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Exploring the influence of social media on sustainable fashion consumption: A systematic literature review and future research agenda

K. Vladimirova ^a, C. E. Henninger ^b, S. I. Alosaimi ^{b,c}, T. Brydges ^d,
H. Choopani ^{e,f}, M. Hanlon ^g, S. Iran ^h, H. McCormick ⁱ and S. Zhou ^j

^aDepartment of Sociology, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland; ^bDepartment of Materials, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK; ^cDepartment of Fashion & Textile Design, Princess Nourah Bint Abdul Rahman University, Riyadh, KSA; ^dInstitute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney, Ultimo, Australia; ^eFreiburg University of Education, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany; ^fSports and Health Department Fashion and Textile, Institute for Everyday Culture, University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Hannover, Germany; ^gDepartment of Sociology, Okanagan College, Vancouver, Canada; ^hDepartment of Economic Education and Sustainable Consumption, Technische Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany; ⁱManchester Fashion Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK; ^jSchool of Fashion and Textiles, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

Growing in popularity, social media and related channels (e.g. Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok) are utilised as sources for sharing information with the power to influence consumers and drive social change. This has become critical for the fashion industry, as fashion/textile consumption has recently been recognized for its devastating social and environmental impacts. This structured, systematic literature review explores who and in which ways can influence consumers on social media to engage with more sustainable fashion consumption practices. Based on an analysis of 92 research studies, the analysis findings indicate that most studies examined how brands can influence consumers via social media marketing strategies. Fewer studies have also addressed sustainable fashion discourse on social media more broadly, including promoting sustainable fashion consumption practices that are not related to brands' marketing strategies and the role of social media as a tool for activism. Based on the review's findings, the article outlines areas for future research.

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1. Introduction

Transforming lifestyles towards more sufficient and responsible patterns across consumption domains, including fashion consumption, is a critical element in any efforts to combat the global climate crisis (Hot or Cool, 2022; United Nations [UN], 2023). Fashion and textile consumption has been identified as the fourth most important pressure category in the EU,

CORRESPONDENCE TO C. E. Henninger  claudia.henninger@manchester.ac.uk  Department of Materials, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

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based on using primary resources and generating greenhouse gas emissions after energy use, transport, and food (EEA, 2019). Consumers are becoming more aware of the impacts of their purchasing decisions on the natural and social environments, and traditional media, as well as social media (SM), play an important role in this process.

Social media (SM) channels have evolved from “social networks” that allow interaction with friends and family into vital channels to receive information instantaneously, especially popular with GenY (born between 1981 and 1996) and “digital natives” GenZ (born between 1997 and 2012) (Pew, 2021). SM channels are becoming highly influential platforms that are transforming consumption patterns among the younger generations but also have the potential to drive social change more broadly (Hilbert, 2022).

In the fashion industry, SM has facilitated debates and fostered change. The collapse of the Rana Plaza factory in 2013, one of the deadliest accidents in the fashion industry to date, was one of the most discussed issues on SM that year. Over the past 10 years, there has been an increase in “sustainable” fashion influencers and opinion leaders who advocate for more responsible fashion consumption practices (e.g. swapping, renting, and second-hand) (Haines et al., 2023; Vladimirova, 2021). More recently, a new trend of “deinfluencing” emerged as a further response to the overconsumption of fashion (Mayer, 2023). There is, however, a fundamental lack of research on how SM can be utilised to influence more “sustainable” consumption practices in this lifestyle domain.

This structured, theme-based systematic literature review (SLR) addresses this gap to synthesize and critically evaluate current research. The underlying research question for this SLR is as follows: *Who and in which ways can influence consumers on SM to engage with more sustainable fashion consumption practices?* Whilst research has already established that factors in the “offline” environment can influence consumption patterns to be more sustainable, whether this holds for the “online” context needs to be explored. There is a need to better understand how sustainable lifestyles, including fashion consumption practices, can be fostered using SM, especially among GenY and GenZ. This SLR critically evaluates and synthesises exciting research in the field and further outlines a future research agenda within a fashion and textile context.

2. Background

Research on sustainable fashion consumption is fragmented (Henninger et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2022). Definitions of “sustainable fashion consumption” practices are recent and keep evolving in line with conceptual advances (Vladimirova et al., 2021). A growing volume of scholarly work on the nexus between sustainability and fashion investigates, among other issues, consumers’ roles in the status quo (McNeill & Moore, 2015) but work is necessary to understand how to transform existing unsustainable fashion consumption patterns nuanced and inclusively and avoid consumer “scapegoatism” (Akenji, 2014).

One aspect that needs further exploration is what influences consumers to adopt more sustainable lifestyles in the context of the growing presence of SM (Ki et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2021). SMs are no longer platforms where individuals solely interact with friends and family. Rather, they became online spaces where commercial actors market their goods and services to individuals in interactive and entertaining formats (Siregar et al., 2023; Wang & Huang, 2023). Globally, the most popular social networks are Facebook (2,958), YouTube (2,514), Instagram

(2,000), WeChat (1,309), TikTok (1,051), Snapchat (635), and Twitter (559), with the number in brackets indicating active users in millions (Dixon, 2023). SM drives mainstream consumption, as evidenced by a growing share of SM commerce globally (Phaneuf, 2021).

An omnichannel approach strongly emphasises SM marketing activities, moving away from traditional advertising formats (e.g. paper magazines; Dalton, 2017). Fashion, from luxury to high street brands, turned to SM influencers to reach an otherwise unreachable audience, GenZ (Monroe, 2021), with SM “influencer marketing” gaining increased popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic (Wiley, 2021). Several new fashion brands moved fully to e-commerce and SM to reduce their costs, leading to the emergence of the “ultra-fast fashion” segment, with sales and market share of brands like Shein (China) or Boohoo (UK) expanding at unprecedented rates.

The narcissistic nature of the SM influencer culture has been called out for igniting compulsive purchasing behaviour among followers (Monroe, 2021). While the fashion and beauty industries have been criticised previously for creating unrealistic body expectations (Yan & Bissell, 2014), SM influencers took this practice to the next level with photoshopped selfies and endless new #OOTD (Outfits of the Day) that encourage novelty-seeking behaviours. Parasocial relations with digital celebrities, based on the illusion of proximity between influencers and their followers, are instrumental in igniting impulsive consumer purchases (Zafar et al., 2020). Recently, “influencer fatigue” seems to have settled, resulting in a new generation of “creators” (people who create content on topics they genuinely care about instead of superficial paid brand endorsements) taking centre-stage in SM marketing (Bakhtiari, 2020). This further links to the relatively new phenomenon of “deinfluencers” (Mayer, 2023), which lacks research.

However, SM also plays an important role in raising awareness about the sustainability of the fashion system, including its environmental and social impacts. Since these concerns started surfacing in 2013, advocacy groups and individuals took to SM to discuss what this means for our consumption and how consumers could call for more transparency in fashion’s supply chains (Beecham, 2019). The most well-known campaign by Fashion Revolution (a UK-based international NGO) used the hashtag #WhoMadeMyClothes, a question consumers were encouraged to pose on SM to brands they buy from. Initially driven by ethical concerns about labour conditions, sustainable fashion discourse has grown in recent years to embrace environmental dimensions (e.g. pollution at the production stage and post-consumer waste) and a focus on what consumers can do in their daily lives to reduce the impact of their clothing consumption.

Another SM campaign from Fashion Revolution under the hashtag #LovedClothesLast has shifted the focus from transparency to the use and disposal phases of the fashion life cycle, urging consumers to find ways to keep their garments in use as long as possible. Importantly, SM served as a platform to amplify voices of individual opinion leaders and influencers who decided to advocate for more sustainable lifestyles (Siegel, 2018). SM influencers from Zero Waste, Slow Fashion, or Minimalist movements started addressing the issues of overconsumption and unethical fashion production practices (Ramjaun, 2021).

3. Methods

Aligning with previous SLRs (Athwal et al., 2019; Henninger et al., 2021), this article synthesises and critically evaluates the state of research on SM influences concerning sustainable fashion consumption by following a rigorous approach that sets out four key parameters: material collection, descriptive analysis, category selection, and material evaluation (Mayring, 2003).

As part of Phase 1 of material collection, keywords were carefully selected based on prior research and were combined to gain the highest impact on search results (Table 1). A keyword search was conducted on four databases (Emerald, Google Scholar, Science Direct, Scopus) to ensure consistent coverage of available scientific peer-reviewed studies in social sciences. No time limitation was imposed on the search results regarding publication dates for this review. The material collection stage was conducted in several phases over 4 months (February–May 2021) and updated in January 2023 (O’Conner et al., 2014).

Based on the titles and abstracts, the initial search resulted in 422 papers. Phase 2 of the material collection involved eliminating duplication from the collected articles, leaving 353 papers. During Phase 3, the articles were explored by carefully imposing inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 2).

Only papers written in English were considered (Mishra et al., 2021). Although this may have implications in terms of geographic representation, this selection encompasses major journals rated by key scientific journal ranking lists (Scimagojr, ABS, and ABDC). Moreover, only peer-reviewed papers, book chapters, and full conference papers were included in the SLR, which implies that conference abstracts, dissertations, notes, short surveys, and non-peer-reviewed publications were eliminated.

A ‘traffic light’ system was implemented to ensure a rigorous and valid approach to the paper selection stage. Researchers carefully reviewed a section of the dataset each, coding articles either as red (not relevant), amber (partially relevant), or green (relevant for this research). After individually coding the papers, evaluations were discussed during two online workshops, and any discrepancies were clarified. Based on the consensus, the first and second authors re-coded the papers to ensure intercoder reliability (O’Connor &

Table 1. Keywords for keyword search.

Section A		Section B	
Social media influencer/influences	Zhao et al. (2019)	Sustainable (fashion/	Blazquez Cano et al. (2020)
Social media celebrity	Zhou et al. (2021)	apparel/garment/	Henninger et al. (2016)
Interpersonal influencer/influences	Vladimirova (2021)	clothing)	McNeill and Moore (2015)
Digital platform influencer/influences		consumption	Orminski et al. (2020)
			Vladimirova (2021)
			Zhao et al. (2019)

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion	Exclusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English language Peer reviewed articles, conference papers Must contain keywords from Sections A and B 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Languages other than English Only contains keywords from either Section A or B Conference abstracts, conference reviews, thesis, notes, and short surveys

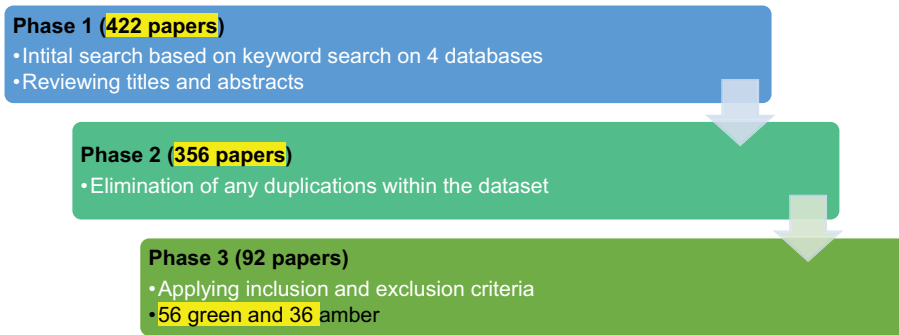


Figure 1. Summary of material collection phases.

Joffe, 2020). We only considered publications with keywords from Sections A and B that provided valuable insights into social media and sustainable fashion consumption.

We narrowed down the papers by applying specific criteria (Figure 1). (Some articles had similar keywords but did not match our review’s aim. We chose broad keywords to include research on sustainable fashion consumption’s influence by media outlets, NGOs, and fashion brands, not just the “influencer culture” literature). This thorough evaluation process retained a total of 92 papers. While all the selected studies contained keywords from Sections A and B, they did not equally cover the themes. Some papers focused on social media and fashion but neglected sustainable fashion. Others covered sustainable fashion advocates but did not delve into social media. Two researchers read each paper to ensure it added valuable context.

Once the selection was confirmed, a research protocol was designed to classify the 92 articles selected for this structured review using bibliographic and background data (Mishra et al., 2021; Stechemesser & Guenther, 2012). Each contributing author was given approximately 12 articles to categorise by the research protocol (Table 3). To guarantee rigour, validity, and inter-coder reliability, these

Table 3. The research protocol (adapted from Mishra et al., 2021; Stechemesser & Guenther, 2012).

Bibliographic data	
Author(s)	Identifies individual/s who has/have written the publication
Year	Address when the article was published
Title	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on the heading of the article • Allows to identify if keywords are included
Type of publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies where the article was published • Allows for exclusion/inclusion criteria to be applied
Journal name	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies where it was published • Allows for ranking of publication
Background of publication	
Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides theoretical foundations of article • Allows to identify clusters
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answers as to how the data were collected • Provides insights into methodological gaps
Country of data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlights where data were collected • Insights into geographic regions independent of author(s) affiliation
Limitations	Address areas of future research

categorisations were done independently, before they were discussed together as the research team. Any discrepancies were further explored in detail (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

4. Findings: Themes

4.1. Sustainable fashion discourse and consumers on social media

Eleven papers discussed the general issues around sustainable fashion discourse and consumers on social media. Media, including SM, have a dual role to play when it comes to fashion consumption. On the one hand, it encourages overconsumption (Johnstone & Lindh, 2022) and normalises fashion obsolescence (Philip et al., 2020). On the other hand, it spreads information about unsustainable practices of the industry and promotes more sustainable consumption alternatives (Hassan et al., 2022; Hudders & Lou, 2022; Kapoor et al., 2023).

Strähle and Gräff (2017) identify eight roles of SM in influencing sustainable (fashion) consumption: publicity, transparency, education, engagement, customer relationship management, social interaction, trust, and empowerment. One of the critical roles of SM recognised in the literature is to provide space to share information (Khare et al., 2022). Consumers are getting more interested in sustainability matters, asking brands for more visible and concrete information about circular fashion (Vehmas et al., 2018), supply chain transparency (Modi & Zhao, 2021), or microfiber pollution (Yan et al., 2020).

Information and knowledge obtained through SM can change consumers' attitudes towards fashion and sustainability. De Lenne and Vandenbosch (2017) argue that SM channels, as opposed to printed fashion or sustainability magazines, offer a promising avenue for engaging young people in more sustainable consumption practices related to fashion. Positive attitudes towards environmentally sustainable purchasing behaviour in China increased recently as Chinese consumers have become more aware of social and environmental issues in fashion through SM (Sun et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2019). Importantly, SM and engagement with peers serve to acquire more information and shape purchasing decisions of consumers (Zhao et al., 2019). Similar findings were reported in India (Khare & Kautish, 2020; Khare et al., 2022) and Bangladesh (Sobuj et al., 2021).

Sustainability is also discussed differently on different SM platforms. Content analysis indicates that the keywords related to sustainable fashion discourse on Facebook are "eco-friendly" and "ethical", which are usually linked to the mode of new fashion production, and "recycle", which draws attention to post-consumer textile waste (Youn & Jung, 2021). Twitter discussions mainly focus on the production aspects of the fashion industry but also touch on certain consumption-related practices (Orminski et al., 2020). A comparative study on Twitter and Instagram found that the key themes in posts with the hashtag #WhoMadeMyClothes were working conditions improvement, supply chain transparency, and environmental protection (Modi & Zhao, 2021). Interestingly, the posts on Twitter contained more knowledge-based messages, while the Instagram posts were more emotion-driven (Modi & Zhao, 2021). Depending on the country's context, De Brito Silva et al. (2023) point out that hashtags are often culturally specific and may

not always be translated whilst further concurring that Instagram posts have emotionally driven content.

Sustainable fashion discourse on Twitter is distorted and lacks narrative coherence: as opinion leaders tend to “talk to each other”, the conversation is not necessarily amplified to involve those less aware of the problem (Orminski et al., 2020). Portway (2020) argues that fashion activists have been rather slow to adopt the framings from climate justice discourse, failing to integrate important sustainability concerns into their communication campaigns.

The analysis identifies different actors who facilitate sustainable fashion discourse on SM: influencers, brands, advocacy groups, and the media. Yet, most studies focus on brand communications and consumer engagement strategies, including influencer collaborations. Only a handful of studies look specifically at other actors communicating sustainability: 3 articles look at NGOs (Fux & Čater, 2018; Lim et al., 2019; Modi & Zhao, 2021), and five articles explore sustainable fashion influencers’ communications not in the context of partnerships with brands or brand promotion (Bly et al., 2015; Foltyn, 2019; Lehew & Patwary, 2018; McKeown & Shearer, 2019).

4.2. Brand-related communications

Social media marketing (SMM) strategies play a key role for brands to reach their existing and potential consumers. The review identified 61 papers on this topic. Depending on who creates the content, SMM strategies can be grouped into brands’ communications (20), consumer engagement via user-generated content (UGC) and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (16), and collaborations with influencers (25).

4.2.1. Direct brand-to-consumer communications

Brand communication directly to consumers has been discussed in 20 papers. Different SMM strategies regarding communicating sustainability are recognised for different types of brands and market segments. In the context of luxury, research indicates that SM brand communities play an important role in enhancing consumer attitudes and loyalty to brands and increasing their purchasing intentions (Kim & Lee, 2019; Kim et al., 2023; Zollo et al., 2020). However, not all consumer engagement leads to purchasing behaviour.

Engaging with luxury brand communities on Facebook predicts purchasing intentions towards brands that are congruent with the actual self (“this brand’s personality is like who I really am”) but not with the ideal self (“this brand’s personality is like who I would like to be”; Wallace et al., 2020). Based on a Lebanese sample, Ramadan et al. (2018) suggest six categories of online luxury followers, all with different levels of propensity to buy and engage via SM. A more recent study by Castillo-Abdul et al. (2021) focuses on creating branded SM content that aligns with corporate social responsibility aspects and promotes and evokes feelings of happiness and, more generally, well-being in followers.

Kong et al. (2020) distinguish between luxury and non-luxury brands when communicating sustainability. The authors argue that, in Germany, consumers view ‘green’ advertising as conflicting with the luxury brand image already perceived as slow fashion. In South Korea, sustainability-related advertising had less of an effect on both luxury and non-luxury brands. The study suggests that SM sustainability campaigns are more

effective for non-luxury brands in countries where consumers are already aware of sustainability challenges (Kong et al., 2020).

Testa et al. (2021) identified three types of fashion brands: sustainable, sustainably aware mainstream, and traditional. Sustainable brands received less engagement on sustainability posts, while sustainably aware mainstream and traditional brands received more engagement. Video posts generated more comments, and single-photo posts received more likes.

Socially and environmentally conscious fashion brands have a variety of information-sharing tactics on SM at their disposal to highlight their CSR efforts or sustainable practices (Casais & Ribeiro Gomes, 2022; Roncha & Radclyffe-Thomas, 2016; Urmínová & Kusá, 2020). For example, sustainable fashion brands communicate their underlying business model elements framed as product attributes or consequences for consumers, society, or the environment (Viciunaite, 2020). Some communications also direct consumers to external activities by promoting pop-up shops (Rosenbaum et al., 2021) or interactive label design (Perez & Lonsdale, 2018). Furthermore, research from Indonesia indicates that there is still a gap in the perception of the marketing strategy of sustainable fashion brands and consumers' attitudes regarding pricing, indicating that SM could mediate this conversation (Puspita & Chae, 2021).

Regarding debates on sufficiency, Frick et al. (2021) discuss communication strategies of online sustainable fashion shops that say #LessIsMore and proactively encourage consumers to reflect before their purchases, showing that sufficiency-related SM posts from brands could increase sufficiency behaviour in the short term. Freudenreich and Schaltegger (2020) provide a conceptual overview of how brands could change their operations to adopt more circular practices, including via SM.

4.2.2. Consumer engagement, UGC, and eWOM

An important role in SMM research is given to eWOM, when consumers share their opinions about products or services via UGC. The review identified 16 papers on the topic. Positive eWOM effectively improves brand image and sales (Kim & Johnson, 2016). Studies found that brands could harness UGC to enhance awareness about the brand (Vasquez et al., 2020) and brand loyalty (Naeem & Ozuem, 2021). Consumers who spread eWOM towards sustainable fashion were found to be extraverted, open to experience, and agreeable (Salem & Alanadoly, 2021).

Consumers generate brand-related content (e.g. product reviews) for several reasons. Some studies suggest that the drivers for UGC are social responsibility, sharing experiences, staying connected and updated (Naeem & Ozuem, 2021; Siregar et al., 2023), while others highlight the role of extrinsic (fame and endorser credibility) and intrinsic (self-acceptance and community feeling) motives (Hasbullah et al., 2020b). Ki et al. (2022) further suggested that consumers seek inspiration from SM influencers to follow their guidance. Consumers engage more with higher-quality marketing content, especially when they have a patronage intention towards sustainable fashion brands and "green consciousness" (Kang & Kim, 2017). Communicating product-focused content has been shown to enhance consumers' intention to spread eWOM about the brand (Kim et al., 2020).

In the case of online fashion shopping, aesthetics drive the relational, emotional, and interactive experiences of consumers, which, in turn, are the predictors of purchasing

intentions (Vazquez et al., 2021). On Instagram, consumers engage the most with single-photo aesthetically pleasing posts on lifestyle and fashion topics (De Brito Silva et al., 2023; Testa et al., 2021). On Facebook, consumers tend to engage the most with video format and infographic posts related to sustainable fashion (Lehew & Patwary, 2020).

Moreover, Septitano et al. (2021) found that appealing to an individual's pride or fostering their (individuals') need to belong through marketing communications of sustainable luxury brands leads to different eWOM responses from consumers that rely on status attainment and affiliation-seeking motives. Interestingly, 62% of respondents in the study were men, which warrants a question whether these findings represent the actual consumers of luxury bags at the centre of images used in the study.

4.2.3. Influencers as part of brands' SMM strategy

A phenomenon that has attracted the most scholarly attention in recent years in the context of fashion and SM is SM influencers and their role in changing the purchasing behaviour of their followers. SM influencers can promote brands (thus, be a vessel for communicating the brand's values and sustainability message) or represent independent content (more aligned with UGC). The review identified 25 papers that address this topic.

There is a growing body of literature that recognises SM influencers as opinion leaders (Casaló et al., 2020; Johnstone & Lindh, 2022; Quelhas-Brito et al., 2020) and explores how "authenticity" of SM influencers serves as a communication strategy to connect with and gain trust of followers who want to mimic these micro-celebrities (Audrezet et al., 2020; Duffy & Hund, 2015; Maares et al., 2021). The literature also investigates the techniques and persuasion mechanisms used by SM influencers to convince followers to buy from brands they are promoting (Feng et al., 2020; Jin & Ryu, 2020; Jin et al., 2021; Kapoor et al., 2023; Kim & Kim, 2020). Some studies question the implications of the phenomenon for the influencers themselves, who must reconcile ethicality with living a luxury lifestyle (Leban et al., 2020) and for the followers, as vanity and narcissism (that fuel influencer culture) were found to moderate compulsive SM use and purchases (Okazaki et al., 2021).

Research also found that influencers' trustworthiness (rather than expertise), followed by attractiveness, define their success and result in higher brand satisfaction and image, which, in turn, are positively linked to purchasing intentions and price premium (Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2021) and intention to use an online rental platform (Shrivastava et al., 2021) Another study shows that the attractiveness of influencers and congruence between the influencer and the brand promoted enhances the followers' purchasing intentions (Torres et al., 2019).

Multiple studies recognise the role of SM influencers in enhancing the purchasing intentions of consumers towards the goods influencers are promoting (Breves et al., 2019; Feng et al., 2020; Kim & Kim, 2020; Torres et al., 2019) and igniting impulse purchases (Vasquez et al., 2020; Zafar et al., 2020). While most of the research on fashion influencers considers fashion in general, the same causal mechanisms apply to sustainable fashion. For example, research from South Korea on YouTube vloggers (Kim et al., 2020) indicates that social capital and parasocial relations positively affect purchasing intentions towards sustainable fashion. Consumers are more inclined to develop positive purchasing intentions towards sustainable fashion products if YouTube vloggers propose

these options or do not buy anything (García de Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Yuan et al., 2023).

4.3. Non-brand-related communications

Twenty reviewed papers focused on the role of SM in sustainable fashion-related activism and advocacy efforts.

4.3.1. Activism, anti-consumption, sufficiency

Topics of sufficiency, minimalism, and voluntary consumption reduction, including consumption of fashion, have gained momentum on SM in recent years. SM serves as an avenue for conversations and consumer-led bottom-up movements and initiatives that discourage overconsumption in general and fashion in particular. For example, apparel is on the agenda of the Zero Waste movement, which is led by female influencers and fosters the idea of consuming less to produce less waste (Ramjaun, 2021). Anti-consumption sentiments drove SM engagement of consumers in #BuyNothingDay campaign on Twitter (Parschen et al., 2020) or via growing popularity of YouTube “Anti-Haul” videos. Part of the “de-influencing” trend, in these videos, influencers say “You Absolutely Don’t Need This!” and advise their followers what *not* to buy as opposed to traditional “Haul” videos (García de Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Haines et al., 2023). Moreover, “greenfluencers” have emerged, the term which describes influencers who are seen to promote activism among SM users (Cooke et al., 2022; Knupfer et al., 2023) and are also linked to driving social change (Kapoor et al., 2023).

Sustainable fashion advocacy groups have actively challenged the status quo for nearly a decade through SM campaigns (Modi & Zhao, 2021). However, fashion activists have been criticised for failing to integrate sustainability and climate justice concerns into their communication campaigns earlier (Portway, 2020). Before climate and sustainability, animal cruelty has been a more prevalent ethical concern in fashion supply chains. NGOs play an important role in providing consumers with relevant facts and information. Analysis of NGO SM communication strategies found that SM posts from NGOs that contain information received the most engagement from SM users. Moreover, negative emotional images influence supportive behaviour towards the campaign but not ethical consumption behaviour overall (Lim et al., 2019).

4.3.2. Celebrities and influencers

The role of celebrities in promoting sustainable lifestyles has been recognised and challenged (Foltyn, 2019). SM accounts of celebrities can reach millions of people and raise awareness of sustainability challenges in the fashion system (McKeown & Shearer, 2019). A study on influential sustainable fashion bloggers indicates that most of them used to be part of the fashion industry and became concerned about sustainability, which drove them towards more sustainable lifestyle advocacy (Lehew & Patwary, 2018). Authors emphasise the role of sustainable fashion bloggers in spreading information about sustainable fashion consumption practices more broadly to their followers (ibid).

While celebrities could be sustainable fashion advocates, sustainable fashion influencers do not have to be celebrities. In an early paper on sustainable fashion pioneers, Bly

et al. (2015) explore the views of bloggers and influencers who became known due to their SM and blogging activity related to sustainable fashion, including strategies for changing behaviour and practices. Authors found that the sustainable fashion consumption “pioneers” tend to agree that a sense of wellbeing and personal style, not fashion, can reconcile the potential disconnect between fashion and sustainability (Bly et al., 2015).

SM and blogs serve as an important source of information to those interested in experimenting with reducing their wardrobes, a sufficiency-oriented sustainable consumption practice (Lim & Bedford, 2019; Vladimirova, 2021). Both influencers (authors of minimalist fashion challenges) and their SM followers (consumers who engaged in wardrobe downshifting) are primarily motivated by personal wellbeing and other intrinsic motives, as opposed to altruistic motives such as sustainability concerns (Vladimirova, 2021).

Similar findings were reported in the context of closet sharing. Vincent and Gaur (2021) argue that consumers’ engagement in collaborative fashion consumption is driven primarily by economic, utilitarian, and innovative motivations. Interestingly, findings from this study indicate that one of the motivations behind consumers’ engagement in closet sharing practice is to keep their SM accounts “fresh” (Vincent & Gaur, 2021). eWOM and exchanges with peers have also influenced consumers’ willingness to adopt more sustainable fashion consumption practices, including some forms of collaborative fashion consumption, such as second-hand clothing (Mohammad et al., 2021).

Another study from China (Zhang & Dong, 2021) looked at behavioural intentions towards sustainable fashion consumption, focusing on buying second-hand garments. The authors found that virtual social capital and peer influence in China significantly enhance behavioural intention to acquire second-hand clothes. However, “face consciousness”, a very strong concept in Chinese culture, negatively impacts this type of behaviour. “Keeping face” and what others (relatives, friends, and acquaintances) would think plays a major role in consumers’ decision to opt for more status goods, including clothes, which is often the first thing people see. Using second-hand clothes still invokes negative connotations in China (Zhang & Dong, 2021).

5. Discussion and implications for future research

This section evaluates the findings presented and highlights gaps and opportunities.

5.1. Research is fragmented and limited

This structured literature review demonstrates that research on SM influences on sustainable fashion consumption is fragmented and heavily biased in favour of marketing research. Out of the 40 journals, 25 fall within the marketing management remit, including consumer behaviour journals; 11 describe themselves as multi- or interdisciplinary journals, and 4 fall within the arts and humanities category. Perspectives from disciplines like anthropology, sociology, and political science were missing. And while marketing research can provide useful information on brand–consumer relationships, it mainly treats sustainability-related content as a means to increase sales. This approach in itself raises concerns about the environmental impact of increased overall consumption.

Social media offers a wealth of information to understand sustainable fashion consumption better. Given that GenY and GenZ are actively present on SM and share their daily practices and activities, social science research could help capture social practices related to sustainable fashion consumption, as represented on SM. A netnographic analysis could map interactions within sustainable fashion communities of practice or the changing beliefs and attitudes of consumers who start engaging in new sustainable practices with little knowledge. Political science methodologies could be applied to study sustainable fashion consumption as a form of political protest and as part of a broader anti-capitalist and degrowth movement.

5.2. Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

Questions surrounding SM's influence on (sustainable) fashion consumption has been investigated from various theoretical underpinnings. Dominant theories include the SOR model, TPB, and TRA, all of which have a heavy quantitative focus. While quantitative papers provide generalisable data, they often ignore the "why" question. As mentioned in the previous section, most studies reviewed were published within the marketing and management remit. This could explain a quantitative focus, as a key marketing goal is to sell products. Measuring what creates this success (sales) and quantifying this will be especially useful for fashion brands.

Yet, what remains unanswered is why consumers engage with certain types of activism/content and how this could be enhanced in the context of transitioning towards more sustainable fashion consumption practices. Thus, more qualitative and mixed-methods studies could shed light in this area. Moreover, conceptual papers could provide an opportunity for further discussions surrounding the power of SM in driving social change towards more sustainable practices. The 21st century has seen an increased focus on sustainability and increased technological advancements, as well as media fragmentation. To capitalise on the latter aspects, future research could use new data collection methods, such as artificial intelligence, Big Data, and eye-tracking technology, to map social interactions on SM and understand user engagement with non-brand-related content.

5.3. Geographical representation

Most studies did not specify the country/region investigated, which could link to increased globalisation and the fact that SM can be accessed from anywhere and by anyone. Thus, geography could become more of a benign factor when investigating the influence of SM on sustainable fashion consumption. Yet from those studies that specified the country's context, there is an apparent bias towards the Global North. Possible explanations could be that leading countries in terms of influencer marketing are located in the Global North and/or due to the inclusion criteria of only selecting studies written in English. Although SM has become more popular, some SM channels are heavily regulated and/or blocked in different countries, which could further contribute to the country bias presented. Notably, there are almost no studies from Africa or the Middle East, even though popular SM platforms (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, and Snapchat) are commonly used in these countries.

It is important to note that research on the impact of environmental knowledge and awareness, which can be shared through social media, on the purchasing intentions of green apparel has only been studied explicitly in the Global South, specifically in China, India, and Bangladesh. A key question to consider is whether it is assumed that consumers in the Global North already possess this knowledge or if they may acquire it through other channels than social media.

Based on our findings, out of the 92 papers that were reviewed, only seven articles conducted a cross-country comparison, five of which focused on the Global North (Bly et al., 2015; Maares et al., 2021; Roncha & Radclyffe-Thomas, 2016; Rosenbaum et al., 2021; Vladimirova, 2021), and two compared the Global South and Global North (De Brito Silva et al., 2023; Kong et al., 2021). More comparative studies could help enhance our understanding about the different contexts for advancing sustainable fashion consumption practices and on its cultural dimensions.

5.4. Agency and actors' analysis

The original question of this review was as follows: *Who and in which ways influence consumers on SM to engage with more sustainable forms of fashion consumption?* An analysis identified influencers, brands, advocacy groups, and media as the key categories of actors advancing the discourse on sustainable fashion consumption. However, most of the papers assume a brand's perspective and examine narrowly how brands can influence consumers with their sustainability-related communications – via their content creation, through collaborations with influencers, or by harnessing eWOM and UGC.

The review shows a remarkable lack of attention to influencers who promote sustainable fashion consumption outside the context of brand partnerships. Future research could zoom into messages, framings, and communication strategies utilised by different types of influencers to different kinds of consumers (e.g. long-term convinced followers and new followers with less knowledge about sustainability in fashion). An under-explored area is parasocial interactions between influencers and consumers and their influence on adopting more sustainable consumption practices.

Moreover, other actors (NGOs, media) communications are almost entirely excluded from research. Existing studies on NGOs either consider the influence of their messages about animal cruelty in fashion (which is a rather narrow interpretation of sustainable fashion) on consumers (Lim et al., 2019) or examine NGO campaigns that target brands and utilise consumer SM engagement as leverage (Modi & Zhao, 2021).

Further studies could explore various kinds of NGOs and activist groups, their approaches, and how they engage consumers. Additionally, researching consumer-driven campaigns that aim to increase awareness and advocate for more sustainable fashion practices is another promising area. This could involve examining campaigns that challenge consumer attitudes towards clothing and encourage longer use and proper care for garments, such as Fashion Revolution's #LovedClothesLast or #Beyond30Wears campaigns.

Moreover, the review did not identify a single study that would examine how media (magazines, news outlets, podcasts, etc.) influence consumers via SM. This finding is particularly surprising considering the substantial body of research on the role of SM in news consumption. In recent years, information dissemination channels have shifted

dramatically in favour of SM, outpacing traditional print or television outlets (Belair-Gagnon, 2015). In fashion, magazines such as Vogue or Business of Fashion have been showing an increased interest in sustainability, which has recently peaked with an interview with climate activist Greta Thunberg in Vogue Scandinavia (Pattinson, 2021). Traditional media outlets are adopting SM strategies to reach their audience. Currently, there is no research that investigates how media outlets' communication through social media channels impacts consumers' understanding of sustainable fashion consumption.

5.5. Alternatives to buying new and sufficiency

After analyzing the literature, it is evident that sustainable fashion consumption is mostly associated with purchasing new products that are either ethically produced or environmentally friendly. Yet, sustainable fashion consumption is much broader than this narrow interpretation. It offers a variety of consumption practices that could work for any budget (e.g. free swapping events) and taste (e.g. renting a gown for special occasions) (Vladimirova et al., 2021). Moreover, activities such as making clothes, having clothes tailored, upcycling and repairing garments, and engaging in more sustainable garment use and care practices (e.g. sun drying clothes and laundry at low temperatures) are all sustainable fashion consumption practices.

The review identified just two papers on second-hand fashion (Mohammad et al., 2021; Zhang & Dong, 2021), one paper on online renting (Shrivastava et al., 2021) and one on closet sharing (Vincent & Gaur, 2021). Nothing emerged on swapping, which was surprising as the swapping phenomenon is often facilitated by SM groups (Camacho-Otero et al., 2020). Other sustainable fashion consumption practices mentioned above are effectively absent from the articles in this review. Future research could explore the role of different SM platforms in promoting more sustainable forms of fashion consumption that are not about buying new garments.

Finally, the sufficiency perspective is an emerging trend in research on SM in the fashion context. Still, it is currently underdeveloped regarding its theoretical underpinnings and empirical contributions. Sufficiency, understood as minimalism and slow fashion approach to consumption, is captured by several papers (Bly et al., 2015; Lim & Bedford, 2019; Vincent & Gaur, 2021; Vladimirova, 2021). Research explores how SM offers users a way to get information, share their journeys, exchange with peers, and be part of a community of interest, which is critical to spreading more sustainable practices.

However, little is known about types of sufficiency-oriented communication strategies and their impact on consumers in different cultural contexts. Future research could focus on communities of interest and explore how information spreads and how and why consumers change their practices towards more sustainable rails.

Moreover, from a business perspective, sufficiency marketing is a new brand communication strategy in general and in the context of sustainable fashion. Sufficiency marketing may sound like an oxymoron that leaves room for greenwashing. More work on communication campaigns from brands that adopt this perspective in their

operations is necessary to categorize different strategies and their impacts on consumers' engagement, attitudes, and actual purchasing behaviour.

6. Conclusion

SLRs play an important role in painting a bigger picture for different research fields as they help identify gaps in existing research and avenues for future inquiry (Paul & Criado, 2020). In this spirit, the current SLR provides an overview of the state-of-the-art research on SM influences on sustainable fashion consumption.

While many "offline" factors affect consumer practices related to fashion (infrastructure availability, skills and competencies, peer pressure and social expectations, stigma



Figure 2. Future research agenda.

and social norms, etc.), the role of SM in reaching consumers, especially GenY and GenZ, cannot be overstated in today's digital age.

Based on the discussion and the themes identified, [Figure 2](#) provides an overview of key areas that warrant future investigations.

With interdisciplinary research becoming increasingly important, it is suggested that the topic of SM influence(s) and sustainable fashion consumption is investigated through different theoretical lenses that can provide further insights into the “why” and “how” certain conclusions have been drawn and whether there may be other insights that need to be investigated further.

The heavy focus on quantitative studies in this area is interesting as it allows to generalize different constructs and test theories. Yet, further research is needed to comprehend underpinning motivations and actions and develop theories fully. Technology and SM channels are continuously changing. Thus, there is a need to explore whether current theoretical underpinnings are sufficient to explain why users engaged in a certain manner and how brands should develop communications in the future.

Furthermore, research needs to explore the Global South further, as SM channels and external factors (censorship, importance of sustainability, infrastructure, availability) can differ dramatically. One area of research is finding ways to engage users who are currently disengaged. The fashion industry needs to change its behaviour towards sustainability, which is a top priority. It is essential to understand how to enable this shift.

7. Limitations




There are a few limitations to this SLR. Firstly, it only considered publications written in English, which means that some studies written in other languages may have been excluded. Secondly, the method used to identify themes and clusters was an inductive approach, which is just one way of interpreting the literature. If a different group of researchers had coded the data, other clustering options could have been used. For instance, studies could have been grouped based on the type of social media platform used (such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter) or the type of sustainable fashion consumption practice (such as buying new or second-hand).

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ORCID

K. Vladimirova  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9362-8283>
C. E. Henninger  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9978-5340>
S. I. Alosaimi  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4287-9944>
T. Brydges  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8139-005X>
H. Choopani  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2385-9307>
M. Hanlon  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9741-6771>

S. Iran  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1483-8520>
 H. McCormick  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7490-6014>
 S. Zhou  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2526-5633>

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