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Adaptive Team Strategies: Sustainability Practices in the Online Fashion Industry.

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Master's Degree in International Studies

Supervisor:

PhD. Ana Margarida Passos, Full Professor,
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Department of History

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Abstract

There has been a growth in e-commerce in recent times, the immensity of online stores available on the internet is truly infinite, so when it comes to the fashion industry, sustainability is becoming the topic of conversation. With the environmental problems that this industry entails, the teams of fashion brands become extremely relevant for evaluating and executing a plan that allows for innovation and the implementation of sustainable practices.

In this context, this dissertation presents an investigation into which sustainable practices are adopted by brands in order to meet environmental challenges and, at the same time, the objectives set by them. To what extent is the adaptability of brand teams crucial to the implementation of sustainable practices? Are brands aware of the major problems facing the fashion industry and the sustainable challenges that online stores entail? What practices can be adopted and what gaps currently exist in the adaptability of teams in their work to make their brands environmentally and socially friendly?

In this way, a study based on secondary sources was carried out which allows for a more in-depth analysis of the work of teams in response to sustainable challenges in e-commerce. This dissertation therefore presents a conclusion that allows us to understand whether or not teams and brands are working to meet the sustainable challenges of the online fashion world.

Keywords: E-Commerce – Fashion Industry – Sustainability – Team Adaptability

Resumo

Tem-se vindo a notar um crescimento do e-commerce nos últimos tempos, a imensidade de lojas online que a internet disponibiliza é deveras infinita, e por isso, quando se fala da indústria da moda, a sustentabilidade começa a ser o tema de conversa. Com os problemas ambientais que esta indústria acarreta, as equipas das marcas de moda tornam-se extremamente relevantes para a avaliação e execução de um plano que permita a inovação e a implementação de práticas sustentáveis.

Neste contexto, esta dissertação apresenta uma investigação sobre que práticas sustentáveis são adotadas pelas marcas de modo a atender aos desafios ambientais e, ao mesmo tempo, aos objetivos traçados pelas mesmas. Deste modo, em que medida é que a adaptabilidade das equipas das marcas é crucial para a implementação de práticas sustentáveis? Estão as marcas conscientes dos grandes problemas da indústria da moda e dos desafios sustentáveis que as lojas online acarretam? Que práticas é que podem ser adotadas e que lacunas existem atualmente na adaptabilidade das equipas no seu trabalho para tornar as suas marcas ambientalmente e socialmente amigáveis?

Deste modo, elaborou-se um estudo baseado em fontes secundárias que permite uma análise mais aprofundada sobre o trabalho das equipas em resposta aos desafios sustentáveis no e-commerce. Esta dissertação apresenta, por isso, uma conclusão que permite perceber se as equipas e as marcas estão ou não aplicadas em responder aos desafios sustentáveis do mundo da moda online.

Palavras-Chave: Adaptabilidade das Equipas – E-Commerce – Indústria da Moda – Sustentabilidade

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Glossary of Acronyms

CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

E-commerce – Electronic Commerce

EFT – Electronic Fund Transfer

TAF – Textile, Apparel and Fashion

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

UNFCCC - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

CENIT – Textile Intelligence Center

CE – Circular Economy

3Rs – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

CO₂ – Carbon Dioxide

GVT – Global Virtual Teams

AI – Artificial Intelligence

RL – Reverse Logistics

PUDO – Pick Up & Drop Off

AAM - Alliance for Audited Media

Chapter 1. Introduction

Sustainability is one of the most important topics on the international agenda. The issue is debated on national and international stages. The State, companies, organizations, public and private entities, whatever it may be, the issue of sustainability is reflected everywhere, even in everyone's daily lives. The fashion industry is one of the most challenging industries in terms of sustainability, being one of the most polluting and environmentally damaging. Therefore, more and more strategic teams are being set up in this industry to address the issue of sustainability in the fashion world, taking into account the main challenges and objectives of companies and organizations. The adaptation of teams to these challenges and problems is very important in this context, and it is important to understand how they adapt to this issue. Therefore, contextualizing what is meant by sustainability and unveiling its importance becomes essential, as well as how it is associated with the fashion industry.

1.1. Sustainability and the World of Fashion

According to the 1987 Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, created by the United Nations, sustainable development is defined as *“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”* (European Union, s.d.). When we talk about the needs of the present and the future, we are talking about issues such as the environment, economic stability, social justice and cultural preservation (Rzeczycki, 2023). All these issues are encompassed in the problem of sustainability.

One of the biggest problems we are facing is the depletion of resources and their careless use. It should be noted that resources are limited, with the result that it is becoming increasingly difficult for companies to meet the demands of a competitive market, making it one of their objectives to reduce the costs of these resources and their environmental impact (Öndoğan, Öndoğan, & Topuzoğlu, 2022). This results in social responsibility being implemented in companies and organizations, which includes environmental, ethical, philanthropic and economic concerns. For this reason, these entities are increasingly dedicated to creating business models that address issues such as sustainability and social change, taking into account internal issues, but also those external to the company, such as the society in which it operates and the environment (Rzeczycki, 2023). This corporate social responsibility (CSR) is necessary to address the

problems that are exacerbating environmental pollution and resource depletion. This includes the problem of changing technology, population growth and industrialization (Öndoğan, Öndoğan, & Topuzoğlu, 2022).

The fashion industry is therefore one of the industries that has the greatest impact on the environment and has several shortcomings in terms of improving the careful use of resources, bearing in mind that progress towards solving environmental problems has been rather slow. It is the second most polluting industry in the world, and this is largely due to the increase in demand for and use of clothing (Bonostro, Javier, Pestaño, & Maningas, 2023). It should also be noted that online fashion has seen significant growth in sales since 2020 and that although online commerce has sustainable benefits, it also faces some challenges such as delivery, returns and packaging (Kawa & Pierański, 2021). From the earliest stages of the supply chain, i.e. from manufacturing to disposal, the fashion industry is essentially polluting at the highest level, causing, as Stefano Abbate, Piera Centobelli, Roberto Cerchione, Simon Peter Nadeem and Emanuela Riccio point out in the article “*Sustainability trends and gaps in the textile, apparel and fashion industries*”, a large volume of waste and high greenhouse gas emissions (Abbate, Centobelli, Cerchione, Nadeem, & Riccio, 2024). As if that weren’t enough, the way in which products are produced, marketed and disposed of is not the only problem facing the fashion industry (Bonostro, Javier, Pestaño, & Maningas, 2023). Labor exploitation and low wages are also extremely important problems.

Innovative businesses should be created by fashion companies, bearing in mind that they positively help in the search for sustainable and socially beneficial solutions (Rzeczycki, 2023). It is therefore essential for teams to adapt in order to overcome the obstacles they face and to create strategies that bring them closer to their goals.

1.2. Teams Adaptability and the Possibility in Improving Sustainable Fashion

Adapting teams to the changes that arise is essential because it makes them stronger and more capable of facing various challenges. This adaptation allows teams to optimize their performance, create innovative solutions and businesses, as well as adopt the creation of new routines (Burke, Stagl, Salas, Pierce, & Kendall, 2006). This is extremely important in improving sustainable practices in the online fashion industry. It is therefore necessary to take into account theoretical models that constitute the team adaptation process and enable teams to adjust and organize themselves in order to optimize their level of performance (Georganta, Kugler, Reif, & Brodbeck, 2021). Increasingly, fashion

companies are relying on teams that have a good ability to adapt because the industry is constantly changing. Teams need to change in order to adapt, and coordination and shared mental models are essential for positive change (Georganta, Kugler, Reif, & Brodbeck, 2021). Teams adapt by assessing situations and adjusting their operations accordingly (Randall, Resick, & DeChurch, 2011). The aim is to understand how they adapt to the challenges of the fashion industry and how they work to develop sustainable practices that benefit the brand on a sustainable level.

1.3. Research Question

E-commerce – electronic commerce – is based on a platform or website that allows the online purchase of goods and services via credit card, debit card or Electronic fund transfer (EFT) (Jain, Malviya, & Arya, 2021).

“(...) the global corporate world pushes rapidly into ecommerce (Business-to-Business). As the Internet enables consumers to enter the global economy, they can compare prices across areas, find out how they vary by request, and become aware of substitution. The buyers obtain a distinct advantage. Thanks to market openness, consumers can conveniently compare e-commerce offerings from different websites” (Jain, Malviya, & Arya, 2021, pp. 665-666).

The immensity of online stores on the internet and the ease of access to these stores means that consumers are increasingly opting for this method of shopping instead of using physical stores. However, physical stores are still widely used and will soon cease to be but given the level of pollution caused by the fashion industry, the choice of online shopping seems more sustainable in some respects. There's no need to leave the house and use transport, which has a huge negative impact on the environment. Instead, the purchase can be delivered to the consumer's home without them having to go anywhere and take the car, for example. E-commerce therefore seems to be the best option from an environmental point of view, but that doesn't mean that there isn't a need for better sustainable methods and practices that allow for a more sustainable supply chain, and for more conscious and responsible selling and buying. For this reason, the work of online fashion teams is essential, especially in adapting to the sustainable challenges that e-commerce brings and in innovating sustainable practices to overcome these challenges. This study therefore seeks to answer the following research question:

- *To what extent have fashion brand teams adapted to adopting sustainable practices in order to develop more conscious and responsible e-commerce stores?*

1.4. Structure of the Dissertation

In order to consolidate the various phases of this research process, we opted to use exploratory, then selective and finally reflective reading. All the data collected is scientifically accredited, as it was gathered from serial articles, periodicals and rigorously selected websites. This thesis consists of 7 chapters, the first of which is the introduction. After the introduction, the second chapter presents a theoretical framework on the need for a more sustainable fashion industry in the digital age, trying to understand the impact that the industry has on the environment and the main challenges and gaps that the industry and fashion brands present for e-commerce. The third chapter goes through the context of team adaptability, its main constructs and the factors that influence team adaptability and talks about the importance of communication and team motivation. This is important for understanding the next chapters. The fourth chapter, with the help of the literature adopted for this study, therefore corresponds to the linking of the two previous chapters, i.e. it involves understanding the importance of team adaptability for the development of more sustainable online fashion, as well as addressing different sustainable practices, such as the circular economy, sustainable packaging, green consumerism, reverse logistics and technological innovation. This chapter also focuses on the challenges and opportunities that still exist today. In the fifth chapter, a study was carried out based on a content analysis of secondary sources, more specifically, a sample of three interviews based on different brands and designers with online stores. The sixth chapter is the data analysis of the interviews, in order to understand which sustainable practices they adopt and whether there is transparency between what was presented in the interviews compared to what is presented on the website of the respective stores. Finally, the seventh and last chapter is the conclusion, where the starting question is answered through the study carried out.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework: The Need of a More Sustainable Fashion Industry on the Digital Era

The need for a more sustainable fashion industry is becoming increasingly important, as it is an industry that is second only to the oil industry as the world's most polluting industry (Rzeczycki, 2023). Although online commerce has benefited sustainability in this industry in many ways, for example because people no longer have to go to the stores and possibly use their cars, which would cause traffic, digital fashion has brought benefits in terms of sustainable development because it allows people to buy online without having to travel and without consuming energy or natural resources. However, even online commerce needs to invest in promoting a more sustainable digital world, including digital fashion. There's a need to improving the Last Mile¹, returns, packaging and taking care with green logistics.

2.1. The Impact that the Fashion Industry has on the Environment

Many studies refer to the fashion industry as the industry that consumes the most resources and is constantly changing. This change comes about because of trends. When we talk about fashion, we talk about trends. These are what often lead to the most problems because they can bring with them many changes. We have the example of fast fashion, which has spread rapidly in the fashion industry and has brought several problems on a sustainable level (Hur & Cassidy, 2019). This is due to the overconsumption and waste of clothes because there is so much more on offer. For example, when a high fashion brand launches a trend and a new collection, fast fashion brands will quickly start mass-producing similar pieces or even replicas of that collection. This will generate extreme mass production.

What has to be taken into account in order to deal with the problem of the impact that the fashion industry has on the environment is to understand what is causing that impact in the first place. What is known is that current consumption patterns are considered excessive and unsustainable, and that tons and tons of clothing waste ends up in landfills (Hur & Cassidy, 2019). In recent decades, there has been an increase in the production

¹ A term used to refer to the final stage of a delivery process, i.e. the last part of a product's journey until it reaches the customer.

and consumption of clothing, and this increase is not only due to fast fashion, but also to accelerated population growth and higher standards of living. However, clothes are designed and manufactured in line with trends and using cheap, fast labor, which generates more and more pollution and an excessive volume of clothing waste. It is worth bearing in mind that this industry is one of the most water-intensive in the world, ranking second, and that the textile, apparel and fashion (TAF) industries are responsible for 8% to 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions, which causes problems for global warming (Abbate, Centobelli, Cerchione, Nadeem, & Riccio, 2024).

“Fashion often conflicts in concept with the philosophy of sustainable development. The concept of sustainable fashion remains ambiguous and it is widely debated whether the philosophy of sustainability can be applied to the fashion industry, as these two concepts are inherently paradoxical in nature” (Hur & Cassidy, 2019, p. 209).

There are several challenges to sustainability in the fashion industry, from overconsumption, cheap labor, resource depletion, lack of clear communication and consumer confidence (Hur & Cassidy, 2019), textile waste, the release of transport gases, materials used for packaging, design methods, among others. The fashion sector is one of the most polluting sectors and one that causes the most damage to the environment. In 2015, according to various studies, 400 billion m² of fabric, representing 15% of fabrics produced in the fashion industry, gave rise to 60 billion m² of waste (Öndoğan, Öndoğan, & Topuzoğlu, 2022). The lack of recycling is one of the main reasons why the industry is one of the most polluting in the world, and according to a 2022 study, 75% of the products generated by the industry will end up in landfills (Bonostro, Javier, Pestaño, & Maningas, 2023). It is clear that there are many problems that need to be solved and that the mentality of consumers, producers and companies must change and adapt in order to respect the environment. Motivation for sustainable consumption is extremely important and significant social and cultural support is needed to facilitate marketing and merchandising options that allow sustainable consumption to develop (Hur & Cassidy, 2019).

An interesting study by Eunsuk Hur and Tom Cassidy on the challenges of applying sustainability to fashion design practices shows that fashion designers face both internal and external challenges, with the internal challenges occurring at a personal and organizational level and the external challenges at a social and cultural level (Hur &

Cassidy, 2019). Eunsuk Hur and Tom Cassidy arrive at a result that shows that the lack of consensus on the meaning of sustainability in fashion design, as well as the perception of compromises, the difficulty of creating sustainable strategies and the lack of knowledge of sustainable design tools that exist, are four of the biggest challenges facing the fashion industry internally. On the external level, there is a complexity regarding sustainable issues that are beyond organizational control, as well as a problem with consumers' purchasing decisions regarding sustainable fashion products (Hur & Cassidy, 2019) in which consumers often don't opt for these products because they are more expensive, or because of a lack of information, or because there is a very high supply of products due to fast fashion with more attractive prices, or even because of the constant change in what is trending. Still on an external level, the perspective that there are not enough incentives or benefits to adopt sustainable design practices (Hur & Cassidy, 2019). On a more positive level and in order to combat the gaps present in the fashion world at a sustainable level, there are authors who advocate models that represent a mutual understanding and reciprocity that allow for rigorous social and environmental standards to be established and for brands to be transparent in order to attract responsible consumers with their purchasing decisions (Lodovico & Manzi, 2023).

In order to make companies and organizations more responsible and aware, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were developed, created by the United Nations in 2015 and consisting of 17 global goals. These goals encourage economic development, the promotion of social inclusion and also the implementation of environmental practices. This is an incentive for fashion companies to develop more responsible sustainable practices and improve company performance (Abbate, Centobelli, Cerchione, Nadeem, & Riccio, 2024).

The creation of the United Nations SDGs has led major companies and brands to create partnerships and incentives to help promote more responsible practices. Condé Nast is a media company that is one of the most prestigious in the world and has a lot of influence in technological innovation (Condé Nast, 2024). The company works with various media outlets and was founded in 1909 by publisher Condé Montrose Nast, and is home to world-renowned brands such as Vogue and GQ (Condé Nast, 2024). The brand is based on work related to print, video, social and digital platforms (Condé Nast, 2024) and has created a Sustainable Fashion Glossary in partnership with the Centre for Sustainable Fashion, London College of Fashion and the University of Arts London, in which it invests in changing the world of fashion, becoming a tool that helps to understand current

fashion and that respects and values the environment and planet Earth (Nast, The Sustainable Fashion Glossary, 2024). A change that consists of sustainable education and the adoption of responsible practices in terms of design and style, and that allows environmental, social, cultural and economic debates to progress (Nast, 2024a). The company has also created a partnership with the UNFCCC's Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action with the aim of making fashion and textiles more sustainable through the reuse of clothing, innovation of materials and technologies, among others (Nast, 2024b). The Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action recognizes the Paris Agreement and the importance this agreement has for the issue of sustainability, and is in line with the objectives of the United Nations Framework on Climate Change, where one of the main objectives is to limit the increase in global average temperature to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels (United Nations Climate Change, 2021). This agenda therefore contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals.

One of the practices that has been adopted by the fashion industry is the use and purchase of second-hand clothes, thus constituting a more sustainable practice that avoids so much waste, betting on the long life of the product. Portugal Têxtil, under the auspices of CENIT - Centro de Inteligência Têxtil (a non-profit organization), founded in 2001, is an online portal for reference and dissemination of information on the textile and clothing industry. In one of its news items, Portugal Têxtil reported that sales of second-hand clothing have been on the rise, with a 31% increase from 2022 to 2023, and that it is estimated that in 2025 the second-hand clothing market will represent 10% of the global fashion market (Portugal Têxtil, 2024). By 2028 it is estimated that second-hand clothing sales will represent an annual growth rate of 11% and that the market will reach the 350 billion dollar mark (Portugal Têxtil, 2024).

In addition to brands based on print, video, social and digital platforms such as Vogue, Vanity Fair, GQ, etc., clothing brands with physical stores and online stores such as Nike, for example, have also implemented a sustainability campaign - "*Design with Consideration*" - which mainly aims to use more responsible materials in their design, and the brand has also developed a policy to combat climate change - "*Go to Zero*" - with the aim of achieving zero carbon and zero waste (Öndoğan, Öndoğan, & Topuzoğlu, 2022). The fashion industry is therefore trying to balance the pursuit of economic growth with a commitment to sustainable objectives, given that this debate generates extreme tension between the economic and the social (Bonostro, Javier, Pestaño, & Maningas, 2023).

The promotion of a Circular Economy (CE) model has become relevant in several fashion companies that choose to promote ecological and more responsible behavior. This model is about following a path that goes from production to recycling and repeats itself, in other words, it's like a vicious circle in which it starts with production, secondly with distribution, thirdly with consumption, fourthly with reuse/repair, and finally with recycling, repeating this process over and over again, taking advantage of materials and combating waste (Bonostro, Javier, Pestaño, & Maningas, 2023). The intention is to consider sustainable production and consumption in order to take care of limited natural resources, relying on the traditional 3Rs, i.e. Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. However, the circular economy also lacks obstacles in its implementation which are often associated with technical aspects, costs and consumer motivations (Bonostro, Javier, Pestaño, & Maningas, 2023).

However, companies must be transparent with consumers and present the real ecological practices they use, not conveying the idea that they are more sustainable than they really are. We are talking about greenwashing, as there are still many fashion companies that are not transparent with consumers and tend to hide practices that they do not consider to be sustainable, often publishing false reports conveying the idea that they are ecological. In this context, it is necessary to adapt companies to sustainable issues and to understand how digital fashion and e-commerce companies stand out in the fashion market and in a significantly polluting industry.

2.2. Sustainability and Digital Fashion

Online commerce has been gaining more and more prominence worldwide and is showing great growth in the digital world of fashion because several brands have started to use digital platforms to sell their products and with the intention of showing their consumers that they care about the environment. It has become easier to shop and more sustainable at the same time. It's also worth noting that social networks play a big role in digital fashion and the online sale of products. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and Pinterest are designed to meet the shopping needs of users and consumers, providing a platform that allows direct and easy purchasing of products from different brands. Social networks turn out to be an asset for e-commerce fashion brands which, if they use them correctly, can achieve a significant increase in the number of sales and at the same time develop their digital marketing and invest in often free and organic advertising. In this

way, digital fashion brands are able to invest in sustainability and a more responsible way of selling products and attracting consumers.

E-commerce is therefore related to sustainability and therefore has some positive effects, such as reducing CO₂ gas emissions due to the reduction in travel by consumers, as well as the incentive to acquire warehouses in strategic locations for more sustainable shipping of products (Haryanti & Subriadi, 2022). However, this also presents one of e-commerce's biggest challenges – logistics.

“According to the United Nations Environment Programme, which has published extensive research on both European and global impacts on the environment, the transport sector is responsible for 23-24 % of global CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel combustion and is expected to grow to one-third by 2050” (Kawa & Pierański, 2021, p. 185).

Online commerce generates thousands and thousands of sales due to easy access and the diversity of brands with internet accounts, and this means that the orders that are placed are distributed to the respective buyers. Therefore, logistics in terms of transporting goods, in terms of how packaging is made and plastic waste used, carbon emissions, the rate of returns, are all challenges that online commerce faces (Kawa & Pierański, 2021). It is therefore important to focus on strategies that optimize the logistical challenges of e-commerce while taking care of environmental issues (Kawa & Pierański, 2021). In addition, packaging waste is a negative impact due to the fact that plastic is still widely used by e-commerce brands, however, other brands opt for the use of other materials such as cardboard boxes, paper, envelopes, among others (Haryanti & Subriadi, 2022). Despite the loss of jobs at the traditional level of physical stores, e-commerce creates a huge number of jobs, both for entrepreneurs and for people working in various areas such as logistics, digital marketing, social networks, among others (Haryanti & Subriadi, 2022).

2.2.1. Consumer behavior in E-commerce

Consumers have begun to look at e-commerce as a means of shopping that is advantageous to them, due to the fact that it is more practical in terms of the total scope of the purchase, as well as the fact that they don't have to use transport or go through traffic (Rita & Ramos, 2022). It is also beneficial for them to protect themselves from the weather.

In this context, consumers are equally important because they are responsible for the way they consume. Consumers should therefore invest in more responsible and conscious consumption, opting for clothes made from more sustainable materials, not making separate purchases from the same website/brand so as not to run the risk of products being delivered at different times or on different days and requiring more than one delivery trip or even more than one goods transport van. Also, whenever a product is received it is important to keep the packaging in order to use it if it needs to be returned, and by reusing the same packaging from the delivery you don't make the mistake of wasting it. Consumers are increasingly willing to wait longer for their order to be delivered as long as the brand makes delivery logistics and packaging more sustainable. In this way, teams can develop strategies to reduce the weight of packaging and use more sustainable materials that encourage a reduction in CO₂ per package (Kawa & Pierański, 2021). Zalando is one of the companies that has managed to reduce greenhouse gases by optimizing its packaging and reducing its weight (Kawa & Pierański, 2021). Of course, retailers and brands need to target their teams so that they develop strategies that enable consumers to have more conscious and responsible attitudes. For example, when it is said that consumers should reuse the delivery packaging if they have to return the product, it is clear that brand and packaging designers should develop eco-friendly packaging that is easy to reuse, using environmentally friendly materials and a design that is practical to transport. Retailers are also increasingly opting for electronic invoices instead of printed ones, reducing the use of paper (Kawa & Pierański, 2021). The construction and use of warehouses that use renewable energy sources is an added value for the environment, as is the use of environmentally friendly and modern means of transport and the creation of strategic geographic charging stations (Kawa & Pierański, 2021). Companies are also starting to invest in employee training that is increasingly linked to the environment and sustainable practices, making their employees more aware and responsible (Kawa & Pierański, 2021).

There are several sustainable development objectives that arise from e-commerce and sustainable business models can be very advantageous in creating responsible measures and practices for this type of commerce (Rita & Ramos, 2022). By using fewer packages for parcels, by optimizing parcel shipping, by designing more sustainable packaging, in other words, by developing sustainable practices in the supply chain, fashion companies can benefit the environment as well as reducing their operating costs (Rita & Ramos,

2022). These models can take advantage of the development of artificial intelligence and its relevance in today's world, especially in the online world, for example to help predict market demand and reduce excess inventory, thus improving the problem of waste (Rita & Ramos, 2022). Consumers' use of e-commerce represents an incentive on their part to make the way they shop more sustainable, thus showing their concern for the environment. To attract the attention of consumers, the use of digital marketing and the incorporation of social media should be incorporated into E-Commerce (Rita & Ramos, 2022). Cybersecurity also needs special attention when it comes to e-commerce; protecting the brand and consumers is extremely important for safe online browsing and purchasing.

Chapter 3. Teams Adaptability

Companies and organizations are increasingly relying on and investing in effective management, which is reflected in the strategies and agreements created by teams, which are essential for companies to adapt to the changes and challenges that arise. Adaptability is therefore essential for companies and organizations to be successful. Teams must adapt quickly in order to keep up with the complexity of modern work, thus improving strategic performance (Rosen, et al., 2011). It is necessary for teams to make room for the exchange of information and to carry out a careful assessment of situations, organizing and adjusting their operations in order to adapt to the challenges of today's world. In this context, team adaptation brings together the innovation of new structures or the modification of existing structures (Randall, Resick, & DeChurch, 2011), but it also encompasses interaction processes that lead to effective results, and emergent states that make teams at a very high level of effectiveness (Rosen, et al., 2011), but also encompasses interaction processes that lead to effective outcomes, and emergent states that make teams more effective in more complex situations (Rosen, et al., 2011). Teams are then expected to adapt their strategies accordingly (Randall, Resick, & DeChurch, 2011).

In order to safeguard team performance, it is necessary to improve adaptation because, in addition to change, companies are also affected by the unpredictability of events in their environment (Abrantes A. C., Passos, Cunha, & Santos, 2018). For example, when the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, teams had to resort to improvisation because this event brought unexpected changes in real time (Abrantes, Passos, Cunha, & Silva, 2023). This improvement in adaptation also involves the adoption of learning behaviors based on a process of reflection, discussion of issues and sharing of ideas. It is through these learning behaviors that companies are able to better assess the environment and possible situational disturbances (Abrantes A. C., Passos, Cunha, & Santos, 2018). Through these behaviors, companies and their teams develop capacities in terms of innovation, adaptation and performance, making them able to deal with the situations they face (Marques-Quinteiro, Uitdewilligen, Costa, & Passos, 2022). This makes teams make better decisions.

In this context, the adaptability of teams is necessary for companies to adapt to situational problems that require change, and this adaptation can often be unpredictable, but it can also be preventative (Abrantes, Passos, Cunha, & Santos, 2018) when it comes to

situations in which teams already have the knowledge that might happen and so they adapt so that certain problems don't develop. In order for this adaptation to be effective, teams must reflect and share information, thus creating a possible space for the development of strategies and practices that allow them to better deal with the challenges that arise and obtain better results. It therefore consists of innovating new structures or modifying existing structures in line with the company's objectives (Burke, Stagl, Salas, Pierce, & Kendall, 2006).

3.1. Adaptability Concept: Four Core Constructs

This adaptation is carried out through four phases that allow teams to perform better by making them adaptable to business challenges. This means firstly, assessing the situation; secondly, formulating the plan; thirdly, implementing the plan; and finally, the team's learning (Georganta, Kugler, Reif, & Brodbeck, 2021).

3.1.1. Situation Assessment

The assessment of the situation is a cognitive process at an individual level (Burke, Stagl, Salas, Pierce, & Kendall, 2006) in which it is necessary to carry out an analysis of the environment in order to look for clues that are detrimental to the company's objectives. These clues should be looked for by taking into account previous experience, i.e. recognizing patterns that allow us to assess whether the issue itself has already affected or could negatively affect the performance of the team and the company (Georganta, Kugler, Reif, & Brodbeck, 2021). Basically, information is gathered, communicated and interpreted in a way that is relevant to the current situation, and a careful assessment and strategic analysis of the environment is carried out (Burke, Stagl, Salas, Pierce, & Kendall, 2006) (Georganta, Kugler, Reif, & Brodbeck, 2021). It is therefore essential to understand the implications of the problems encountered in order to invest in developing initial solutions (Georganta, Kugler, Reif, & Brodbeck, 2021). The assessment of the situation is a fundamental and recurring process about the individual actions of the team members, which allow the team to be successful, in which the clues must be classified based on existing knowledge and translated so that they can be given meaning and a response can be obtained (Rosen, et al., 2011).

3.1.2. Plan Formulation

As for formulating the plan, this involves carrying out a course of action consisting of planning and defining objectives (Burke, Stagl, Salas, Pierce, & Kendall, 2006) that allow the current state to be transformed into the desired state, through planning and problem-solving tasks (Rosen, et al., 2011). In this case, it is essential to distribute the roles and responsibilities of each team member, taking into account previous behaviors and mistakes. In this way, reflexivity is important for the formulation of the plan and for it to be effective (Georganta, Kugler, Reif, & Brodbeck, 2021). The discussion and prioritization of tasks, as well as the sharing of information (Burke, Stagl, Salas, Pierce, & Kendall, 2006) are important for the formulation of the plan, both in static and dynamic environments (Rosen, et al., 2011).

3.1.3. Execution of the Plan

The execution of the plan is about putting into practice what was previously established in the formulation of the plan, i.e. in this phase the plan is executed (Georganta, Kugler, Reif, & Brodbeck, 2021). The plan is executed in a “*dynamically, simultaneously, and recursively*” way (Burke, Stagl, Salas, Pierce, & Kendall, 2006, p. 1195), and is a process that involves supportive and coordinating behaviors at the individual and team level (Burke, Stagl, Salas, Pierce, & Kendall, 2006). It is a coordination of actions between team members who engage in “*affective, behavioral and cognitive processes*” (Rosen, et al., 2011, p. 111), including “*mutual monitoring, back-up behavior, systems monitoring, reactive strategy planning, reactive conflict management, and affect management*” (Rosen, et al., 2011, p. 111). Good team performance is characterized by successful coordination, which translates into good implementation of the plan (Georganta, Kugler, Reif, & Brodbeck, 2021).

3.1.4. Team Learning

Team learning, the final phase of the adaptive cycle (Burke, Stagl, Salas, Pierce, & Kendall, 2006), consists of a process of reflection on past actions (Georganta, Kugler, Reif, & Brodbeck, 2021), with the aim being to develop knowledge by combining and sharing knowledge in order to learn from experience and avoid previous mistakes (Rosen, et al., 2011). This learning is summed up in a recapitulation, in which the team tries to understand its past performance; in a reflection on the results (asking questions, seeking feedback, etc.); in integration, in which the team creates a new shared model consisting

of recognized successes and failures; and in action planning, in which the team develops what it has learned by creating a plan that integrates the lessons learned (Rosen, et al., 2011).

In the adaptability of teams, it is also important to address what are defined as emergent states. Emergent states are essential for the proper functioning and success of teams. These can be defined as the characteristics or properties that occur through the interaction between team members in the search for answers to challenges (Rosen, et al., 2011). They are also considered to be “*moderators of team performance processes*” (Rosen, et al., 2011, p. 113). It can be said that these states arise from the collective behavior of the members and define the team’s ability to adapt to the problems it faces and its future processes (Rosen, et al., 2011). When we talk about emergent states, we’re talking about mutual trust, motivation, individual behavior, etc. (Rosen, et al., 2011). Mutual trust is based on the belief or expectation that other team members will behave appropriately and with good intentions, thus improving communication and efficiency between team members in order to protect the interests of each other and the group (Rosen, et al., 2011). Motivation is about the degree of energy and commitment that the team puts into its work with the intention of achieving its goals and satisfying joint needs. It is also related to autonomy and purpose (Rosen, et al., 2011). Individual behavior is important because each person’s behavior, choices and beliefs reflect on the team’s work and performance. Thus, each member must focus on persistence in their work in order to meet the collective needs (Rosen, et al., 2011). Other emergent states that are essential for the four phases of team adaptation are shared mental models and team situational awareness, which refer to the way members perceive their work and the environment (Rosen, et al., 2011). Shared mental models can be any aspect of reality that allows the team to predict future states of the system and react more quickly when changes occur. As for the team’s situation awareness, this refers to the shared understanding among members about the current situation, causing the team to adapt (Rosen, et al., 2011).

In this way, the team’s adaptive cycles and the four phases that teams must go through are essential for the team’s success and for adapting to the circumstances and changes that occur, and any contingencies. Emergent states are also important in the collective sharing between team members and in achieving effective results.

3.2. Factors Influencing Adaptability

There are several factors that can influence the adaptability of teams, and their collective process is crucial for them to adapt to unexpected situations. To do this, teams must acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities that enable them to perform their work well, both individually and collectively. Collaboration and coordination between members allow learning to develop so that consensus can be reached on the discussion in question. Discussing mistakes, sharing knowledge, organizing ideas and developing skills makes it possible to prevent certain situations and problems (Ramos-Villagrasa, Passos, & García-Izquierdo, 2019). Therefore, by creating effective coordination strategies, teams are able to adapt efficiently to the stressful situations they encounter (Entin & Serfaty, 1999).

Nowadays, with the evolution of technology and global virtual teams (GVT), there are challenges related to the exchange of knowledge and integration between team members, however, technology can be beneficial in terms of innovation and creativity (Shirish, Srivastava, & Boughzala, 2023). Technology allows teams to interact more dynamically and quickly, but the fact that virtual communication sometimes takes place can also lead to difficulties in understanding and communicating between members. Therefore, cognitive awareness, flexibility and the ability to generate appropriate strategies for adaptation become essential skills that virtual teams must possess (Shirish, Srivastava, & Boughzala, 2023).

However, teams run the risk of adapting poorly to situations, and this needs to be acknowledged because some may have more difficulties than others and everything also depends on the resources they have and the challenges they face. This means that more complicated situations can prevent teams from adapting successfully and achieving positive results (Georganta, Stracke, Brodbeck, Knipfer, & Burke, 2023). For example, lack of motivation, inability to act and develop a plan, lack of reflection, lack of creativity, disorganization, hinder the team's ability to adapt and result in poor team performance (Georganta, Stracke, Brodbeck, Knipfer, & Burke, 2023).

In this context, communication between team members and team motivation are essential elements that can influence the whole team's work. The ability to organize is also important so that ideas become clearer, and all the positions and roles of each member are properly distributed so that effective work can be carried out to achieve effective results.

Chapter 4. The Importance of Teams Adaptability for a More Sustainable Digital Fashion

The adaptability of teams is therefore important for the sustainability challenges facing the fashion industry. Fashion teams must have the adaptability skills and competencies to achieve effective results when it comes to sustainable problems and challenges. E-commerce teams must adapt in order to overcome the obstacles they face in terms of delivery and returns logistics, packaging, transparency in the supply chain – in other words, making sure that the products sold are manufactured sustainably and comply with ethical and environmental practices – conscious consumer consumption, the search for a circular economy, competitive prices, among others.

The sustainable practices that many e-commerce stores linked to the fashion industry are practicing are only achieved through the ability of the teams to adapt to these practices in order to make the fashion company in question more environmentally responsible. In this context, it is important to understand what sustainable practices exist and can be implemented by e-commerce companies, but also how e-commerce teams adapt to sustainable challenges and what skills they seek for effective adaptation and the creation of these practices.

4.1. Current Sustainable Practices

Due to the use of social networks and the internet, in other words, new technologies and innovations, e-commerce has grown significantly in recent times, given that citizens have access to all kinds of technologies on a daily basis, such as cell phones. This means that people are looking for an easier, faster and more accessible way to shop (Bertram & Chi, 2018). Electronic marketing has a lot of influence on people because social networks and the internet are bombarded with advertisements from various online businesses. In this way, we can see at first glance how e-commerce has grown significantly, thus changing the global retail sector (Nath, Kumar, Sharma, Meena, & Jain, 2023) and placing social networks as key platforms for marketing strategies to attract consumers. It is therefore essential to create and adopt sustainable practices that make digital shopping as environmentally responsible as possible. We are therefore talking about sustainable fashion, which arises from the social and environmental responsibility of fashion companies, from the design, production and use of the product, and which in turn allows

for the creation of lasting quality on a social and environmental level (Bertram & Chi, 2018).

“This includes the textiles and processes used to develop clothing, the waste and pollution produced by the packaging and delivery of clothing, and the consumers’ decision on how to dispose the product” (Bertram & Chi, 2018, p. 254).

Thus, in order to respond and adapt to the sustainable challenges that are emerging, teams are beginning to define and create green practices so that they can achieve their goals and become socially and environmentally responsible. Although the implementation of certain practices is more complicated than others, teams work to find solutions and make implementation possible. This is due to the motivation and agile management skills of teams who seek knowledge and other skills that make them effective in adapting to environmental challenges. As is to be expected, teams that don't acquire certain necessary skills, invest in knowledge and lack the motivation to adapt make it more difficult for them to implement green practices and innovate those that are already ingrained.

There are therefore various practices that make online fashion more sustainable. Of the various green practices, the following essentially stand out: the circular economy (Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017), consumer awareness of green consumption (Nath, Kumar, Sharma, Meena, & Jain, 2023), the adoption of sustainable packaging (Bozzi, Neves, & Mont'Alvão, 2022), the reduction of returns and reverse logistics (Bertram & Chi, 2018), the use of renewable energy (Bertram & Chi, 2018), sustainable design, responsible production and sourcing, AI technologies for sustainable models, among others.

4.1.1. Circular Economy

The circular economy model consists of avoiding the use of excessive resources (Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017) and reducing waste (Eriksson & Käck, 2023), with the aim of extending the useful life of products, i.e. promoting sustainable development by reducing environmental impact – using biodegradable and recycled raw materials – and investing in competitiveness (Abbate, Centobelli, Cerchione, Nadeem, & Riccio, 2024). It's about promoting economic production based on *“purposeful restoration and regeneration”* (Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017, p. 761), giving value to recycling practices. This

model encompasses all forms of logistics, from the choice of materials used for product design, manufacturing and distribution (use of ecological packaging), a commitment to consumers and the environment (SanMiguel, Pérez-Bou, Sádaba, & Mir-Bernal, 2021). The aim is therefore to use recycled and low carbon-emitting materials from the moment the product is designed and manufactured, trying to minimize waste as much as possible (Abbate, Centobelli, Cerchione, Nadeem, & Riccio, 2024) and the waste of resources, and to make consumers aware of the need to take sustainable measures when using the product, so that there is a circulation that allows the process to start again in the same way. This means that companies need to invest in a circular textile economy based on sustainable product design and reverse logistics, adopting circular practices such as repair, recycling, longevity and reuse (Abbate, Centobelli, Cerchione, Nadeem, & Riccio, 2024).

“It challenges fast fashion by drawing a sharp distinction between consumption and use of materials, advocating the need for a functional service model characterized by manufacturers or retailers increasingly retaining product ownership and acting as service providers. This paradigm shift has direct implications for the development of efficient and effective take-back systems and the emergence of new design practices that generate more durable products and facilitate disassembly and refurbishment” (Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017, p. 761).

Teams should therefore strive to achieve creative and innovative skills that will make a circular model effective and well-developed. To do this, they can study other brands, particularly fast fashion brands that have started to practice this model, such as the Inditex Group, which owns Zara and has committed itself to the circular economy and decarbonization (SanMiguel, Pérez-Bou, Sádaba, & Mir-Bernal, 2021). What teams can do is gather the means for a possible product life cycle assessment to understand what environmental benefits can be achieved by recycling textile waste. However, there are some barriers preventing the development of the circular economy, such as restrictions on technology, as well as *“high research and development costs, and the supply chain complexity”* (Abbate, Centobelli, Cerchione, Nadeem, & Riccio, 2024, p. 2850).

4.1.2. Sustainable Packaging

The packaging used to deliver products is essentially made of plastic, which is why it is necessary, in order to respond to sustainable challenges and preserve more responsible practices, to adopt the use of environmentally friendly packaging that will reduce the carbon footprint (Nath, Kumar, Sharma, Meena, & Jain, 2023). The adoption of cardboard packaging is an alternative option to plastic and is apparently more sustainable, but according to the Fibre Box Association², just recycling a cardboard box can worsen its environmental impact (Bertram & Chi, 2018). It is therefore necessary to sensitize brands to opt for packaging that has a lower environmental impact and is reusable and recyclable, while also reducing waste (Eriksson & Käck, 2023). However, the adoption of environmentally friendly packaging can lead to additional material and production costs and a change in the supply chain infrastructure (Eriksson & Käck, 2023).

“Packaging, including the containers in which online orders are sent, accounts for 29.8% of waste in the United States, or 75 million tons, and many of the materials used to package products are not recyclable” (Bertram & Chi, 2018, p. 256).

Packaging is used to ensure that products are delivered safely and that there is no damage to them when they are delivered. Brands also use packaging to advertise the product and the brand itself, i.e. at the same time as they want to get the product to the consumer through safe packaging, they also want to stand out from the competition. However, in e-commerce, as the packaging is delivered directly to the consumer, this part of the appearance and creating packaging in order to advertise the product and the brand should not be the main focus of online stores (Bertram & Chi, 2018).

“One study conducted by Sealed Air revealed that 56% of e-commerce customers take issue with the packaging that their items come in, with their top two concerns being inability to recycle it and the difficulty in disposing of it” (Bertram & Chi, 2018, p. 259).

² Non-profit packaging manufacturing organization representing companies in North America (Bertram & Chi, 2018)

As a result, companies have started to develop creative solutions that capture the attention of their consumers and that are environmentally responsible and conscious in order to have a beneficial impact on reducing waste and reusing products (Bertram & Chi, 2018).

4.1.3. Green Consumerism

“Green consumerism focuses on customer behavior that reduces the negative environmental impact of their purchases. Green clients’ environmental problems are usually comprehensive and well-known which firmly believe humans are to blame for creating ecological issues. It also demonstrates a desire to take action to address environmental challenges” (Nath, Kumar, Sharma, Meena, & Jain, 2023, p. 2).

Consumers are beginning to pay attention to environmental problems and are increasingly responsible and sensitive to this issue. They have started to find out how their favorite clothing brands manufacture their garments and how their supply chain works. There is, therefore, a concern on the part of the consumer for a responsible and conscious purchasing preference, and sometimes they don't mind paying more if what they are buying really is beneficial to the environment. That's why brands that care about the consumer encourage their teams to adopt sustainable practices that reflect an environmentally responsible supply chain. This has therefore become an alternative to fast fashion – which has seen a decline in sales – where consumers’ buying habits are becoming more conscious and they have become more aware of sustainability (Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017). Consumers are starting to take a closer look at slow fashion, which is consequently having an impact on brands’ business models (Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017).

There is therefore a need to make consumers aware of the need to adopt more sustainable consumption practices, and brands that invest in e-commerce, such as the Nude Project, have created a community that makes their consumers feel that they are part of a movement based on a business model invested in sustainability and people. This makes consumers feel that they are part of the Nude Project world and that they are making a difference to the environment by consuming responsibly.

4.1.4. Reverse Logistics

Reverse Logistics (RL) is defined by the American Reverse Logistics Executive Council as:

“(...) the process of planning, implementing, and controlling the efficient, cost-effective flow of raw materials, in-process inventory, finished goods, and related information from the point of consumption to the point of origin to recapture value or proper disposal” (Bozzi, Neves, & Mont'Alvão, 2022, p. 18).

One of the biggest environmental problems in e-commerce is actually product returns, which result in problems related to greenhouse gas emissions (Kawa & Pierański, 2021). Of course, the whole delivery process isn't the most environmentally friendly, but what makes it worse is the returns part. Returns happen for various reasons: the garment may not meet the customer's expectations; the order may have been wrong, and a sweater was delivered instead of pants; the customer bought a size M jacket, but when they tried it on it didn't fit; the product may be damaged, among other reasons. The returns process is not the most practical or easy to do and involves complicated logistics with added costs and additional processes (Kawa & Pierański, 2021). However, returns in e-commerce have a lower environmental impact (Kawa & Pierański, 2021). So, there are positive and negative aspects, but teams need to invest in reverse logistics that is in line with companies' social and environmental responsibility, i.e. that pollutes as little as possible and is as practical as possible.

Therefore, the rules for returns must be clear and all the necessary information must be gathered, making the process easier for the customer and also for the brand. To facilitate the process, customer support is very important and the store's system must be able to identify the order the customer has placed so that it is possible to guide them correctly (Bozzi, Neves, & Mont'Alvão, 2022). This should not only be done by telephone, but the website should also explain how to do the process, the validity for doing so and also a customer support box that allows other questions to be clarified via e-mail. Some brands also put instructions in the order that is sent so that the customer is informed as soon as they receive the product (Bozzi, Neves, & Mont'Alvão, 2022).

The customer can go to a PUDO³ or even a click & collect point to return the order if it is not collected by a courier (Kawa & Pierański, 2021). After this step, the products are transported to the brand or to a company that handles returns (Kawa & Pierański, 2021). The returned product is then analyzed by a competent team to check whether the product can be put back on sale (Bozzi, Neves, & Mont'Alvão, 2022). This means a negative impact on the environment because the product has to be cleaned and repackaged (Bozzi, Neves, & Mont'Alvão, 2022), and also repaired if necessary (Kawa & Pierański, 2021). This whole process involves additional costs (Kawa & Pierański, 2021). Using accurate photographs that portray the product correctly, specifying width and length measurements, as well as describing sizes, is essential and can prevent the product from being returned (Kawa & Pierański, 2021). Packaging can also benefit from this process and avoid additional costs if it is designed to be reused in a possible return (Kawa & Pierański, 2021).

Therefore, reverse logistics has a much greater impact on online purchases due to the fact that it isn't possible to exchange or return the item straight away if the customer doesn't like it or it doesn't fit, because at the time of purchase it isn't possible to try the item on and therefore the customer only knows if they like it when they receive the order (Bozzi, Neves, & Mont'Alvão, 2022). Optimizing reverse logistics is therefore essential.

“Optimizing routes offers numerous advantages, it enables shorter distances, fewer trips, cheaper shipping costs, less deterioration of roads, less pollution, etc. It is directly related to the possibility of planning delivery routes. E-commerce deliveries are difficult to optimize as they happen on demand at very short notice” (Bozzi, Neves, & Mont'Alvão, 2022, pp. 20-21).

Also,

“Specialists mentioned the importance of being customer-centric. Generating a unique buying experience helps to mitigate fear related to buying online. Paying attention to what customers say to Customer Service agents is of utmost importance, most of the problems can be identified there” (Bozzi, Neves, & Mont'Alvão, 2022, p. 21).

³ Pick Up & Drop Off points - smart lockers for delivering and returning parcels.

Reverse logistics promotes recycling and reuse, reducing environmental impact and contributing to the circular economy.

4.1.5. Technological Innovation

By investing in technology, brands are able to implement more innovative sustainable practices. Augmented reality has the potential to influence fashion business models (Bertram & Chi, 2018), but so does AI, which especially in e-commerce can benefit the process of buying and selling a product, as well as facilitating supply chain logistics.

However,

“As technology advances and companies can process orders at faster rates, consumers are also beginning to expect rapid delivery rates for little or no extra cost (Fernie, Sparks, & McKinnon, 2010). This places more pressure on e-commerce companies to forgo environmentally sustainable practices in favour of cheaper, faster practices that will meet consumer demand” (Bertram & Chi, 2018, p. 260).

4.2. Current Challenges and Opportunities

There are many challenges facing e-commerce, and new and existing companies are increasingly looking for innovative business models that will allow them to “survive” in an increasingly exhausting market (Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017), and so teams are trying to adapt to create more sustainable business models that allow for more positive environmental effects (Bertram & Chi, 2018). One of the most important challenges is the issue of logistics (Bertram & Chi, 2018). Teams are constantly trying to find solutions, but so far these have been quite limited, and there is a need to achieve a business model based on green practices that improves the entire logistics of online sales. The issue of logistics ends up being intertwined with the product and e-commerce teams, however, according to a study carried out by Carolina Bozzi, Marco Neves and Claudia Mont'Alvão, *“professionals who are directly involved with the operational part of the logistics are more conscious and more critical about the impacts returns cause on the business”* (Bozzi, Neves, & Mont'Alvão, 2022, p. 30), since returns cause high costs for companies. Another challenge is fast fashion, which requires teams to respond quickly (Bertram & Chi, 2018) so that they can process all the new trends and adapt effectively, bearing in mind that fast fashion produces a lot, quickly, and pollutes a lot, due to the low cost of products and increased consumption, mainly due to polluting

materials and the exploitation of workers, in other words, “*the cheaper and easier it is for one to buy clothes, the more clothes one will buy and, in turn, throw away, which results in large environmental impact*” (Bertram & Chi, 2018, p. 254). One response to fast fashion is slow fashion, however, a brand whose identity is fast fashion is very difficult to institute more sustainable practices due to the immensity of the garments produced and the logistics of deliveries and returns. Consumers who are loyal to these fast fashion brands are always waiting for new collections and promotions because they are used to mass production. In this way, the teams of fast fashion brands should adopt more sustainable practices that allow fast fashion to have less of a negative impact on the environment, investing in innovation, consumer education and also in knowledge and compliance with environmental regulations: “(...) *consumer education can be a catalyst for changes in consumer behavior toward more sustainable individual practices related to fashion*” (Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017, p. 767). Here, emerging states play a crucial role because the motivation to want to change and education about environmental regulations are essential for investment in sustainable practices and better team adaptability (Rosen, et al., 2011). Fast fashion teams must be aware of the team situation in order to better understand their work and the environment. Product design is also relevant in that all the information is there and therefore has an impact on the entire product cycle (Bozzi, Neves, & Mont'Alvão, 2022). Therefore, information must be clear and precise, and correctly communicated to avoid exchanges and returns (Bozzi, Neves, & Mont'Alvão, 2022). Quality and appearance, as well as the materials used, the manufacturing process and the associated costs must be taken into account (Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017). Design teams or the designer himself can opt for sustainable solutions in the process of choosing textiles and materials, such as sustainable fibers or recycled materials (Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017) for garments and can use new technologies to make their work easier in the choice process and throughout the design and production process – *natural dyeing techniques, zero waste mechanisms, slow fashion methods* (Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017, p. 767). These teams must also have a global vision and systemic thinking that allows them to effectively analyze the environmental impact that materials and the entire product design may have. The choice of suppliers must also be a conscious and responsible one. The teams' shared mental models are essential, as is the sharing of knowledge and the development of skills

to improve sustainable solutions and create collaborative and effective agreements (Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017).

With regard to consumers, teams should have a customer-oriented mentality, i.e. study consumer preferences and give them ecological options that may even be more profitable, such as optimizing routes in the delivery and returns process, thus benefiting the environment and bringing fewer costs to the company (Bozzi, Neves, & Mont'Alvão, 2022). In other words, it's important to manage costs and operational efficiency, to establish a balance between sustainability and spending.

“In the fast fashion model, consumers are usually distant from production processes. This distance implies less emotional appeal in the acquisition and use of fashion goods that is necessary for large-scale immoderate consumption. Voluntary simplicity focuses on the careful use of apparel and an appeal for broader usefulness in order to decrease the production of fashion goods and the associated consumption of natural resources” (Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017, p. 769).

The sale of second-hand items is also a sustainable solution that has been on the rise recently, with e-commerce companies such as Vinted promoting the sale and purchase of second-hand products. There is an opportunity to reuse and for consumers to buy these products, and the costs may be lower. Therefore, with the increase in consumer demand for vintage and second-hand items, other brands and their teams face the challenge of investing in new sustainable ways to attract customers while remaining loyal to their brand and environmentally responsible. Recycling and second-hand goods are therefore relevant to the success of many business models (Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017).

It is also important to focus on corporate CSR, because communicating CSR practices provides a significant opportunity for expansion and improvement (Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017).

Chapter 5. Research Design: Methodology

Sustainability is therefore one of the biggest challenges facing the fashion industry, as it is the second most polluting industry in the world. Therefore, brands – fast fashion, slow fashion and high fashion alike – must create sustainable objectives to make them environmentally and socially responsible. CSR is essential for teams to be able to meet environmental challenges and achieve their goals. However, many designers and brands engage in greenwashing and are not transparent about the sustainable methods they adopt and the results they show. For this to stop, the teams that make up the brands have to realize that there is a big problem in the industry and that it is increasingly degrading the environment. Therefore, the main job of brands is to be transparent and invest in sustainability through responsible methods that enable positive results. Sustainable practices can be adopted and created by teams, from product design, transportation and right through to the end of the product's life. Circular practices and ecological materials are just a few examples of many more.

In this context, secondary sources were essential for analyzing the work of some brands in terms of sustainability and, therefore, to understand which gaps are still present and need to be filled. Interviews with designers and brand directors were used to find out what practices are adopted by the teams, while at the same time checking whether the specific brands implement their sustainable work in their online stores. A content analysis was carried out for this research. A distinction was made between the population and the sample. The population refers to all the brands and designers currently on the market. Therefore, since there are so many brands and designers, it was decided to define a sample in order to narrow down the analysis to certain criteria. It was therefore decided to choose the following criteria: time frame (interviews conducted between 2021 and the present) and the diversity of sustainable practices reflected in the body of each interview, with a focus on sustainable luxury fashion brands. We therefore gathered interviews from electronic magazines about digital culture and technology (Wired), about design and creative trends (D5 Magazine), and about fashion and lifestyle (Harper's BAZAAR) which are ones of the most influential magazines about innovation, design and fashion, respectively, according to an article written by Sophia Crisafulli – "*America's 100 most popular magazines*" –, about a ranking using data taken from the Alliance for Audited

Media's Snapshot Report⁴, and based, as Crisafulli mentions, on a *"paid average and a verified evaluation and circulation over a six-month period ending June 30, 2018"* (Crisafulli, 2018), where Wired and Harper's BAZZAR are mentioned. D5 magazine is also mentioned as the *"perfect destination for design inspiration"* by LIV Hospitality Design Awards (LIV Hospitality Design Awards, 2024). Therefore, we did an analysis of interviews with Stella McCartney (by Wired), BITE Studios (by Harper's BAZAAR) and Patrick McDowell (by D5 Magazine).

5.1. Research Method: Secondary Sources (Interviews)

5.1.1. Stella McCartney

Carla Sertin's interview with Stella McCartney for WIRED, *"Exclusive: Stella McCartney on her personal struggle to clean up the fashion industry's act"* (Sertin, 2023), involves understanding the importance of sustainability in the fashion industry in Stella's eyes, taking into account the designer's background and the work of her team in adapting to environmental challenges.

Stella McCartney is a British fashion designer who trained at Christian Lacroix when she was just 16 and went on to study at Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication and later at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design. From 1997 to 2001, she was creative director – until then held by Karl Lagerfeld – at Chloé, *"where her easy interpretation of the house's codes, fluid tailoring and sense of proportion was met with both commercial and critical success"* (Business of Fashion (BOF), s.d.). To this day, Stella has had her own brand, Stella McCartney, since 2001. The designer has a very sensitive relationship with the environment, both in her personal life and in her work. She has always been a vegetarian and when it comes to her work she refuses to use leather or fur in her designs (Business of Fashion (BOF), s.d.). In the *"about us"* category of Stella McCartney's website, you can see how much attention the designer and her team pay to sustainability:

"The first-ever Stella McCartney menswear collection launched in Spring 2017 and Stella designed the first-ever vegan Stan Smith trains in Autumn 2018" (Stella McCartney, s.d.) and,

⁴ Alliance for Audited Media (AAM) – largest not-for-profit media assurance independent organization (Alliance for Audited Media, s.d.).

“In 2023, Stella was honoured with a CBE, Commander of the Order of the British Empire, by His Royal Highness King Charles III in recognition of her services to fashion and sustainability. She also debuted the world’s first-ever luxury products crafted from BioSequins and regenerative cotton” (Stella McCartney, s.d.).

In the interview, you can see that innovation is one of the most important factors for Stella McCartney because the development of sustainable textiles, materials and technologies is the path that needs to be adopted by brand teams, especially when it comes to product design. To one of the questions, Stella replies that connecting with the environment is important in order to understand the gaps and shortcomings that are present in the industry in terms of sustainability (McCartney, 2023). By creating this genuine connection with the environment, you can get a better idea of what needs to be changed or innovated. It also mentions what laws and legislation are needed in the fashion industry to make amends for the level of pollution being caused to the planet⁵ (McCartney, 2023).

As reflected on her website or online store, the designer has a very sensitive relationship with the environment, both in her personal life and in her work. She has always been a vegetarian and when it comes to her work she refuses to use leather or fur in her design (Business of Fashion (BOF), s.d.). Also in the interview, Stella goes along with what is reflected on her website, stating that in her work she has never used leather, fur or feathers, thus encouraging brands to start changing the materials they use in their designs, thus constituting a first step towards environmental awareness⁶ (McCartney, 2023). Basically, it says that limitations are essential in order to respond in the best way to environmental needs, since, for instance, thousands of animals die every year in order to make bags⁷ (McCartney, 2023).

It also reflects the importance of transparency towards consumers, i.e. the need to correctly inform customers about the sustainable practices that her team adopts⁸ (McCartney, 2023). In its e-commerce store, Stella McCartney has a category called “*sustainability*” where it shows sustainable progress and how much its brand and team

⁵ V. Annex A, Stella McCartney, question 3, p. 47.

⁶ V. Annex A, *Idem*, question 3, p. 47.

⁷ V. Annex A, *Idem*, question 3, p. 47.

⁸ V. Annex A, *Idem*, question 5, p. 48.

invest in its work, presenting alternatives of more sustainable materials that can be used in product design, such as Savian (alternative to animal skin), Mango Materials (transforms “*harmful methane into a biodegradable alternative to traditional fossil fuel-based plastics*”), Bananatex (biodegradable material, Banana Plant-Based Low-Impact Fibre), organic cotton (Stella McCartney, s.d.), among others.

It’s clear that one of the biggest challenges for the designer is finding a balance between making money and being sustainable and ethical at the same time⁹ (McCartney, 2023). Stella says that making a choice in favor of sustainability often hurts her business.

“Bringing my non-leather bags into America means getting taxed 30 percent more. That’s nuts. If I put a sliver of leather on it, it goes away. That’s medieval. It’s crazy, it’s wrong, it’s a bit dark” – Stella McCartney¹⁰ (McCartney, 2023).

In this way, creating a conscious and responsible team, through a connection with the environment, which is transparent, innovative and motivating, are essential characteristics for the brand to succeed in its sustainable goals. This is what Stella McCartney reflects in her brand and in herself. Educating and informing the consumer is one of the most important ways to bring about change for the sake of the environment.

5.1.2. BITE Studios (aka By Independent Thinkers for Environmental progress)

Harper’s BAZAAR and Jessica Davis conducted an interview with the CEO and co-founder of the brand BITE Studios, William Lundgren, in 2021 – “*Unstitched: BITE Studios - The sustainable label that perfects the wardrobe staples*”. The interview came about because the brand focuses on basic items, with the possibility of these being considered more environmentally and fashion-conscious (Davis, 2021).

BITE Studios is a brand that focuses on being sustainable and shows respect for ecology, art and craft, while adopting a new vision of what is considered luxury. It also adopts a slow-design approach, using sustainable materials in its design such as natural organic fibers, and making clothing with an ecological conscience (BITE Studios, s.d.). You can check this out on the brand’s website, giving the impression that its team invests in e-

⁹ V. Annex A, Stella McCartney, question 4, pp. 47-48.

¹⁰ V. Annex A, *Idem*, question 4, pp. 47-48.

commerce and in transparency and information for the consumer, as well as in the integrity and identity of the brand.

William Lundgren, when asked “*what makes a truly sustainable brand*”, essentially mentions two things: partnerships with suppliers and circularity¹¹ (Lundgren, 2021). Partnerships with suppliers in the development of ecological and biodegradable materials are essential¹² (Lundgren, 2021) and, like Stella McCartney, William reflects the importance of the choice of materials in product design. He mentions examples of materials such as: *organic silk, organic cotton, organic wool, organic linen*¹³ (Lundgren, 2021).

“A sustainable brand should make pieces designed to last.” – William Lundgren
(Lundgren, 2021)

One of the sustainable practices that BITE has adopted represents the importance of product circularity, and the brand has decided to innovate and adopt a “buy-back” scheme, i.e. what the brand does is buy back the product for 20 percent of the original price from a customer who didn’t want it. Here, the condition of the product doesn’t matter, but rather its reuse, with the intention of archiving it or transforming it into another garment¹⁴ (Lundgren, 2021). This shows the team’s capacity for innovation, but also for management in terms of sustainability and the development of its objectives. The only problem that seems to be present in this method is in terms of reverse logistics, because not only is there the possibility of the brand spending more, but there is also the possibility of affecting sustainability with the transportation and logistics of returning the product. However, it seems to be a sustainable initiative, but one that perhaps needs to be better studied in order to understand the pros and cons in environmental terms.

The interview also shows how hard the brand works to encourage knowledge among team members, i.e. the brand’s team values the study and collection of information needed to assess what is in line with the brand's values and the materials it wants to use in its

¹¹ V. Annex B, William Lundgren, question 1, p. 50.

¹² V. Annex B, William Lundgren, question 1, p. 50.

¹³ V. Annex B, *Idem*, question 1, p. 50.

¹⁴ V. Annex B, *Idem*, question 1, p. 50.

products, which are organic, recyclable and low-impact¹⁵ (Lundgren, 2021). Here, William criticizes traditional luxury fashion, saying that it lacks respect for nature and all living creatures¹⁶ (Lundgren, 2021), but also diverts his attention to how to source sustainable labor and materials¹⁷ (Lundgren, 2021). However, when it comes to consumers, William says that they are becoming increasingly conscious about their purchases and how they make them¹⁸ (Lundgren, 2021).

*“Our brand mission is to accelerate the world’s transition into more sustainable consumption by creating a modern alternative to consuming clothes. We want to offer an alternative model to people who, like us, believe in the urgency to fight climate change and do not want to compromise when it comes to the clothes we wear”*¹⁹ (Lundgren, 2021).

William also mentions the importance of the team and the determination of its values, and its work is essential for partnerships with suppliers in terms of the search for organic and recyclable materials, but also in the innovation of other sustainable practices²⁰ (Lundgren, 2021).

In terms of e-commerce, BITE presents the choice of materials they use in their clothes on their website, as well as an explanation of them, in order to educate the customer and inform them about the purchase they might make:

“If a fabric does not meet our high standards in sustainability or quality, then we will seek an alternative. In rare instances that a design requires the use of manmade materials, we look to recycled fibres, and have a blanket ban on virgin synthetics, non-organic cotton or silk, animal skins or fur, and non-certified viscose. Today between 98% to over 99% of the fibres used in BITE collections adhere to our strict guidelines” (BITE Studios, s.d.).

¹⁵ V. Annex B, *Idem*, question 2, pp. 50-51.

¹⁶ V. Annex B, *Idem*, question 2, pp. 50-51.

¹⁷ V. Annex B, William Lundgren, question 3, p. 51.

¹⁸ V. Annex B, *Idem*, question 4, p. 51.

¹⁹ V. Annex B, *Idem*, question 5, p. 51.

²⁰ V. Annex B, *Idem*, question 6, pp. 51-52.

5.1.3. Patrick McDowell

The main goal of Patrick McDowell, creative director of the brand of the same name Patrick McDowell, is to redefine the idea of luxury through sustainability: “*Sustainability is at the core of everything Patrick does, striving to reinvent luxury through a sustainable mindset*” - Anna Wintour, *Vogue* (Patrick McDowell, s.d.). The British brand defines itself as independent, sustainable and luxurious, and has solidified itself on the global stage as a brand that is dedicated to sustainable challenges and also to circular business practices. The brand has created an innovative and revolutionary business model based on an approach that fuses the drop system²¹ with a made-to-order²² approach (Magazine, 2024). In this way, the interview with Patrick McDowell by D5 Design Magazine in 2024, “*Interview with Patrick McDowell on Fashion’s Sustainable & Ethical Future*” reflects on the brand’s work in adopting sustainable practices, especially at e-commerce level, such as the made-to-order approach (Magazine, 2024).

McDowell gives special attention and importance to the artisans he works with, partners and clients, in other words, for the brand the supply chain is the main point that requires special thought²³ (McDowell, 2024). In other words, innovation in this respect is essential, hence the designer's need to re-imagine how clothes can be created and sold in a more sustainable way, going against traditional fashion by limiting production²⁴ (McDowell, 2024). The brand works with high-quality producers based on ethical and sustainable practices, such as the Italian producer Taroni, which has been producing high-quality fabrics since 1880²⁵ (McDowell, 2024), thus sending out the message that they can maintain their sustainable status while maintaining the brand’s identity and aesthetic²⁶

²¹ Drop System consists of the limited and unexpected launch of new products, a collection with limited quantities of pieces. However, this can result in over-manufacturing and waste.

²² Made-to-order consists of production to order, i.e. products are manufactured according to the orders that are placed. This means that only when a customer makes a purchase will the part that has been bought be manufactured, so there is no waste and no over-manufacturing.

²³ V. Annex C, Patrick McDowell, question 1, p. 53.

²⁴ V. Annex C, *Idem*, question 1, p. 53.

²⁵ V. Annex C, *Idem*, question 5, p. 54.

²⁶ V. Annex C, *Idem*, question 6, p. 54.

(McDowell, 2024). However, the designer says that by adopting this model he faces economic challenges, but he is not discouraged when he says that:

“(...) we should be putting purpose before profit, we are making sure we are not only doing the right thing for the planet, but we are charging our customers appropriately – making pieces that don’t cost the earth”²⁷ (McDowell, 2024).

In this way, it seems that the brand defines exactly what its objectives and values are and does not fail to express its commitment to sustainability, through a connection between the brand and its consumers²⁸ (McDowell, 2024), but also through innovative methods, the selection of ecological materials, circularity and transparency with consumers by placing certification and traceability of the origin of the fabric and its materials on all its garments, as well as where it was manufactured and the kilometers in transit (Patrick McDowell, s.d.).

²⁷ V. Annex C, Patrick McDowell, question 3, p. 53-54.

²⁸ V. Annex C, *Idem*, question 4, p. 54.

Chapter 6. Data Analysis

These brands are really invested in sustainability and in making their online stores more sustainable and socially responsible when it comes to the consumer. They opt for ecological materials and fabrics when it comes to their designs. We find these interviews relevant and crucial for this study because it's possible to understand better the challenges and opportunities that these brands go through in their everyday lives. These brands are changing the industry or at least trying to do so. When it comes to innovation, responsibility, and transparency these brands are working to be better every day and trying to incorporate sustainability in innovative ways through their online stores, spreading their story and inspiring consumers to be more conscious about their purchases. This doesn't mean that their online stores are fully sustainable in their practices and this study showcases an analysis to their websites to understand what is still missing and what can be improved.

It can therefore be seen that the brands featured in this study translate what they say in the interviews into what they present in their e-commerce stores. Special attention to the connection with sustainability and the consumer seems to be present in all these brands. However, they all call on the industry not to ignore the fact that it is one of the most problematic for the environment and the planet, and that they need to invest in their teams so that they invest in motivation and innovation, and consequently in sustainable practices that enable effective results at ethical and environmental levels.

All of the brands in this study have categories on their website such as "about us" and "sustainability" which allow them to inform and educate consumers so that they can make more conscious and responsible purchases. Stella McCartney, despite adopting ecological materials and having relevant information on her website about them, seems, at least in her interview and on her website, not to mention other innovative practices like BITE Studios and Patrick McDowell mention, such as the "buy-back" and "made-to-order" approach, which leads us to believe that the brand has not adopted any of these models so far. However, it seems that although the CEO of BITE Studios mentions in the interview that the brand has adopted the "buy-back" approach, it doesn't seem to have formally adopted it, at least in its online store there is no mention of this approach or this option in any category. Despite this, it is possible to verify on the BITE Studios website that the brand reimburses the cost of return fees that consumers pay when returning a product,

“BITE Studios will refund what you have paid, including the freight and delivery charges. The refund will be made as soon as possible after BITE Studios has received the item that you would like to return” (BITE Studios, s.d.).

Stella McCartney also doesn't charge the customer for exchanging products only when the size and/or color of the product doesn't match the customer's expectations, *“if you wish to change the size and/or color of an item that you purchased, you can do so at no additional cost”* (Stella McCartney, s.d.).

As for Patrick McDowell, it was possible to verify when clicking on the purchase of a product, more specifically in the checkout part of it, that the brand does not accept returns because it adopts the “made-to-order” approach, which ends up being more sustainable than others in this sense because it does not face the environmental challenges of reverse logistics – *“As our items are made to order to fit your exact measurements, we are unfortunately unable to accept returns. We will however be able to adjust pieces to fit you perfectly”* (Patrick McDowell, s.d.).

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Throughout this study, we have been able to see the impact that the fashion industry has on the environment and the work that teams are doing to make online fashion brands and this industry more aware and responsible. It is necessary for brands and designers not to ignore the fact that this industry is the second most polluting in the world, and to define their sustainable objectives. Therefore, in order to achieve these goals, brands need to create strategic teams and invest in the adaptability of their teams so that effective results can be achieved on an environmental and social level. One of the industry's biggest problems and challenges is the scarcity of resources, and with the growth of fast fashion and the large mass production that this entails, we need to set a limit on what is produced and make brands responsible to that extent. The entire supply chain needs to be developed sustainably, and so brands must dedicate themselves, specially, to conscious and responsible product design, to more organized and innovative logistics with low levels of pollution, and to educating consumers so that they make their purchases with more attention to the environment. With the growth of e-commerce, teams need to adapt and find effective methods to optimize the logistics of delivering and returning products and how they are presented.

It is therefore necessary to design more sustainable packaging, to use renewable energy in the supply chain, to adopt artificial intelligence technologies to solve the problem of waste by reducing excess inventory, and to be transparent and clearly communicate information to consumers to avoid returns and, consequently, increased greenhouse gas emissions. Teams must therefore invest in their adaptability, following the four core constructs – situation assessment, plan formulation, plan execution and team learning – in order to acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities that will enable them to perform effectively. By organizing themselves, collaborating with each other and sharing knowledge, they achieve more positive results and are able to respond to the challenges and opportunities they face. Brands with an online store should therefore invest in teams with a good capacity for motivation, innovation, reflection, organization and communication. These are essential characteristics for teams to be able to create innovative, more environmentally conscious and responsible business models.

Practices such as the circular economy, sustainable packaging, green consumerism, more sustainable reverse logistics, renewable energy and technological innovation can be adopted by online stores to make them more sustainable.

Based on the study carried out, it is therefore possible to answer the research question:

- *To what extent have fashion brand teams adapted to adopting sustainable practices in order to develop more conscious and responsible e-commerce stores?*

Fashion brands' teams have invested in their adaptability, resulting in the adoption and innovation of sustainable practices; however, there are still several challenges and adjustments to be made if e-commerce stores are to be considered more conscious and responsible. The importance of team adaptability for more sustainable online fashion is clear. In view of the study carried out and the analysis of the interviews and the characteristics of the brands' online stores presented in Chapter 5, the teams have dedicated themselves to working based on knowledge and learning, but also on the motivation to achieve their sustainable goals. It seems that online brands are betting more on circular businesses and designers, when creating their products, also take special care in the materials they choose, increasingly opting for ecological materials and textiles. Some sustainable practices have been adopted by the brands studied with regard to their online stores, such as green consumerism, i.e. consumer education, meaning that online stores are investing in clear and precise information for consumers in order to make them better informed so that they are able to make more conscious and responsible purchases. Transparency about the sustainable practices that online stores present is extremely important for your business. These are the practices and characteristics that Stella McCartney, BITE Studios and Patrick McDowell present in their online stores. The innovation with the "by back" and "made-to-order" models that BITE Studios and Patrick McDowell refer to in their interviews is motivating and requires reflection on the part of the teams, in order to understand how much the environment can benefit from these initiatives. One of the most important aspects for online stores is the "about us" category and the "exchange and returns policy", which must have all the necessary information so that consumers are well informed about the work and identity of the brand, and about logistics, in order to make more conscious purchases, respectively. The "sustainability" category is not always present on websites, but it is essential for the brand to be transparent and to inform the consumer about the sustainable practices it adopts. It can even help other store teams research sustainable practices to implement in their brand. This means that the brands studied generally show good adaptability when it comes to the sustainable challenges of e-commerce. However, it was noted that there is still a lot of

work to be done to overcome pollution in this industry, and that e-commerce also needs to innovate in line with sustainability, especially when it comes to delivery and returns logistics, as well as the materials used in packaging. Teams should therefore, through reflection and the sharing of mental models, try to understand the environmental gaps that their brands need to fill, in order to position the brand as one that cares about the planet, the environment and people. Only by trying to understand what's wrong can you do good. This allows teams to perform well and achieve their sustainable goals. We also see the need to continue researching the subject studied in future work, given that there are still several gaps in e-commerce in terms of sustainability, and with the aim of investigating other sustainable practices that are favorable to it.

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Annexes

Annex A²⁹

Interview with Stella McCartney

Exclusive: Stella McCartney on her personal struggle to clean up the fashion industry's act

- 1. Carla Sertin: I had a look at your stand at COP28 yesterday, but didn't get the chance to chat with you or the different founders there.**

Stella McCartney: Oh, please go back and meet them. We finished really late last night, and the reason I managed to get through that day is because I don't feel like my being here is about me. It's about the innovators. That's what gave me the energy, because it's just incredible. It's about us as a team and us as a business. What we have done and what we continue to do is truly showcased at COP28—it's the future of fashion.

- 2. You're one of the more outspoken proponents of moving towards sustainable luxury, sustainable fashion. Why isn't that a more common practice in fashion?**

It is my privilege and my honor and my purpose. I ask journalists what they talk to fashion designers about, and I don't get it. How can you only talk about fashion in its simplest, most mundane [form]? I don't get it.

But why aren't more people here? Well, it's hard. This is not easy, what I do is not the easy route. It's the hardest route, but it's the most fulfilling route and it's the most important route. You have to have passion, and you have to have a purpose. I'm not saying that other fashion brands don't have that, but they clearly don't have it to the level that I do. The leaders in business in the room at COP28 are the ones that truly see it as their mission. I think it's my mission.

²⁹ Ref. McCartney. (2023). *Exclusive: Stella McCartney in her personal struggle to clean up the fashion industry's act*. Available at: <https://wired.me/culture/stella-mccartney-exclusive/> [accessed on September 10, 2024].

3. You sometimes credit your parents' fame and your upbringing for giving you the privilege to work on sustainability. Is that where this sense of purpose comes from?

I grew up in a very different way. I was very privileged to have the parents I had, I grew up on an organic farm, vegetarian. I saw life through a different lens, and that gave me the opportunity to be this person. That's a privilege that I had. It set me on a different path from others.

I was in China a few months ago, and I realized I hadn't seen one animal, I hadn't heard one bird. It hadn't occurred to me on other trips to China, and it kind of broke my heart. I was sitting with a young female interviewer like yourself to talk about sustainability. I asked, "Do you feel connected to animals? Do you have a connection to nature?" And she said, "No, not really." It's like, of course you don't. If you are not given the privilege that I had, how do you connect? How do you expect to connect with why I do what I do, which is to save nature and to save the creatures, and to save us? I understand why people don't get it.

And on a business level, we're penalized for it, we're not incentivized. That's why I'm here, we need policy change. We need laws and legislation placed on the fashion industry, to basically make us not one of the most harmful industries on the planet. I started like this, I've never worked with leather, I've never worked with fur, I've never worked with feathers. The limitations I personally put on myself, and we as a business put on ourselves, are unheard of. We self-police at Stella. Nobody else would do that. Nobody would do that in any business. We find it hard enough to self-police when we get home, like "Oh I shouldn't eat sugar". Unless somebody takes away your sugar, you're gonna eat it, you know what I mean? And the 'sugar' of the fashion industry is a billion animals being killed a year to sell handbags.

That's deep sh**. Were you expecting that? [She laughs]

4. Actually, yes, that's why I was looking forward to this interview. You've said it before, "It costs more to do good", right?

It does, because on the business side, I think the men, mostly, with a seat at the table, they are also working for businesses, so they can't make the decisions. No matter how good they are inside, how many kids or grandchildren they have, or how much they know that morally, they should be making their family proud in the way that they conduct business, it's not really their decision. I'm lucky because I'm a founder, so I can make those decisions. I had a CEO in the past who was like, "Stella, please just use leather, because

we're never going to make money." Had I not been there, a brand that was even founded on those ethics would have switched into leather.

I have a funny relationship with finance, because when you're trying to do something good, associating that with financial return seems like they don't match. I struggle with that, but I think I'm really wrong in that struggle. I've spoken to friends about it, and they're like, "your brand should be the one making money, businesses like yours should be the biggest brands in the world." Bringing my non-leather bags into America means getting taxed 30 percent more. That's nuts. If I put a sliver of leather on it, it goes away. That's medieval. It's crazy, it's wrong, it's a bit dark.

I'm not even answering your questions anymore.

5. No, I was actually going down that route about taxation and regulations.

Where do we start?

It's not all on the government. That's one side, but I really believe that people hold the power. I'm people, and I know the power I hold when I buy sustainable toilet paper, as opposed to a conventional toilet paper. I know supply and demand. I am a supplier and I serve people, so I understand. If people don't buy that bag, I'm not gonna be making that bag in two years, because it's pointless. And that's the rule of the world.

Even here at COP, I came to my first COP two years ago, and I sat at some dinners watching beef getting handed out, fish getting handed out, and then the vegetarian option. You can't be at an environmental summit and not know that animal agriculture is one of the biggest things cutting down our f***ing rainforests, and a billion animals are killed for fashion a year and 17 percent of our rainforest just for handbags. Knowing the grain, all the soy that's grown on the planet is going to f***ing cattle, it's not going to humans. Without this, we wouldn't have drought, we wouldn't have famine. It's mad. To see at an environmental conference, beef getting handed out, is gobsmacking.

We come back to consumer demand. People being informed is critical. That's really what I try and do every day with my brand. At my installation, it's about giving people information, so they can make the right choice. The two go hand in hand.

Coming back to COP two years later, I've been to one plant-based dinner, which was great, and then last night I went to one with beef, fish and veggie options.

[To her team:] I couldn't believe that last night. It was shocking.

6. To be frank, even just going to the COP venue, I noticed they had more plant-based options than they usually do.

It's COP. They should only be giving and showcasing young, plant-based brands. That's the point, give the next... the future of our planet... [She pauses to wipe away a tear] I mean, it really upsets me, actually. I'm a bit emotional, it's really upsetting.

7. Did you see the PETA protestors outside of the venue?

No, were there?

8. Yeah, they were talking about how COP isn't addressing the impact of meat and agriculture on climate change.

[To her team:] Bring them in! Let the PETA protestors in. Would you invite them to our stand? I'd like to meet them. PETA and all those NGOs.

9. There's a lot of talk about greenwashing, and you've already mentioned some disappointment around meat at COP.

Look, we know the greenwashing thing, we all know the disappointment. But if I go down that road, it's impossible for me to believe that I can make any change. Because it's so real. Anything is better than nothing. My own child was like, why are you going, it's all so disappointing. [She's tearing up]

I'm really emotional today, I think I'm exhausted. I don't particularly want to be here. I don't particularly want to be doing an interview, if I'm honest. It's lovely to meet you, but I'd rather not. Sadly I have to, somebody has to do this. There's a great amount of people in here doing that. It's hard to be negative about it, like I have to be positive, I have to believe it. Last COP, I didn't see any plant-based dinners, and this time I saw one out of two. So we're 50 percent better.

10. What's making you feel optimistic right now about the future of sustainable fashion?

The people. The next generation of people like the youth, they make me optimistic, talking to people like you makes me optimistic because I really can't tell you enough how important it is that you tell this story.

And you have to stay positive. I've seen this my whole life. My mother founded a meat-free company in 1991. My parents have been having this conversation since I was born. They've been made fun of, my mom was murdered by the press, and by people, for being vegetarian. You can't come at it like you're telling people off. Like you said, PETA was here and nobody knew they were here. It doesn't work, in my opinion. It doesn't work certainly for me. I need to be encouraging. I have to be positive, I have to come at it with an informative heart and an open heart.

Annex B³⁰

Interview with William Lundgren

Unstitched: BITE Studios - The sustainable label that perfects the wardrobe staples

1. What makes a truly sustainable brand?

Choosing not to compromise. I think the most important thing we have learned on the journey of sustainability is the investment of time into the selection of materials. You have to work together with suppliers that develop high-quality organic silk, organic cotton, organic wool, organic linen, organic everything, essentially. A sustainable brand should make pieces designed to last.

Not only that, you have to think about circularity as well. What happens at the end of life? There has to be a plan in place for the clothes to continue. At BITE, we have a buy-back scheme where we will repurchase a customer's unwanted item for 20 per cent of the original price, no matter the condition. This piece will either get archived or repurposed into another garment.

2. How do you successfully run a sustainable business?

We're very proud of the philosophy and the people behind the brand. We start at the very beginning in sourcing and developing new materials, ensuring we collect the information we need to evaluate whether or not it complies with our material guide. We take great pride in that 95 per cent of every BITE garment is made from organic, recycled or low-impact materials.

At our core is the grounding principles on how we view the world, the element of carefully selected fabrics, details, materials and construction based on time, knowledge and beauty. Working with respect for nature and all living creatures connects an element that luxury fashion traditionally has been lacking.

Sustainability is front of mind even down to our packaging, which is made from paper certified with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), which works to take care of our forest and those rely on them: by protecting plant and animal species, indigenous people's

³⁰ Ref. Lundgren. (2021). *Unstitched: BITE Studios – The sustainable label that perfects the wardrobe staples*. Available at:

<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/uk/fashion/a36751468/unstitched-bite-studios-sustainability/>

[accessed on September 15, 2024].

rights, and forest workers safety. All our transportation is also climate compensated. At this stage, we are doing the best we can, and we are constantly looking for new progressive ways of working.

3. What do you think needs to change in the industry?

How we source labour and material. Most of what is available isn't meeting the standards and quality that we, as producers, require. When it comes to sustainability, there is no room for compromise and although cheaper alternatives exist right now, our climate is paying the price. We have a responsibility to speak up and set a new standard.

4. What is the industry doing right?

When we started, sustainability was seen more as a separate entity that was difficult to interconnect with fashion. Now, material sustainability is a future target for most brands and more and more people are buying in line with their belief system. This is wonderful and of course the only way forward. Consumers are now very conscious of what they put in and on their bodies.

5. What do you want to achieve personally with your brand, in terms of sustainability?

Sustainability was the key factor from the start since we believed the industry needed to change, but also because we personally would never have started a label that did not care for the environment at a time when this is one of our most important crises to solve collectively.

Our brand mission is to accelerate the world's transition into more sustainable consumption by creating a modern alternative to consuming clothes. We want to offer an alternative model to people who, like us, believe in the urgency to fight climate change and do not want to compromise when it comes to the clothes we wear. We're proud that retailers such as Net-A-Porter, Selfridges and Luisa Via Roma are extremely supportive of our brand mission and our proposition.

6. What advice would you give to those wanting to make their business sustainable?

Start with the team. These are the people that will make or break your brand. If everyone shares the same values from the beginning, it will reflect in the choices you make together in the end. Take first steps in talking to your suppliers about exchanging materials for organic or recycled; it's an interesting process working together to improve your practices.

We got so much advice in the beginning and have received a lot of support throughout,

so I think we have avoided many mistakes by meeting many wonderful and generous people that believed in our vision.

7. What's the smallest change a consumer could make to become more eco-conscious?

Caring for your clothes, mending pieces rather than throwing them away, buying better and wiser. This is why at BITE we really focus on wardrobe staples that people will adore and keep in their wardrobe for years as opposed to throwaway fashion.

8. What are the most common inaccurate "facts" about sustainability you see promoted?

There's still this preconception with sustainability that it equals poor quality, when in reality it is the exact opposite. We use the highest-quality organic silks, wool, and cotton which has an incredible luxury feel to it that synthetics can't achieve. Why would you buy an oil-based synthetic garment that does not breath at all closest to your skin, when you can wear a luxurious organic garment with a completely different quality and airy feel to it? It represents a modern approach to design and environment, a new optimistic way forward with amazing garments that you will love forever.

9. What should consumers look out for when shopping sustainably?

Consumers should invest in pieces that are timeless and won't go out of style after one single season. They should consider the cost-per-wear of a garment and understand that shipping a sustainable brand does not impact the luxurious, high quality of clothing.

10. What's the biggest misconception about sustainable clothing?

That sustainability and style don't go hand-in-hand. BITE marries modern thinking with cutting-edge design. We want our customers to know that we don't compromise with any materials in terms of environmental and social aspects and that our full collection will always be made in natural organic or recycled materials. The touch and feel from the natural organic materials against the body are really luxurious.

11. Where do you turn to when you feel confused about sustainability and need more detail?

To science and well-written reports by experts. There tends to be a lot of misinformation nowadays and so we at BITE stick to the reports from the experts. We are constantly learning and developing as a brand and as a team and this is what continues to fuel our passion and remains our driving force behind why we are doing what we are doing.

Annex C³¹

Interview with Patrick McDowell

Interview with Patrick McDowell on Fashion's Sustainable & Ethical Future

1. Can you provide more insight into the inspiration behind merging the drop system with a made-to-order approach for your AW24 collection?

I've always been interested in not only designing beautiful clothing but also thinking about the systems the clothes sit within. I think it's important that we continue to look at ways to be creative and innovate – remaining curious and asking ourselves how we can make things better for everyone across all stages of the process – the artisans we work with, our supply chain partners, and of course our clients. I knew very early on in my career that I wanted to create a fashion brand of the future that was kinder to people and the planet and part of that was to reimagine how clothing is created and sold. We're limiting what we produce and by creating pieces that fit and suit our clients perfectly to ensure they feel as great as they look.

2. How do you foresee the fashion industry responding to this business model?

Our model puts both people and our planet at the heart of what we do and I think the industry is ready and open to anything that helps to move us all towards a more sustainable and client-focused future. The hope is that we are able to inspire others to continue to innovate and look at ways we can all work together to make fashion more sustainable.

3. What challenges did you encounter while implementing such a sustainable approach, and how did you overcome them?

Our business has been built with sustainable excellence at its heart and approaching the market in this alternative way has only been possible with the strong partnerships we have built with our sustainable material suppliers and artisans, had we not had those relationships in place already the challenge of working in this new way and adjusting our supply chain and production cycles would have been far greater. There is also, of course, the economics of producing in this way, but with the belief that we should be putting

³¹ Ref. McDowell. (2024). *Interview with Patrick McDowell on Fashion's Sustainable & Ethical Future*. Available at: <https://d5mag.com/interview-with-patrick-mcdowell-on-fashion-sustainable-ethical-future/> [accessed on September 10, 2024].

purpose before profit, we are making sure we are not only doing the right thing for the planet, but we are charging our customers appropriately – making pieces that don't cost the earth.

4. How do you believe this model will impact the relationship between the fashion brand and its customers?

The model is designed to strengthen the relationship we have with our customers. By offering a more personalised and ethical shopping experience, we're not just selling clothes, we're engaging in a shared commitment to sustainability. This approach fosters a deeper connection between our brand and our customers, building on mutual values and a common purpose.

5. Can you share examples of the sustainable materials employed in the creation of the AW24 collection?

One of our most used fabrics is from a producer in Italy called Taroni, who since 1880 have made fabrics of the highest quality. Their commitment to the elimination of all hazardous materials in their production and reputation for ethical practices mean we are able to offer our clients pieces that are not only luxurious but consciously crafted.

How does the brand balance the creative aspects of design with the logistical challenges of sustainable production?

Balancing the creative with the logistical challenges of sustainable production involves innovative thinking from the outset. We ensure that our sustainability efforts complement our aesthetic by collaborating closely with suppliers who understand our vision, share our commitment to ethical practices, and help us to work towards producing in this new and innovative way.

6. What role do partnerships play in achieving a sustainable growth model, particularly with local manufacturers and makers?

Building strong and meaningful relationships with the people that touch our business, including of course our makers, has always been central to the way we work. By collaborating and having open conversations with local manufacturers and artisans, and finding the best way to work for everyone, we are able to reduce our carbon footprint, support local economies, and ensure that our production practices are ethical. These partnerships are also essential for sharing knowledge and resources towards our sustainability goals.

7. In your opinion, what is the significance of offering a complimentary re-fit option for your garments in terms of conscious consumption?

We understand that bodies change and by offering our clients a complimentary re-fit, we allow their pieces to change as they do. Similarly, should they decide they want to pass their Patrick McDowell garment on to a family member, friend, or loved one, we can help with this too. This not only reaffirms our commitment to quality but also elongates the life of our garments – helping us to build long and meaningful relationships with our clients.

8. How has the fashion community responded to your brand's commitment to transparency and traceability?

The response so far has been positive and is something we feel is essential for building trust and meaningful, long-lasting relationships with our clients.

9. Can you share your vision for the future of sustainable luxury in the fashion industry?

My hope for the future is a system where sustainable and ethical practices are built into every part of the industry. I truly believe luxury fashion has the potential to lead by example, showing that it's possible to combine sustainability with high-quality, innovative design. I hope that the approach we are taking can help to influence the broader industry and change consumer expectations, paving the way for a more sustainable future.