of America, and a group facilitated by Business of Fashion under the mantle Rewiring Fashion, have argued that the pandemic provides an opportunity to fundamentally overhaul the industry and lead to a completely new, slower, fashion system. As Balmain designer Oliver Rousteing told *Vogue*, in light of COVID-19, "we are no longer in a time of being the trend of the season. I don't want to be cool, cool's over. Chic's over. You're cool for two months these days. It used to be two years. Who wants to be part of that?" (Holgate 2020). This reimagined industry would be based upon fewer trends, seasons, fashion weeks, and collections (Rewiring Fashion 2020).[2] It also aims to support new fashion buying and consumption behaviors and to reduce the industry's dependence on discounting.

Indeed, these are conversations that are perhaps nothing new to scholars looking at movements such as slow fashion (Clark 2008; Fletcher 2010), upcycling (Han et al. 2017), closed-loop (Niinimäki and Karell 2020), and/or technologically driven design (Vignali et al. 2019). Whereas some of these movements have been quite niche (Niinimäki and Hassi 2011; Brydges 2018), with the rise of COVID-19, we are seeing more mainstream recognition of the need to engage in new design practices, such as the *Rewiring Fashion* manifesto which received over 2,000 signatories including by well-known brands Erdem, Oscar de la Renta, and more (Rewiring Fashion 2020). Thus, COVID-19 presents a potential opportunity for these movements to grow.

While conversations in the design stage may support the transition to a more sustainable fashion industry, it is important to interrogate which stakeholders within part of the overall industry have been left out of decision-making processes thus far. With luxury segments leading these discussions, largely absent are influential fast fashion and High Street brands, as are smaller and/or independent fashion- design businesses that are facing unique challenges during COVID-19 and face a highly uncertain future (Friedman 2020).

Production

COVID-19 has had a significant effect on garment production, and garment workers in particular (Brydges and Hanlon 2020). As Uddin (2020) writes, it is clear that "we are in uncharted territory and entering into a period that threatens the well-being of the whole apparel manufacturing industry and the livelihood of the millions of workers around the world that rely on our industry to support them." While estimates vary, billions of dollars of garment orders – including orders for garments that were already produced – have been canceled by fashion brands around the world, which has had devastating impacts on garment workers (Clean Clothes Campaign 2020). After international campaigns such as #PayUp, a number of leading fashion and apparel brands including Lululemon, H&M, Zara, Nike, and Ralph Lauren, have committed to pay in full for approximately US$15 billion of orders that were already produced pre-pandemic (Worker Rights Consortium 2020). However, brands such as C&A, Sears, and Urban Outfitters have yet to make similar commitments (Worker Rights Consortium 2020).

Thus far, the reduction in demand caused by COVID-19 has resulted in significant revenue loss and unemployment for workers in Asia, resulting in financial pressure that threatens sustainability initiatives previously underway (Martinez and Sharpe 2020). In particular, access to finance and skills development is needed to bridge this transition, particularly for women workers who are disproportionately affected by the precarious nature of production work (Martinez and Sharpe 2020). More broadly, Martinez and Sharpe (2020) argue that stepping back on sustainability initiatives in the industry threatens future resilience, and highlight that sustainability and cleaner production efforts also create jobs.

Meanwhile, other commentators have suggested that the disruption to global supply chains caused by COVID-19 presents a potential opportunity for stakeholders within this space to invest in upgrading skills and technology in international garment-manufacturing facilities. In addition, they contend that the current crisis provides an opportune moment for the reshoring of garment production and/or to create a more balanced mix of local and global production networks (Kaine, Payne, and Coneybeer 2020; Nguyen 2020). While it remains to be seen if the pandemic will lead to new geographies of production, such considerations must address the wider implications on garment workers.

Retail

Even before COVID-19, the fashion-retailing sector was experiencing a number of significant changes brought on by a range of factors. First, new digital technologies and retailing platforms have been fueling online shopping (McKinsey 2019). Second, the rise of direct-to-consumer brands in both the fast fashion (such as Boohoo) and ethical or transparent fashions (such as Everlane and Allbirds) segments (Gallantway 2020; *The Economist* 2019) have contributed to new consumer preferences. Finally, the retail landscape has been transformed by the restructuring of department stores and High Streets with notable retailers such as G-Star RAW, J.Crew, and Neiman Marcus declaring bankruptcy, while brands including Cath Kidston, Esprit, H&M, and Dian von Furstenberg have all closed stores (Kong 2020).

Evolving consumer preferences are behind many of these changes. For example, there is some evidence to suggest that a growing number of consumers, and young consumers in particular, would prefer to purchase clothes from sustainable brands (Nielsen 2014; Boston Consulting Group 2019). However, this claim is at odds with the rise of an Instagram-fueled culture for many Gen Z consumers who refuse to be seen in the same outfit more than once (Paton, Lorenz, and Kwai 2019). This dichotomy is reflected in the well-established consumer intention-behavior gap which has found that a stated preference for sustainable or ethical alternatives does not necessarily lead to consumers purchasing sustainable or ethical fashion (Carrington, Neville, and Whitwell 2010; Iran, Geiger, and Schrader 2019).

We, therefore, wonder if COVID-19 will support the transition to sustainable retail practices. For example, some retailers have already reported increased interest around sustainable brands (Thomas 2020), as consumers used some of their time in lockdown to investigate sustainability in ways that they did not before due to time constraints (Brown 2020). There have also been campaigns to encourage consumers to support local and national brands affected by the pandemic, such as initiatives from the Australian Fashion Council (#wewearaustralian), Canadian Arts and Fashion Awards (#wearcanadaproud), and the Council of Fashion Designers of America with Vogue and Amazon Fashion (Common Threads digital storefront).

However, there are also concerns that the industry may fall into a pattern of deep discounting, similar to the circumstances that took hold during the 2008 recession, as retailers rely on sales to excavate clothes from overflowing warehouses and recoup (Bain 2020). This situation led to luxury British department store Harrods opening an outlet store for the very first time (de Klerk 2020a), while many department stores initiated significant sales, where it was common to see 40% off new merchandise in March/April 2020 (Maheshwari and Friedman 2020) and up to 80% off by June 2020 (Yotka 2020).

Consumption

With respect to consumption, we are interested in understanding how COVID-19 has affected behaviors surrounding clothing use and care. Dutch trend forecaster Li Edelkoort called the crisis a “quarantine of consumption,” predicting that the pandemic will change not only the pace of everyday life but also the pace of practices of consumption (Fairs 2020). With more time spent at home, consumers are being encouraged to rethink their consumption (Brown 2020). Industry data suggest the frequency of fashion items purchased decreased during the early stages of the public health crisis, with clothing sales in the United States down 89% in April 2020 compared to April 2019 and down 50% in the UK over the same period (Dowsett 2020). However, this may change over time as the challenges imposed by the pandemic appear to have led to a return to old practices such as heavy discounting (Bain 2020; Dowsett 2020), which may further fuel the cycle of fast fashion.

Before the COVID era, numerous consumer-facing campaigns were seeking to encourage shoppers to adopt sustainable consumption behaviors. Especially notable recent wardrobe challenges include “Loved Clothes Last” from Fashion Revolution (Fashion Revolution 2020), #30Wears by EcoAge (de Klerk 2020b), the 6 Item Challenge by Labour Behind the Label (2020), and the #LoveNot Landfill Campaign by London Waste and Recycling Board (2020). All of these promotional efforts call on consumers to minimize and extend the life of their wardrobe, and to think more critically about the social and environmental footprint of their closets. It remains to be seen whether such campaigns have stalled or gained momentum.

However, changes to consumption behaviors are also highly contested, with some commentators throwing caution to the wind and encouraging consumers to capitalize on the moment and take advantage of the deals that are available. As fashion director Anna Murphy (2020) wrote in *The Times*, "[I]gnore the fact that there is a global crisis. Ignore the fact that it is preposterously hot. Concentrate on scoping out the ever-after fashion investment pieces that cost a smidgen of what they usually would."

Moreover, new retail models, such as rental platforms, which may have supported novel consumption are facing new challenges in the COVID-19 era due to changing work and lifestyles, and hygiene concerns around the sharing of garments (Businesswire 2020; Singer 2020). Relatedly, there are indications that clothing care and laundering habits have shifted during the pandemic, with market assessments reporting rapid growth in the sale of laundry products (Novozymes and Nielsen 2020), and a 25% increase in the sale of cleaning products in general (Accenture 2020). As Brooks and colleagues (2018) have shown, laundry practices can have a significant impact on the environment. For example, the typical American household does 300 loads of laundry annually, producing 179 million metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions per year (Mandel 2019). While the purchase of laundry detergents for at-home use has significantly increased, sales of detergents for dry cleaning have notably declined, which reflects less use and cleaning of "going out" clothing (Persistence Market Research 2020).

It is clear that consumers – or the "elephant in the sustainability room" (Morrency 2019) – play an important role in the transition to a more sustainable fashion industry. Consumer research conducted in fifteen different global markets in April 2020 found that 54% of consumers expected that "making more sustainable choices" would be a permanent shift in their shopping habits beyond the pandemic (Accenture 2020). However, while consumer behaviors are no doubt an important piece of the puzzle, this does not absolve brands of their responsibility in contributing to trends supporting a more sustainable fashion industry. Indeed, consumers have varying amounts of resources and support available to them in being able to engage with such issues. An individual's capacity to adjust their consumption will vary in relation to social location, such as their socioeconomic status (McRobbie 1997).

End-of-life

Of growing concern is the industry's textile-waste problem (Bick, Halsey, and Ekenga 2018; Sandvik and Stubbs 2019) which is being exacerbated by COVID-19 in a number of ways. Many Western charities have been forced to close during the pandemic, unable to collect unwanted garments for resale that may now be destined for landfills (Ortolan 2020). Moreover, due to infection and hygiene concerns, consumers appear to be hesitant to return to shopping at secondhand stores, which by some estimates account for one-third of charity revenues (Onita 2020). At the same time, there is evidence to suggest that many consumers are using some of their time at home to declutter their homes and closets. A report from Waste Resources and Action Program (WRAP), UK, estimates that 67 million pieces of clothing and 22 million pairs of shoes will be disposed of by homes in the country post lockdown, with many of this going to charity shops (WRAP 2020).

This situation also has implications down the supply chain and for the highly globalized networks that define the secondhand clothing trade (Brooks 2013). For example, in Ghana, women working in the pre-owned clothing industry have seen their source of employment decline as shipments of used clothes were at least temporarily paused (Bauck 2020). However, there are also some early indications that the decline – and in some cases, outright bans – of imported secondhand clothing (due to concerns regarding the potential spread of the virus from countries such as the United States) may lead to a revival of local fashion brands (Dahir 2020). Indeed, advocates in Kenya and beyond have been calling for the curtailment of secondhand clothing for some time now as a way to revitalize local fashion industries, which oftentimes cannot compete with discarded clothing (Dahir 2020).

Canceled orders of new stock in countries such as Bangladesh have caused significant waste and have compromised livelihoods. While COVID-19 has drawn attention to the economic dependency of garment manufacturing in South Asia, initiatives such as Lost Stock have emerged to mitigate what they see as a potential humanitarian crisis, supporting garment workers by shipping finished products to consumers as "mystery boxes" to avoid some of the waste (Lost Stock 2020). However, calling on shoppers to pick up the tab of companies not only places the onus on consumers to save workers in crisis, it also reinforces problematic rescue narratives which frame garment workers as weak and vulnerable while showcasing consumers as powerful (Brooks 2007; Chowdhury, 2014; Kabeer 2000; Seidman 2007; Siddiqi 2009).

Pre-COVID-19, the concept of the circular economy was gaining momentum in the fashion industry. Influential actors such as the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, Copenhagen Fashion Summit, and Kering Group have propelled industry discussions, alongside a growing academic literature on the fashion industry and circularity (cf Henninger, Bürklin, and Niinimäki 2019; Hvass and Pedersen 2019; Rosa, Sassanelli, and Terzi 2019). For example, there has been a growing industry discussion regarding textile-to-textile recycling whereby existing garments are woven into "new" textiles (Bain 2019). While there is an important caveat regarding textile recycling, as currently it is estimated that less than 1% of clothing is repurposed into new garments (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017), there was a growing buzz around the potential innovations in this sector, with brands such as Adidas and Stella McCartney investing in new textiles (Bain 2019). In the COVID-19 era, we have observed that, at least in the short term, many of these efforts appear to have gone quiet. More broadly, as Brooks et al. (2018) have argued, however, closed-loop recycling initiatives fail to confront the scale and pace of fashion consumption under the logic of global capitalism.

Discussion

Reflecting on whether COVID-19 shows signs of supporting a just transition to sustainable fashion, our analytic framework highlights how the fashion industry has responded to the crisis across five stages in the supply chain: design, production, retail, consumption, and end-of-life. Our analysis found that discussions regarding environmental sustainability in the design stage are centered on high-end or luxury segments and have yet to enter the mainstream. Shifting toward sustainable design for mainstream fashion is critical for systemic change in the industry. More sustainable design and reduced consumption of fast fashion have flow-on impacts for production, with significant effects on livelihoods in producing countries.

Both before and during the pandemic, the retail sector has been in flux, with intentions to drive sustainable purchasing not necessarily or uniformly reflected in practice. It seems quite likely that the bankruptcies of major retailers will continue in the coming months (Maheshwari and Friedman 2020). While discounting remains a significant concern, it remains to be seen what impact these developments will have on sustainability initiatives and consumption patterns more broadly.

There have also been setbacks for more sustainable consumption options, such as sharing platforms (Singer 2020), and there appears to be a shift toward more frequent laundering, which has considerable environmental impacts. The pandemic has also increased the volume of clothing being cleared from closets (WRAP 2020), but it is not yet evident whether this can drive secondhand sales, or will contribute significantly to landfill accumulations. Textile recycling remains a niche activity and is less critical than upstream initiatives to change design, production, retailing, and consumption.

As we have seen, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on garment production and, in particular, on garment workers (Brydges and Hanlon 2020). Ongoing alterations to the speed and pace of garment production will affect workers who have been forced to respond and adapt to changing industry dynamics caused by the pandemic in real-time. As corporate-led initiatives promoting "top-down" measures aimed at supporting garment workers have long been critiqued (Kabeer 2000; Brooks 2007; Seidman 2007), any just transition must take into account labor rights and power dynamics (Stevis and Felli 2015), and understand the social and environmental ramifications of changing production processes – for better or worse – on workers' lives, and make adjustments that support the reform of unjust practices. Moreover, when economic growth through competition underpins the driving force for change, companies are incentivized to reform their individual behavior to avoid "naming and shaming" tactics by transnational campaigners targeting consumers – a process which risks sidestepping the role of the state in supporting these transitions (Seidman 2008).

Sustainability initiatives must therefore recognize how a multitude of social factors across various stages will influence capacities for engagement. For example, while renting and sharing platforms are perceived to offer a lower-cost means of consumption, such distribution channels often cater to an elite audience, and even in emerging economies have been found to be exclusive (Retamal 2017). When a consumer's capacity to participate in and engage with sustainable fashion is contingent on increased spending, the transition will fail to bring meaningful change (McRobbie 1997; Crane 2010). The accessibility and affordability of ethical and sustainable consumption remain issues that need to be addressed.

Using the five-stage sustainability framework to unpack initiatives along the supply chain has allowed us to undertake a comprehensive review of the impacts of COVID-19 on sustainability in the fashion industry while considering a broad range of stakeholders. Our analysis has enabled us to identify which parts of the fashion-supply chain have been most disrupted with regard to sustainability. Our review suggests that progress toward sustainability in the production and end-of-life stages has stalled significantly. Unsustainable practices in the retail sector have also been reinforced by the pandemic with heavy discounting and dumping of clothing. Where change toward sustainability appears most promising is with regard to high-end fashion design and with some aspects of consumption. Drawing from the perspective of the just transition has also been important to highlight the social dimensions of sustainability.

Our framework has thus revealed incremental shifts occurring across the supply chain during the pandemic, both toward and away from improving social and environmental sustainability. In sum, these shifts do not appear to reflect an overall movement toward greater environmental sustainability. Moreover, the reduction in fashion consumption – which may be temporary – has cast a spotlight on the problematic livelihood impacts of rapid system change. Shifts toward slower, more localized fashion, need to include plans for just transitions in producing countries.

Conclusion: what lies ahead for the future of fashion?

Whereas COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the fashion industry thus far, it remains to be seen whether the pandemic is going to be the sustainability reset the industry desperately needs. We have seen that sustainability-related developments are highly uneven across the supply chain, with some stages (such as design and consumption) receiving far more attention than others (such as end-of-life). Perhaps the best-case scenario is that this significant economic upheaval fuels changes in brand and consumer behaviors that lead to a new, more sustainable fashion industry. Yet, despite the fact that groups such as the Global Fashion Agenda have long argued that the viability of the industry relies on brands committed to sustainability (Kent 2020), there are concerns that investments in associated initiatives may ultimately wane in the post-COVID era due to significant cash-flow issues (Business of Fashion 2020). While sustainability is a protracted challenge, for some brands the need to address short-term issues such as inventory management may ultimately determine their bottom-line (Business of Fashion 2020; Cernansky 2020). The irony may be that as COVID-19 halts key functions such as production, transportation, and consumption, some brands may actually meet their upcoming sustainability targets.

Moreover, it is crucial that brands not use COVID-19 as an excuse to press the pause button on sustainability initiatives. Instead, the industry should use the time to reflect, retool, and rebuild a more inclusive, as well as environmentally and socially sustainable, industry. With ever-changing cycles of media coverage, it remains to be seen whether the pandemic will have a lasting effect, or whether the industry will move on to the next crisis, leaving behind the lessons learned here so far. While fashion faces a very uncertain future, what is perhaps clearer is that the industry of tomorrow will look very different from the one we once knew. Future research could examine how different actors – such as retailers, fashion designers, education institutions, the garment industry, and more – are responding to the current public health emergency in different geographic contexts and trace this transition over time.

Notes

1. We identified industry and media reports from a range of sources, including Google News searches and commentary on Twitter. We also relied on industry and/or business-to-business media sources such as *Business of Fashion*, *Women's Wear Daily*, *The Sourcing Journal*, and *Drapers*, which provided regular commentary on these issues, as well as the *Clean Clothes Campaign Coronavirus Live-blog* (updated daily).
2. It has also been estimated that travel associated with the "big four" fashion weeks of New York, London, Milan, and Paris produces 241,000 tons of CO_2 (Ordre 2020), which suggests such a reduction in the number of seasons and/or fashion weeks may also help make the fashion industry greener.

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