

# DIFFERENT FAÇADES OF SUSTAINABILITY FASHION



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## Opening Remark

During the last twelve months, and because of the COVID-19, it has reshaped many things, it has changed the perspectives of everything, in every direction you take. Our fashion business is certainly one of them but “sustainable fashion” is only the most favorite buzzword for the industry to use as the marketing tool. But if we come to the bottom of it, it has only been scratching the face and for those who have really been committed and have taken it seriously are only on the starting line.

There are many ways and forms for the recycle, reducing the carbon emissions, using blockchain to tackle the supply chain, and return to the criteria as set by the Paris climate accord, are areas calling for our commitments.

The pandemic came unannounced and the developed country, and in fact most of the developing countries, were forced to lockdown to curb the spread of the virus. We found shops piled with clothing for the season, warehouses were stuffed with stock, and container terminals and shipping vessels with containers loaded with fresh merchandiser. And you cannot overlook the supply chain where productions have completed, goods-in-progress, raw materials in their different forms, were clogging in the supply chain. Everything was told to stop. And as if it was not worse enough, payments were held up, some even being denied, workers were sent home without pay. The industry was in a total chaos.

I do not see that this “old” problems could have solved as yet, and in the meantime, we have seen more bankruptcy, companies looked for Chapter 11, downsizing with shops closing and letting the staff go. To say that the fashion has went through apocalypse was perhaps a milder word.

## Resale of Fashion

First and foremost, there has to be a demand and for the marketing company the customers would need to be allocated, otherwise everything will just end up as empty talks. This is all about the reselling of the clothes and keep them in circulation. The industry would like to call this as “the circular fashion movement”.

At this moment, the fashion industry has a huge over stock situation for reasons we have raised earlier. To find ways to manage the excess inventory is not “resale” as these are fresh merchandise as they have not been worn and used, and to sell them is the “first sale” with the price that must be appealing to the customers. This should be separated from the “resale” but rather as “special sale”.

And also, those excess inventory can be earmarked for resale if they can be managed for “briefly owned” and destined for resale after a very short period of time to allow the garments to enter into “the circular fashion movement”. And because they have to come back into the flow, a special team with professional training to assure the quality and the hygiene condition of those clothing that the next customer in line will wear with the peace of mind. I do not know how many of these operators for “the circular fashion movement” have set the procedures to put this business in operation. Consider that third party auditors should be engaged to make this business viable.

There are already some known players, and we can identify them as the following:



Courtesy of facebook.com

**RealReal - The RealReal** Inc. is an online and brick-and mortar operation who offer luxury clothing, fine jewelry, watches, fine art and home décor on consignment. The company is traded on Nasdaq and has a revenue of \$300 million.

**ThredUp** - It is an online thrift store and consignment shop for secondhand clothes. Its merchandise is from Gap to Gucci, and in between there is Lululemon, Anthropologie, Madewell, and others.



Courtesy of: rsvpa.wilf.org



Courtesy of: sellonposhmark.com

**Poshmark** - It is an ecommerce market place for new and secondhand clothing for women, men, kids, home and many others. It has also handbags, shoes, jewelry and accessories, brands from luxury to the most popular fashion brands.

It is said that the secondhand apparel market has the sales of \$28 billion in 2019, which is by no means small, and in 2024 it will become \$64 billion. This was in according to GlobalData's estimate and in a financial report as cited by ThredUp.

## Recycle Blended Cotton and Polyester

It is said that there is this H&M supplier who is testing a machine that can recycle blended cotton and polyester in a factory setting and H&M is committed to support this technology's wider rollout if it is successful.

There is also another Swedish company, Renewell, newly listed in the Swedish stock market in November, have plans to ramp up its production capacity by fivefold by 2026.

This is a positive attitude to take up recycle but we have been there before and we know already for recycle it will be costlier than the "virgin" yarns and fibers. Unless this is supported by the market, otherwise this will remain as a marketing tool where the practicality would not sustain.

For fast fashion company like H&M, it needs volume to drive the cost down. At this moment, I cannot see how the recycle technology can fit into their business model. It is already known that in order to sell in their price-range, the quality would also need to be compromised. I am skeptical about this company and this may only be their marketing gimmick.

## Biodiversity is All About Coexistence

It is already said in the report of the World Wildlife Fund that the animal population has dwindled by a staggering 68% since 1970 because of the ecology change that has affected three-quarter of the planet's ice-free land. This is because of the climate change that affect the growth of the agricultural products.

The Fashion Pact signed by 60 fashion companies launched by Kering's CEO in August, 2019 that committed to seven new targets to reduce the sector's environmental impact on climate, biodiversity and oceans. The Fashion Pact announced seven quantifiable, time-bound targets that included initiatives to reduce emissions, plastic packaging and the impact of raw materials within the fashion industry.

The regenerative agriculture, rotating farming practice and for livestock as well to make soil healthier so that it can refrain on the exhaustion of carbon and help to regulate water cycles. In this area will need agricultural experts for advice.

## Labor Rights

The long-standing social challenges have been more challenging at this time of the pandemic. Labor rights have been a problem in Dhaka in Bangladesh to Xinjiang's forced labor camps. This has been raised by human rights campaigners and labor advocates to address this problem in the fashion supply chain. An ethical clothes campaign group known as Remake successfully pressured many of the big brands to pay for orders placed with suppliers throughout the pandemic. The campaigners are pushing now for more systemic change to ensure workers are paid living wages and guarantee decent and safe working conditions.

We addressed the issue for the Xinjiang cotton in our other article and we are not going to repeat here. Please read our *"Grapevine Part 2 - Short Read - What is the New Withhold Release Order Enforcement Meant to the Apparel World"*.

## Final Remarks

It was already in 2019, luxury department store, Selfridges, was gearing up a new major campaign and brand strategy centered on sustainability, but when the UK entered into lockdown in March 2020 it was stalled. In fact, all companies put their new sustainability initiatives on hold. But lately, the initiatives have rekindled, and brands and retailers have found to push ahead to meet the goals as set previously.

For instance, the footwear company, Timberland, has introduced the "regenerative agriculture" from the US ranches who rear their herds in a way that mimics natural grazing patterns and keeps the soil fertile. It absorbs carbon out of the air instead of emitting it into the atmosphere. Timberland is aiming for carbon-net positive by 2030 by pulling away from rubber plantations that mimic the natural biodiversity of the rainforest and use cotton only from the organic cotton farms.

The industry is still looking for a clear visibility over their supply chain and many of these initiatives are hard to achieve. Timberland's plan is perhaps the most ambitious as it involves farm-to-factory which is hard to accomplish for the smaller companies.

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For the brands and the retailers, keeping themselves up with the sustainability business model is already a challenge. In order for them to satisfy the expectation of the investors and equity funds, their business model that build on continuous growth is contradicting. Especially this time at its excess inventory problem created by the pandemic. In the short term, the year-to-year growth would need to be on hold until this can be solved. It is important to take the step-by-step approach, even if it is a small step at a time.

It is advisable to listen closely to the market for the need and the consumers' trend and build the business around them.



Courtesy of: cemeli.com

Lastly, we would like to introduce a company known as Cemeli, who is an apparel retailer who promoted sustainable fashion. We highlights those points that emphasize by this company by directing to the all valid points—*carbon footprint, carbon neutral, certifications, circular economy, local community buying, eco-fashion, education. Foundations, plastic-free, provenance, water, and zero waste.*

You can visit them at [cemeli.com/blog/cemeli-blog/what-is-sustainable-fashion/](https://cemeli.com/blog/cemeli-blog/what-is-sustainable-fashion/)

More websites suggested by Cemeli which are worth exploring. Let's work toward sustainable fashion altogether!



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