`ORIGINAL PAPER`

Fashionable Ethics: Exploring Ethical Perspectives in the Production, Marketing, and Consumption of Fashion

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Abstract

This Special Issue examines ethics in fashion to further critical understanding of the various drivers and barriers, nuances and layers of complexity in fashion production, marketing, and consumption, and aims toward a more future-oriented perspective through the lens of ethics. Research on ethical issues in fashion is growing but is fragmented across diverse domains, from supply chain and operations management, to psychology and sociology, to marketing and consumption. Furthermore, there has been only a peripheral focus on ethics and limited application of ethical theories or frameworks to fashion's ethical dilemmas. This Special Issue brings together diverse domains and unpacks salient ethical issues using the lens of ethical theories and frameworks to advance theory development on balancing social justice with environmental responsibility, decision-making in ethical situations, and newer forms of greenwashing and consumerism. The selected papers use varied methodologies and offer novel insights across different global contexts.

Introduction

Fashion is simultaneously enthralling yet exploitative, replete with a multitude of ethical issues along the entire value chain from production and marketing to consumption, incorporating labor exploitation, animal cruelty, environmental pollution, consumerism, cultural appropriation, objectification, under-representation, and discrimination. The advent of fast fashion, while democratizing fashion by making trendy and affordable clothing accessible to a wide audience, has come under intense scrutiny due to its extensive ethical and environmental challenges. Fashion's ephemeral nature and inherent emphasis on change and trend-driven obsolescence directly conflicts with principles of sustainability. Growth and globalization have brought into question consequence-focused morality of 'greatest good for the greatest number' as the unequal distribution of gains, massive input resource demands, and labor exploitation have become critical global issues. If the fashion industry is to meet societal expectations and operate as more than a ruthless struggle for profit maximization, then utilitarian considerations for the greater good must be tempered by deontological principles of respect for persons and intrinsic human rights. However, despite calls for substantive change, current ethical initiatives are insufficiently radical or transformative to mitigate against the dominant growth paradigm of increasing production and consumption driven by an obsessive focus on change and planned obsolescence of products. This reliance on "fashionable ethics" that prioritize profit and brand image over real ethical reform highlights the ongoing challenges in aligning the industry's business practices with meaningful ethical standards. Could business ethics temper the apparent economic advantage to producing or marketing unethically?

Research on ethical issues and sustainability in fashion is growing but tends to be fragmented across diverse literature

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bases, from supply chain and operations management, to psychology and sociology, to marketing and consumption. While there is a relative abundance of literature on various ethical issues, from modern slavery to controversial advertising, the theoretical foundations tend not to lie within the domain of business ethics and there is limited application of ethical lenses and theories to advance knowledge. To address these gaps and consolidate diverse literature bases, this Special Issue seeks to extend theoretical perspectives on fashion ethics across the value chain from production to marketing and consumption at individual, organizational, and institutional levels through a business ethics lens. The call for papers encouraged authors to challenge existing theories and approaches and identify new or alternative perspectives for a better understanding of fashion ethics that exposes critical debates and contradictions, anticipates future developments, and furthers critical understanding of pressing phenomena. This Special Issue aims to provide a platform to synthesize these disparate disciplines and unpack salient ethical issues using the lenses of various ethical theories and frameworks. In doing so, we highlight their value in informing analysis of ethical issues as well as guiding decision-making and theoretical development to set the direction and scope of future research in balancing social justice with environmental responsibility, addressing consumerism and new forms of greenwashing, cultural appropriation, objectification, underrepresentation, and discrimination. We received 61 submissions and following peer review, 9 papers were selected for publication. Comprising a variety of theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary perspectives, the selected papers contribute theoretical advances to further research into fashion ethics and extend knowledge to inform and shape ethical business practices. When asking 'what constitutes the good?' or 'what should we do?,' ethical theories and frameworks help by proposing principles to determine the rightness or wrongness of actions and the goodness or badness of the motives and ends of those actions. The selected papers offer novel insights on how ethical theories and philosophies guide decision-making for various actors in the global fashion industry, how ethical beliefs can drive actors to be 'good citizens' despite political, economic, and market forces to the contrary, and how non-Western conceptualizations of ethics differ from Western ones and how can these be applied to inform responses to ethical issues in a global industry.

This article is structured as follows. First, we present an integrative overview of ethical issues in fashion and review existing research on fashion ethics in production, marketing, and consumption literature. We then present an overview of the theoretical perspectives used in the special issue articles and summarize the authors' contributions. We conclude by presenting key future research directions to highlight how ethical theories could be harnessed for future studies.

A Production Perspective on Fashion Ethics

The complex nature of global fashion supply chains presents significant ethical challenges, particularly in terms of traceability, transparency, and the multi-tiered structure of these networks (Perry et al., 2015). Fashion supply chains often extend across multiple levels, involving numerous subcontractors and lower-tier suppliers, with most production concentrated in the Global South where cheap labor is abundant. These regions are frequently characterized by institutional voids, including weak regulatory frameworks, limited oversight, and inconsistent enforcement of labor standards (Huq & Stevenson, 2020). For fashion brands to adopt truly ethical practices, they must look beyond their internal employees and prioritize the safety, security, and livelihoods of their suppliers and their workforce—the weakest link in the fashion supply chain. One of the most well-known and frequently reported ethical issues in the fashion industry is the sweatshop working conditions that vulnerable workers, often living in developing countries, face. These are characterized by minimal safety measures, low wages, long hours, exploitative contracts, and a lack of workers' rights (Smestad, 2009; Sullivan, 2022). The worst fatal disaster in the history of fashion and textiles occurred in 2013, when the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Bangladesh resulted in the deaths of over 1200 garment workers who were making clothes for Western fashion brands. In fast fashion, Shein, for example, has been criticized for sweatshop conditions, with reports indicating that some workers face grueling 75-h workweeks, receiving minimal pay and operating in unsafe environments (CNN, 2024). Temu faces similar accusations, with rapid production demands leading to unsafe working conditions and labor exploitation (Bloomberg, 2023). Sweatshop working conditions are not limited to fast fashion, as seen in revelations of exploitation of migrant workers in Italy producing for luxury brands Dior and Armani (The Wall Street Journal, 2024). It was reported that production costs at LVMH subsidiaries kept as low as 53 Euros for a handbag priced at 2600 Euros were achieved by forcing workers to sleep at the workplace and removing safety devices to speed up production (Reuters, 2024). Child labor is still prevalent in the fashion industry, denying children their fundamental rights and subjecting them to inhumane working conditions. Many of the approximately 112 million child laborers are employed in the agricultural sector with many involved in cotton harvesting (European Commission, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic revealed unethical practices by retailers towards their global supplier base. The widespread cancelation of orders and payment defaults not only threatened to dismantle established supplier bases but also imposed severe economic and

social strain on workers who were already at the margins of financial stability (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2020). In Bangladesh, the crisis was especially severe. Over $2.8 billion in orders were canceled, jeopardizing the livelihoods of the country's four million garment workers as international buyers reneged on payments, risking the survival of suppliers and threatening the stability of an established supply chain (Forbes, 2020). The collapse of supplier networks, worsened by reduced or canceled orders, disproportionately impacted vulnerable workers in developing regions who were already in precarious conditions. The situation becomes even more challenging when fashion companies are also held liable for the unethical actions of their suppliers, who decouple formal ethical practices by adopting them symbolically (Huq & Stevenson, 2020). Modern slavery, a more pernicious form of sweatshop working conditions which includes human trafficking and forced labor, occurs across fashion supply chains in both developed and developing countries (Walk Freee, 2024). Garments are one of the highest risk goods imported to G20 countries in terms of forced labor (Walk Free, 2023).

In addition, environmental pollution is a significant problem (Niinimäki et al., 2020). It appears in various forms, such as the substantial amount of carbon emissions (over 1 billion metric tons of global carbon emissions (Sadowski et al., 2021)). Water pollution occurs as harmful pesticides, dyestuffs, and microplastics leach into local waterways, which affects the environment and impacts humans living in these areas, as well as flora and fauna. Fashion is associated with an enormous use of non-renewable resources such as fossil fuels for making synthetic fabrics. The high level of water usage and other natural resources in areas with limited resources is another significant issue, both for growing cotton and for textile processing. For example, in Bangladesh, the world's second largest apparel exporter after China, a worrying decline in groundwater levels has been attributed to industrial textile processing factories (Sakib, 2023). The fashion industry also generates an enormous amount of textile waste, which mainly ends up in landfills. The export of low-quality used clothing to developing countries causes an overflow of waste with high associated environmental and societal costs (Nkhata, 2023). This enacts 'waste colonialism,' a new form of colonialism where waste and pollution are used to dominate another group of people in their homeland (The OR Foundation, 2024).

There is also a negative impact on animals through its glamorization of fur and exotic skins, which is condemned as unethical. China, the biggest fur producer in the world, has been criticized for its cruel fur farming practices. While the UK banned fur farming 22 years ago, it imports over a million animals' worth of fur each year (Edward, 2024). Fashion supply chains have significant impacts on biodiversity and habitat loss through raw material production, textile processing, and textile waste management (McKinsey & Co., 2020). While animal rights are well established in advocating for greater animal welfare on the basis of both utilitarianism and deontological ethics, there is tension between animal rights positions' focus on the irreducible good of the individual, and environmental holists' focus on the functioning of systems—which motivates a consideration of multispecies justice (Celermajer et al., 2021).

While there has been increased research into how fashion companies can develop capabilities to mitigate unethical supply chain practices (Huq et al., 2016)—especially following the Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh—most studies have focused primarily on focal firms and, to some extent, their tier-one garment suppliers (Zorzini et al., 2015). However, there remains a critical need for more empirical research to explore the roles of other essential stakeholders, including both traditional actors (tier-two suppliers, subcontractors, intermediaries, and third-party auditors) and non-traditional actors (NGOs, consultants, and donor agencies). These gaps require empirical research that considers the diverse influences of and impacts on multiple actors across the supply chain, including workers who are the most marginalized. Additionally, ethical challenges in the fashion industry are often complicated by contradictions between formal institutions, such as laws and regulations, and informal, locally embedded practices in developing countries. As such, many recent papers on ethics in fashion production are underpinned by Institutional Theory or political theory. There are, however, some examples that have used an ethical lens, such as Sen's rights-based approach to examine the misrepresentation and non-recognition of women garment workers in ethical compliance codes (Alamgir & Alakavuklar, 2020), normative theories of justice to identify actors and allocate responsibility for ensuring labor standards (Dahan et al., 2023), and ethical leadership theory to explore the connection to employee voice (Lam et al., 2016).

Despite international anti-corruption legislation, fashion supply chains remain vulnerable to bribery and collusion that undermine fair competition and inflate operational costs (Jiménez et al., 2022). Corruption can manifest as unethical procurement practices and collusion between brands and suppliers, often at the expense of workers' rights and safety. For example, suppliers may secure contracts through illicit payments rather than through fair and transparent selection processes (Unglesbee, 2023). Corruption in public procurement, as illustrated by recent UK government contracts awarded under questionable transparency during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscores the urgent need for rigorous anti-corruption measures across both public and private apparel supply chains (BBC News, 2023). The research imperative around corruption in fashion supply chains is clear: understanding these practices allows for the

development of targeted, context-sensitive anti-corruption frameworks. In many cases, weak regulatory environments, especially in emerging economies, create opportunities for discretionary power abuse, facilitating bribery and unfair practices (Silvestre et al., 2020). Future research can explore the stages at which corruption is most likely to occur in fashion supply chains and examine the efficacy of various anti-corruption practices. For example, developing a taxonomy that categorizes different forms of corruption specific to fashion supply chains can help identify key actors and their roles. Furthermore, studying the impact of corruption on organizational and stakeholder relationships can shed light on the broader consequences for business ethics and consumer trust. Additionally, leveraging advanced technologies, such as blockchain for improved traceability and transparency, alongside studying effective frameworks from other sectors, could support the creation of more ethical and resilient supply chains.

However, while technology holds promise, it is not a silver bullet for achieving an ethical and transparent supply chain. The phenomenon of "techwashing" refers to the misrepresentation or exaggeration of technological advancements by companies to appear more innovative or sustainable than they truly are (Forbes, 2019). In supply chains and production, techwashing can involve overstating the benefits of technologies such as blockchain or AI, suggesting enhanced transparency or efficiency without meaningful change. Although the term "techwashing" is not yet widely used, research is needed to examine this practice within fashion supply chains, where brands make vague or misleading claims about technological practices to project a progressive image without significant operational change. This tactic allows companies to capitalize on consumer interest in innovation and sustainability while making minimal or superficial adjustments to their ethical practices. One prominent form of techwashing is exaggerating sustainable innovations. For instance, brands may claim to use water-saving technologies in denim production but only apply these methods to a limited product range, leaving their overall environmental impact largely unchanged. Another common tactic involves overstating tech-enabled supply chain transparency; some fashion brands advertise the use of blockchain to imply that their supply chain guarantees ethical practices.

EDI initiatives have the potential to emerge as an essential tool for fostering ethical change within this sector. As stakeholders' awareness and demand for ethical practices grow, EDI initiatives can play a vital role in promoting fair treatment of workers and incorporating diverse suppliers (Berenguer et al., 2024; Sordi et al., 2022). By fostering partnerships with minority and women-owned suppliers, EDI can help address historical inequalities and supports ethical labor practices, directly tackling some of the fashion industry's most pervasive ethical issues. EDI's commitment to

diversity also amplifies the voices of traditionally excluded workers, such as farmers and lower-tier laborers, who are often excluded from critical decision-making processes and agency in global supply chains (Silva et al., 2023). For example, sexual exploitation including harassment thrives in these environments, highlighting critical gaps in worker protections and raising ethical concerns about companies' responsibilities to ensure fair treatment for all employees (Better Work, 2024). Weak reporting mechanisms and a pervasive fear of retaliation often silence victims, leaving them without recourse or support. Additionally, power imbalances created by temporary contracts, subcontracting, and low wages exacerbate the risks for vulnerable workers, who are often left with limited protection (Grosser & Tyler, 2022). The drive towards a low-carbon fashion industry has raised ethical questions of how this can be achieved in a just, inclusive, and fair manner, since top-down governance and the cascading of paradoxical demands from lead buyers leads to negative physiological and psychological effects on workers (Karaosman & Marshall, 2023).

This context highlights the need for increased research focusing on the perspectives of suppliers in the Global South (Huq & Stevenson, 2020), particularly to examine the conditions under which suppliers begin auditing the financial stability and ethical track record of powerful Western buyers or are compelled to terminate relationships due to unethical buyer behavior. With power imbalances heavily favoring buyers, positioning the buyer as the principal and the supplier as the agent (Chae et al., 2017), many suppliers face an economic and ethical dilemma: continue operating under unfair terms or risk relationship termination. Economic exploitation perpetuates unsustainable conditions for suppliers and destabilizes worker livelihoods across global fashion supply chains, underscoring the urgent need to understand these power asymmetries. Thus, business ethics researchers should also explore extreme cases where suppliers shift from a reactive role to actively initiating relationship terminations with unethical buyers.

A Marketing and Consumption Perspective on Fashion Ethics

Marketing and promotional methods in the fashion industry have faced longstanding criticism. The promotional intensity of social media marketing and influencer marketing encourages impulse purchasing. Consideration of EDI is lacking in fashion marketing communications. For example, body diversity is not widely seen in fashion campaigns. The use of thin models has been linked to body image issues, depression, excessive exercise, and eating disorders among consumers (Huang et al., 2021). Cultural appropriation is a common occurrence when fashion brands incorporate

elements from foreign cultures into fashion designs and campaigns without fully acknowledging their source or cultural significance. Many fashion brands emphasize exclusivity, especially luxury brands, which creates a sense of status but excludes many people due to the unaffordability of their products. There is an ongoing debate about the compatibility of ethical and sustainable luxury consumption, which partially has a paradoxical nature (Osburg et al., 2021). Marketing optimization technologies enable greater personalization and precision of targeting, particularly valuable in competitive markets such as fashion, but have the potential for algorithmic bias, and discrimination. All technology originates with humans and therefore incorporates human shortcomings, prompting the need for critical debate through the lens of business ethics around the 'greater good' in the AI and algorithmic march towards greater efficiency and effectiveness. Digital transformation has reshaped the industry and led to new ethical quandaries as a result of advances in digital technologies, such as the impact on employees who become replaced by AI. This fundamentally changes shopping experiences and raises new ethical questions for fashion brands (McLeay et al., 2021). Frequent reports of ethical transgressions make consumers highly skeptical of ethical claims with numerous accusations of greenwashing or mock compliance, where fashion companies are criticized for paying no more than lip service to systemic labor, environmental, and EDI issues (Huq et al., 2014; Sterbenk et al., 2022).

As the internationalization of retailing and distribution gathers pace and fashion brands strive to create attention-grabbing campaigns to stand out in a highly competitive market, ethical issues emerge from the influence of cultural values on consumer perceptions of fashion marketing activities, for example nudity, sexual images, or the use of females in advertising. The use of Western women as models in advertisements for Dolce & Gabbana's hijab and abaya collection in the Middle East caused Muslim women to feel that the Western world was dictating what they should wear while excluding them at the same time (Haris, 2016). Beauty standards in fashion advertising and promotion remain heavily influenced by white European standards, while advances in photo-editing technology contribute to increasingly unrealistic beauty ideals (Ranjanala et al., 2018). Lee et al. (2024) used signaling theory to investigate whether incorporating models with disabilities into brand narratives contributes to positive consumer responses. Results showed that despite the negative effect of perceived brand inclusivity on consumer willingness to buy, the serial mediation by transportation into brand stories and advertising credibility flipped the effect to positive. Fashion companies make much use of social media marketing, particularly the visual-based Instagram and TikTok platforms and social media influencers. However, there are increasing reports of the negative psychological effects of excessive social media

use and social comparison to unrealistic beauty ideals, especially in younger adults (Merino et al., 2024). Controversial themes in fashion advertising campaigns also raise ethical questions around potential societal consequences. Gurrieri et al. (2016) explored violent representations of women in advertising through critical discourse analysis of advertising portrayals of women in suggestive, dehumanized, and submissive roles in campaigns across Australia, Italy, Turkey, and Canada. Client organizations used three discursive strategies to defend and legitimize their decisions—subverting interpretations, making authority claims, and denying responsibility. They concluded that while controversial or taboo advertising plays an important role in shifting boundaries, it carries moral implications which may have damaging societal effects in terms of gender-based violence. Srivastava et al.'s (2022) visual discourse analysis of Nordic fast fashion advertisements found that the visual representation of girls in fast fashion advertising resurrects gender stereotypes which do not reflect the values of state feminism for gender equality.

Fashion retailing is based on promoting wants rather than needs, leading to overconsumption. Fast fashion encourages quick turnover of fashion items through promotions and low prices, exacerbating issues such as adverse working conditions and environmental waste (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Repairing or reusing items has been overshadowed by the trend of buying new items, and garment-to-garment recycling is still rare despite the emergence of enabling technologies. While consumers are increasingly aware of some ethical issues related to fashion consumption, there remains an attitude-behavior gap, necessitating further educational efforts (Pérez et al., 2022; Ronda, 2023). All this contributes to unsustainable consumption patterns.

Consumers also have ethical responsibilities which extend to many practices and are both cultural and contextual (Carrington et al., 2021), but fashion is a complex product with multiple competing attributes and trade-offs must inevitably be made. There is a tension between consumer self-enhancement (desire to look stylish) and sustainability values (desire to reduce harm to society and the environment) (Bandyopadhyay & Ray, 2020). Consumption is not limited to purchase but also includes use and disposal behavior. Ethics in consumption implies a critical engagement regarding the purchase and usage of clothes, meaning that consumers think about their decisions and not only satisfy immediate desires (Clarke & Holt, 2016). Garcia-Ruiz and Rodriguez-Lluesma (2014) argued for an alternative perspective to the two competing paradigms of deontology and consequentialism that dominate consumer ethics research. While acknowledging that empirical research has shown individuals typically use both principles (duty) and consequences as evaluation criteria, these paradigms neglect the role of the individual's character or identity in the moral decision-making, which is

particularly relevant in consumption contexts, so they proposed virtue ethics as a more apt conceptual framework that incorporates questions of "what life do I want to lead and what kind of person do I want to be?."

While fast fashion sees no sign of abatement, the emergence of movements such as minimalism represent a sustainable alternative to ever-increasing consumption but also a conundrum for how brands might engage with or sell to such people (Pangarkar et al., 2021) or even engage with the degrowth agenda, raising the question of whether there is an economic advantage to producing or marketing unethically. Olson (2022) examined the potential link between sustainable marketing mixes and the creation of conditions that may paradoxically contribute to unsustainable consumption levels, concluding that moral self-licensing and rebound effects lead to higher predicted sales even among the most environmentally conscious consumers. Bandyopadhyay and Ray (2020) explored how fashion brands identify and work on a positioning strategy that balances the tension between fashion and sustainability-related aspects of their products. Their findings identified three aspects that should be highlighted in the positioning of a sustainable fashion brand: (i) authenticity of the products and business processes, (ii) local and/or traditional aspects of the product including its design, and (iii) an appealing backstory with market relevance.

Several questions about marketing ethics arise as newer forms of greenwashing have emerged (Sterbenk et al., 2022) and fashion brands engage in social media-based virtue-signaling around topical causes such as diversity, equality, and inclusivity but without the required internal transformation. As more fashion brands engage with sustainability storytelling, greenwash accusations have been exposed, such as ill-defined sustainability criteria and unsubstantiated green claims (Changing Markets Foundation, 2022) and techwashing as noted above, where companies misrepresent or exaggerate their technological advancements to appear more innovative or sustainable than they truly are (Forbes, 2019). Finally, sustainability strategies have been criticized for embedding Western ideology, including modernity and capitalism, as the single and dominant story of progress and change, which results in the perpetuation of colonialist power relationships (Fletcher & Fitzpatrick, 2024).

Introduction to the Special Issue

The nine papers of this Special Issue comprise diverse topics, ethical lenses, and methods across varied global contexts, as shown in the table. The authors have used the ethical lenses to bring novel perspectives to the ethical issues under scrutiny and extend theoretical understanding of how employees, business owners, and consumers navigate challenges to ethical decision-making in a variety of contexts.

The ethical theories comprise the normative Western theories of deontology and virtue ethics, and Confucian virtue ethics. Deontology focuses on the act itself and is rooted in moral obligation or duty rather than considering consequences, whether good or bad. Virtue ethics emphasizes the role of character and virtue in moral philosophy rather than either doing one's duty or acting for the greater good. Confucian virtue ethics refers to a set of ethical principles, or virtues, considered to be important for leading a good life. Some papers have combined ethical theories and other theoretical lenses for an integrated and holistic perspective. Most papers focus on consumption (Pu et al., Tran and Bartsch, Wei and Shen, Auxtova et al., Zeugner-Roth et al., Celik and Ekici) with only one paper focusing on production (Tandon et al.) and one on marketing (Werner et al.). Methodological approaches comprise qualitative, survey, and experimental methods (Table 1).

In our first paper, Tandon et al. conduct a longitudinal qualitative study of ethical sourcing and decision-making in the fashion industry, with a focus on individual employees working in the supply chain. They investigate employees' views towards ethical sourcing and the contextual ethical considerations that affect their moral agency to enact ethical sourcing decisions. Qualitative data were collected from a sample of 63 UK-based employees working in various functions and levels of the fashion supply chain through a series of open-ended essays gathered in three waves over nine months to yield rich insights. Data were analyzed using grounded theory. Findings revealed a contemporary outlook on boundaries of ethical sourcing that go beyond compliance, the external considerations that tempered employees' ethical decision-making, and three levels of action for ethical considerations: supplier, organization, and individual. The paper concludes with a comprehensive conceptual framework named the Synergistic Multi-Actor (SMA) Framework for Ethical Sourcing.

In our second paper, Pu et al. analyze effective awe-inspiring visual content strategy for social media engagement with ethical fashion brands based on both utilitarian (Mill) and deontological (Kant) perspectives. They examine 5,362 Instagram posts of five ethical fashion brands and show that the presence of awe-inspiring visual elements increases consumer engagement on social media for ethical fashion brands. Their research also identifies the moderating roles of the color green and the size of the visual elements in this context. Two follow-up experiments provide causal evidence for these relationships. Experimental evidence for the role of deontological beliefs as a mediator of the relationship between feelings of awe and social media engagement with ethical fashion brands is also provided. Overall, the findings of this article offer a more nuanced understanding of how ethical fashion brands can develop effective visual advertising campaigns on social media and the underlying process

Table 1 Summary of Special Issue papers

No	Authors	Context	Geographical context	Ethical lens	Method
1	Tandon et al	Ethical sourcing by fashion industry employees	UK	Moral agency	Qualitative essays
2	Pu et al	Social media engagement with ethical fashion brands	Multinational	Deontology	Netnography and experimental studies
3	Tran and Bartsch	Consumer responses to moral transgressions in the fashion industry	Germany and Vietnam	Moral rationalization	Survey and experimental studies
4	Wei and Shen	Ethical fashion consumption	China	Confucian virtue ethics and theory of regulatory focus	Experimental studies
5	Hillier et al	Upcycling practices	UK	Ethical agency	Qualitative interviews
6	Werner et al	Small fashion entrepreneurs' business decisions	UK	Virtue ethics and theory of responsibility	Qualitative interviews
7	Auxtova et al	Second-hand fashion shopping in charity stores	UK	Virtue ethics	Qualitative interviews and observation
8	Zeugner-Roth et al	Consumer perceptions of fashion brands' moral behavior	UK and USA	n/a	Scale development
9	Celik and Ekici	Cognitive dissonance of sustainable fashion consumers	Turkey	Ethical subjectivity and moral transgression	Qualitative interviews

driving the effect, which is consistent with deontological ethics.

In our third paper, Tran and Bartsch investigate consumers' responses to moral transgressions in the fashion industry, taking a comparative approach between Western developed and southeast Asian emerging markets. Using an institutional perspective, they employ multimethod analyses, including cross-national secondary data from 12 countries and experimental data from 940 German and Vietnamese consumers. In a non-transgression context, they show that Western developed-market consumers embrace higher ethical standards (Study 1A), tend to seek collective action against prevalent immoral behaviors in society (Study 1B), and are more critical in evaluating fashion brand ethicality than Southeast Asian emerging-market consumers (Study 2). However, in a transgression context, the moderated mediation analyses reveal that consumers largely do not differ in their direct devaluation of fashion brand ethicality and subsequent price considerations (Study 3) across six transgression scenarios (i.e., worker abuse, child labor, racist advertising, weight discrimination, climate change, and environmental pollution). Moral rationalization processes appear to be more frequent and consequential in the Southeast Asian emerging market, while they either do not occur or are significantly weaker in the Western developed market.

In our fourth paper, Wei and Shen contribute a deeper understanding of ethical fashion consumption in a non-Western cultural context. Building on the theory of regulatory focus and Confucian virtues, they examine the effects between Confucian virtues and cultural values of face consciousness (saving face) using a three-study experimental design. While ethical fashion consumption is delineated by the Confucian virtues of rén, yì, and lǐ, the two face regulatory foci of gaining mianzi and avoiding losing Lian have a dual moderating effect on individuals' manifestation of these virtues. Individuals who seek to gain mianzi desire a consistent social self-image will proactively follow Confucian virtues to adopt ethical fashion. In contrast, individuals who primarily seek to avoid losing lian are less interested in ethical fashion. When the unethical consumption of fashion goods is a group norm, the mianzi-oriented group members behave less ethically and prefer a non-ethical fashion option, but the members who intend to avoid losing lian would be more likely to support ethical fashion.

In our fifth paper, Hillier et al. contribute towards a radical processual rethinking of the type of ethical agency that supports sustainable production and consumption of fashion. In their empirical study of upcycling practices (i.e., the transformation of unwanted clothing or waste materials into items of value), as a form of sustainable organizing, they interrogate the agency involved and acknowledge the complex forms of valuation that take place in and through the making process. Qualitative interview data gathered from 13 designer-makers in the UK are analyzed through the lens of John Dewey's pragmatist perspectives on valuation and brought into conversation with literature on 'making,' more specifically through the anthropological work of Tim Ingold. The authors contend that current conceptualizations of sustainable organizing are inadequate because they undermine the relational orientation that sustainable organizing entails, and instead argue for a processual, relational approach to valuation, which allows for the accommodation of a plurality

of ways of thinking about what sustainable organizing may mean.

In our sixth paper, Werner et al. apply virtue ethics to examine the sustainability practices of small fashion entrepreneurs in the UK who are challenging the mainstream fashion industry's focus on novelty and growth. The authors use a novel framework that integrates MacIntyre's virtue ethics and Jonas's responsibility imperative. Following analysis of qualitative data from 80 in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs, the authors identify key virtues such as passionate commitment, authenticity, humility, sharing and empowering, and temperance, which guide the entrepreneurs' sustainable practices and business decisions. The paper provides a deeper understanding of how these entrepreneurs balance sustainability with business demands, offering a valuable contribution to the discourse on sustainable fashion and post-growth entrepreneurship.

In our seventh paper, Auxtova et al. focus on circularity in fashion consumption (that is, the reuse of existing clothing) and use a virtue ethics lens to examine consumer experiences of shopping for second-hand clothing in charity stores. They conduct ethnographic interviews with 23 charity shop staff and 126 shoppers in Scotland and use grounded theory to elicit how consumers experience second-hand clothing consumption as constitutive of sources of (in)action that encourage or inhibit the virtuous activity of shopping second hand. They find that pleasure and/or shame or guilt (pain) enable virtuous moral decision-making towards reuse and sustainability. They furthermore argue that seduction and conversion, hand in hand with pleasure, act as levers supporting such moral decision-making, mitigating aversions and wayward desires that obstruct good moral intentions to shop second hand.

In our eighth paper, Zeugner-Roth et al. introduce the construct of authentic brand ethicality, defined as the degree to which consumers perceive a brand's moral behavior as genuine, real, or true. After thoroughly defining authentic brand ethicality and distinguishing it from existing concepts of brand ethicality and brand authenticity, the authors address recent calls for rigorous and comprehensive measurement practices. They present a multi-step scale development process, culminating in a 12-item full scale and 7-item parsimonious scale for measuring authentic brand ethicality. This research will assist both theorists and practitioners in understanding and uncovering the significant construct of authentic brand ethicality.

In our ninth paper, Celik and Ekici investigate how sustainable fashion consumers manage cognitive dissonance when transgressing their code of conduct in the sustainable fashion consumption scape. The authors integrate a range of interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives to better understand this phenomenon, including ethical subjectivity, transgressive behaviors, and cognitive dissonance theory.

Following thematic analysis of 20 existential-phenomenological interviews with sustainable fashion about their inconsistent behaviors in the context of sustainable fashion consumption, the authors identify the behavioral-level strategy of 'alternating moral practices.' This is a new cognitive dissonance reducing strategy in sustainable fashion consumption, which differs significantly from previously known cognitive dissonance reduction strategies and plays an important role for the future of sustainable fashion consumption.

Conclusion and Future Research Directions

The fashion industry's duality, encompassing both bright and dark sides, highlights the complex ethical landscape that needs thorough academic investigation and collective stakeholder action. Understanding the challenges in fashion production, marketing, and consumption through ethical theoretical lenses can offer critical insights into the industry's most pressing ethical dilemmas. By grounding academic research in these ethical perspectives, business ethics scholars can guide the fashion industry toward more responsible production processes that prioritize sustainable, fair, and accountable practices. To build a comprehensive understanding of ethical production practices in fashion, exploring the issues discussed earlier through various ethical theoretical lenses provides nuanced perspectives that address specific challenges faced by the industry. It is imperative to apply ethical frameworks not only to evaluate business responsibilities (Islam & Greenwood, 2021) but also to guide research into how different stakeholders attribute responsibility to focal firms for unethical practices based on contextual factors, ultimately shaping firm behavior (Hatmann & Moeller, 2014). While the papers in this Special Issue provide valuable novel insights and advance our knowledge and understanding of the fashion ethics, opportunities for further research remain. These include harnessing other ethical theories beyond the ones featured in this Special Issue, going beyond traditional normative theories, and integrating normative (what is right/wrong) and descriptive ethics (what motivates moral behavior). As noted by Poszler et al. (2023) in their systematic review of ethical theories applied to the context of self-driving cars, ethical theories have both advantages and disadvantages, therefore hybrid combinations of theories could counteract trade-offs.

Consequentialism, with its focus on foreseeable consequences and maximizing the greater good, is a useful lens to critically examine ethical issues that have negative consequences on stakeholders. In production, future research could address the negative purchasing practices by focal retailers which lead to ethical non-compliance and culminate in worker exploitation. Advances in digital technologies across production and marketing have transformed the

fashion industry and there is a need for future research to examine the new ethical quandaries that emerge as a result of these advances and how they should be managed. In management, consequentialism could motivate future research into the ethical correctness of managerial decision-making that has sustainability-related consequences, for example, the use of AI technologies that aim to match production to demand in real time to encourage impulse purchasing of fast fashion. In marketing, it could address ecommerce practices that encourage excessive consumption resulting in high returns rates, the societal consequences of controversial advertising campaigns that glamorize negative portrayals of marginalized groups, and the unintended consequences of sustainability messaging that encourage consumption and increase sales.

Deontological ethics, with its focus on moral obligations irrespective of consequences, provides a solid foundation for examining the corporate responsibility to uphold ethical standards in fashion production and marketing, even in profit-driven or challenging institutional contexts. A deontological framework allows future research to delve into the inherent moral obligations of fashion companies to create safe and respectful working environments, especially in regions where labor protections are minimal or absent. This future research agenda can critically investigate questions such as: What is the scope of companies' obligations to enforce anti-harassment standards in supply chains, especially in regions with weak regulatory oversight, where the risk of worker exploitation is high? Furthermore, deontological ethics provides a moral foundation for questioning whether fashion brands have an obligation to truthfully represent their sustainability initiatives and digital transformation initiatives, particularly in countering greenwashing, regardless of potential marketing benefits. An essential research question emerges: To what extent does technology contribute to genuine improvements in supply chain transparency and worker protections in fashion, and how are brands using techwashing to inflate its ethical impact in supply chain management and production?

Virtue ethics underscores the importance of cultivating moral values, such as fairness and respect, which are central to effective EDI initiatives. EDI practices in the fashion industry can address historical inequalities by promoting supplier diversity and amplifying the voices of marginalized workers, such as lower-tier laborers and minority-owned suppliers. From this perspective, research could examine: How can fashion companies foster a virtuous organizational culture that champions diversity, equity, and inclusion, promoting fair treatment for all supply chain participants? Virtue ethics provides a framework for exploring how companies can cultivate an organizational culture that inherently discourages harassment by upholding values such as respect, dignity, and fairness.

A pertinent research question might be: How can fashion companies develop a workplace culture rooted in these virtues to effectively deter incidents of sexual harassment? Virtue ethics also explain how individuals/organizations/institutional actors become 'good citizens' despite political, economic and market forces to the contrary, which has relevance for marketing and consumption research. From this perspective, research could examine the potential for virtue ethics to temper unsustainable consumption and questionable decisions in marketing communications, such as launching controversial advertising campaigns that could have damaging societal effects.

Contractualism emphasizes the need for fair agreements, particularly in complex supply chains where power imbalances allow for potential exploitation. In regions with minimal legal oversight, ethical frameworks such as contractualism can guide the development of policies that hold brands accountable for fair and ethical interactions with suppliers. A relevant research question might be: How can anti-corruption measures in fashion supply chains align with contractualist ethics, ensuring that agreements between buyers and suppliers promote fairness and accountability? In cases where suppliers are subjected to unfair contract terms or withheld payments, contractualism provides an ethical foundation for evaluating the conditions under which suppliers might sever ties with powerful buyers. Contractualism stresses the importance of mutual advantage and respect in agreements, prompting the question: Under what conditions do suppliers in the Global South initiate relationship terminations due to unethical practices by powerful buyers?

Finally, it is important to recognize that the authors of the finally accepted papers are largely affiliated with universities from developed economies, which are arguably better placed to support their academics to succeed in the rigorous peer review process of prestigious academic journals such as the Journal of Business Ethics. Furthermore, the ethical lenses applied in all but one paper are Western. Calls for decolonization in the sustainability agenda and academic thought are pertinent here and there is a need for future research to incorporate ideas from non-Western perspectives and emerging economies to avoid perpetuating epistemic injustice. Future research should consider how non-Western traditions, religions, and cultural practices such as Buddhism, African Ubuntu traditions, and Japanese Shintoism inform moral decisions and ethical approaches in fashion production, marketing, and consumption, and how non-Western conceptualizations of ethics can be applied to inform responses to ethical issues in a global multicultural industry.

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