

Shaping the perception of Sustainable Fashion: Power Intervention as Metaphor of Social Media Discourse (Power - government power)

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Abstract:

Social media and government regulations play critical roles in promoting sustainability, but both confront substantial hurdles. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok democratise sustainability talks, yet also face challenges such as greenwashing and consumerism. Governments can incentivise sustainable activities through legislation, but they frequently meet criticism from economic interests and challenges in international cooperation. This study looks at how social media and government interventions influence popular perceptions of sustainable fashion. The study investigates how government organisations disseminate sustainability themes using discourse analysis, interviews with designers, lawmakers, and influencers, as well as content analysis of government and fashion-related posts. The findings suggest that while government programs shape public discourse by portraying sustainable fashion as a societal responsibility, scepticism regarding the genuineness of these messages reveals a trust gap. Governments use social media to influence public opinion through eco-labeling, sustainability certifications, and collaborations with environmentally aware individuals, however greenwashing remains a challenge. Influencers use channels like Instagram and TikTok to fight scepticism by delivering honest, emotional stories that make sustainability more relevant. The study emphasises the importance of transparency in government messaging and proposes that visual content might help make sustainability more accessible to the general population. It provides vital insights on how the government and social media may work together to promote sustainable fashion, as well as recommendations for future eco-friendly garment sector promotion initiatives.

Keywords: Sustainable fashion, government power, social media discourse, public perception, collaboration, visual storytelling.

1. Introduction

The fashion industry, a crucial pillar of the global economy, is under increasing scrutiny for its considerable environmental and social implications, such as excessive carbon emissions, water pollution, and labour exploitation [1]. These challenges are especially acute in the fast fashion paradigm, which prioritises rapid manufacturing and low-cost consumer items, resulting in unsustainable practices that worsen climate change and resource depletion [2]. As people become more conscious of these negative consequences, there is a move towards more sustainable fashion. Sustainable fashion attempts to limit environmental damage, improve ethical labour standards, and foster thoughtful consumerism, fuelled by consumer awareness and legislative actions [3].

In recent years, social media has had a significant impact on public debate surrounding sustainable fashion, offering a platform for consumers, activists, brands, and legislators to discuss and advocate for sustainable practices. The interactive and accessible aspect of social media has amplified numerous voices, allowing individuals and groups to exchange knowledge, criticise unsustainable behaviours, and campaign for change [4]. Social media promotes accountability and transparency in the fashion business through quick transmission, allowing public perceptions of sustainable fashion to be constantly altered and reshaped [5]. Furthermore, platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter have enabled consumers to interact directly with companies and industry practices, encouraging a better awareness of sustainable options and magnifying the conversation about ethical consumerism [6].

Government engagement in the fashion sector has become increasingly important in this discussion, as regulatory agencies around the world establish regulations to enforce sustainable practices and limit environmental damage. For example, the European Union's Circular Economy Action Plan seeks to make products more sustainable and reduce waste, with obvious implications for the fashion industry [7]. Such regulatory frameworks are a sort of "power intervention," requiring compliance while also representing governmental authority in the sustainable fashion narrative on social media [8,1]. As a result, government initiatives have begun to affect cultural ideas of sustainability, with social media serving as a platform for publicising and discussing these policies.

This research investigates the metaphorical usage of governmental power in social media discussions about sustainable fashion. The study aims to better understand how government policies are interpreted, communicated, and modified in digital narratives by analysing social media content and user interactions. This investigation

illuminates the intersection of regulatory authority, social media influence, and sustainable fashion, with the goal of providing a comprehensive understanding of how government interventions not only enforce sustainable practices but also shape public ideals about ethical consumption and environmental responsibility.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Section Headings The Shift Toward Sustainable Fashion

The fashion industry has come under fire for its broad environmental and social implications, notably as a result of fast fashion techniques that prioritise quick production and low costs. These behaviours lead to water contamination, greenhouse gas emissions, and extra trash [1]. The textile sector alone is expected to account for up to 10% of worldwide carbon emissions, significantly contributing to landfill trash and oceanic microplastic contamination [9]. In response, sustainable fashion has evolved as a counter-movement, encouraging ecologically conscious manufacture, ethical labour, and reduced consumption habits [3]. This method promotes greater openness in the sector, encouraging brands to embrace circular economy models that reduce waste and prioritise resource reuse [8]. Sustainable fashion aims to address environmental issues and reform the sector into more responsible practices that correspond with global sustainability goals [1].

2.2 Social Media and Consumer Influence in Sustainable Fashion

Social media is critical in moulding consumer perceptions of sustainable fashion, with platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook serving as important conduits for advocacy and information exchange [10]. Consumers, influencers, and activists use these platforms to expose unsustainable practices in the fashion industry and advocate for better transparency and ethical standards [4]. This democratisation of information enables customers to obtain insight into brand practices, raising awareness of sustainability issues [11]. Notably, efforts like #WhoMadeMyClothes allow customers to hold corporations accountable for their supply chain policies, putting pressure on them to disclose essential information [12].

Furthermore, influencers play an important role in promoting awareness and moulding consumer attitudes towards sustainable fashion. They raise awareness of crucial problems including ethical labour practices and environmental protection by collaborating with sustainable brands or lobbying on their own. The rising discussion

about sustainability on social media platforms has greatly raised customer demand for sustainable solutions, putting pressure on firms to embrace more responsible practices [5]. This dynamic transform social media into an effective instrument for consumer empowerment, increasing brand accountability and pushing more sustainable practices in the fashion sector.

2.3 Government Power in Fashion Industry Regulation

In recent years, there has been a rise in government interference in the fashion business, owing to a growing awareness of its environmental and social implications. The European Union's Circular Economy Action Plan intends to reduce textile waste through eco-design and product durability measures [7]. Furthermore, governments use taxation policies, such as those targeting plastic consumption, to encourage more sustainable practices in the business [4]. Regulatory frameworks are being developed to reorient the fashion industry towards sustainability and reduce its total environmental effect [8].

Given the global scope of the fashion business, international policy cooperation is critical. Frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encourage sustainable practices across nations [9]. Government interventions not only create binding legislation, but also provide voluntary guidance to ensure compliance with environmental and labour norms [2]. The effectiveness of these activities is frequently dependent on consumer knowledge and support; as a result, social media has developed as an important instrument for sharing information about government measures and influencing public opinion. By raising awareness, social media may amplify the influence of these policies, encouraging consumer engagement and accountability, resulting in a more sustainable fashion landscape. As a result, the interaction between government initiatives and customer behaviour is critical in creating meaningful change in the business.

2.4 Social Media as a Platform for Government Power Intervention

Social media has evolved as an effective instrument for empowering consumers while also functioning as a route for government communication about regulatory goals. Governments use platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to promote policies and involve the public, particularly in environmental and social governance [13]. This public interaction promotes openness, which helps to implement sustainability rules and improves accountability in the fashion business.

Regulatory announcements made via social media contrib-

ute to the broader narrative of sustainable fashion, holding brands accountable for their practices [8]. The discourse surrounding these policies reveals intricate power dynamics in the industry, as consumers increasingly scrutinize brands and demand compliance with sustainable standards. Governments, recognizing the significance of public support, aim to enforce sustainable practices through their regulatory authority [6]. This shift illustrates how the combination of governmental power and social media influence can reshape industry standards and consumer perceptions regarding sustainability. By effectively communicating their intentions and policies through social media, governments not only enhance public awareness but also galvanize consumer activism, creating a more informed and engaged populace. Thus, the interaction between social media and governmental intervention serves as a crucial mechanism for driving sustainability in the fashion industry, empowering consumers to demand greater accountability from brands.

2.5 Theoretical Implications and Future Research

The relationship between social media, government intervention, and sustainable fashion is an intriguing area for future research, especially given the current emphasis on consumer behaviour and corporate responsibility while frequently overlooking the role of government power [14]. Future research should look into how government narratives on social media platforms influence public perception of sustainable fashion projects, as well as the potential for these narratives to drive long-term reforms in the sector [15]. Investigating „power intervention“ as a metaphor in digital discourse may provide insights into how regulatory authority is understood and exercised in online settings [16]. This investigation is critical for understanding the dynamic link between governmental authority, social media, and the practices of sustainable fashion firms. Researchers can uncover paths for more effective governmental influence in promoting sustainability in fashion by examining how policy and public discourse intersect in creating industry norms and consumer behaviours [10]. Thus, filling this vacuum in the literature not only enriches scholarly debate, but also informs practitioners and policymakers looking to use social media as a tool for regulatory activism and environmental stewardship.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research approach to look

into how social media discourse influences public perceptions of sustainable fashion, particularly in relation to government actions and their role as symbols of power. A phenomenological method is especially useful for analysing the meanings and experiences people give to sustainable fashion, which are moulded by both social media discourse and government measures. This design allows for the examination of social narratives, metaphors, and symbolic language surrounding sustainable fashion [17]. By focussing on these narratives, the study aims to identify how government influence and social media alter perceptions of sustainability in the fashion sector.

3.2 Data Collection

Data were gathered from Twitter and Instagram, two channels that are essential to discussions about sustainability and government measures in the fashion sector. These platforms were chosen because of their widespread public reach, high levels of user involvement, and frequent use by government organisations and fashion influencers to promote sustainability projects [18]. The study employed a purposive sampling strategy, concentrating on social media posts and hashtags that directly related government initiatives to sustainable fashion, such as #SustainableFashion, #WhoMadeMyClothes, and #EcoFashion [19]. These terms were chosen for their relevance to both government policy conversations and popular consumer discourses about sustainable fashion.

To ensure that the data was representative, 150 postings were collected between 2020 and 2023, including information from government organisations, fashion brands, and sustainability influencers. These postings were chosen for their relevance to government-led activities such as new laws, sustainability certifications, and public campaigns focused on sustainable fashion. The posts were vetted to verify that they accurately represented government rhetoric or responses to sustainable fashion.

In addition to the social media content research, 10 important industry stakeholders were interviewed in a semi-structured format, including designers, fashion influencers, and politicians. These interviews aimed to better understand the perceived importance of government actions in moulding public attitudes towards sustainable fashion, as well as the efficacy of social media in delivering sustainability messages. The interview approach included open-ended questions about the participants' perspectives on government policies, the role of social media in promoting sustainability, and the challenges of public communication. All interviewees provided informed consent forms, guaranteeing ethical compliance, and all interview data was anonymised to safeguard participant

privacy.

3.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to detect and explain reoccurring themes and metaphors in social media discourse, notably those involving government initiatives in sustainable fashion [20]. Thematic analysis is appropriate for this study because it enables the detection of patterns throughout a dataset, with an emphasis on language that represents underlying power dynamics and public mood towards sustainable fashion projects [21]. The investigation included classifying posts and finding themes around government authority, regulatory power, and consumer perceptions of sustainability activities. Codes were organised into bigger themes, such as „government as enforcer“ and „consumer empowerment through social media,“ to show how power is portrayed in the conversation.

3.4 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis was used to investigate how government interventions serve as metaphors for power in selected social media posts. Discourse analysis enables a study of how language creates and reflects societal power structures, making it appropriate for evaluating government depictions in the sustainable fashion discourse [22]. This analysis focused on posts that presented government acts as authoritative, use metaphors and rhetorical language to portray government intervention as a powerful force in creating long-term change.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

All social media data were anonymised to protect user privacy and to follow ethical requirements for online research [23]. Only publicly accessible posts were analysed, and no direct interaction with users occurred. This approach adheres to ethical guidelines for research in public online places, respecting user-generated content while ensuring the validity of the study's findings.

4. Findings and Analysis

The study's findings provide important insights into how government actions influence social media discourse on sustainable fashion. Several major themes emerged from content analysis and stakeholder interviews, demonstrating the dynamic interplay between government narratives, social Media, and popular perceptions of sustainable fashion.

4.1 Dominance of Government Messaging

The content analysis of social media channels revealed a

high prevalence of governmental messages about sustainable fashion. Government-related posts accounted for over 40% of the analysed content, with an emphasis on policy initiatives, sustainability rules, and awareness campaigns. For example, the UK government's sustainable textiles campaign emphasised responsible consumption and recycling, using hashtags such as #SustainableFashion and #EcoFriendly to increase exposure [24]. This study lends support to the view that government institutions actively shape language, defining sustainable fashion as a public obligation and national priority [25].

4.2 The Impact of Social Media on Public Perception

Interviews with stakeholders revealed an agreement that social media is an effective instrument for amplifying government messaging and affecting public perception. Participants stated that social media platforms provide fast access to knowledge and encourage community engagement in sustainable practices. According to one fashion designer, „When the government promotes sustainable fashion on social media, it creates a sense of urgency and responsibility among consumers“ [26]. This is consistent with the findings of Rauth et al. [27], who contend that social media can increase consumer awareness and develop a collective identity focused on sustainability.

4.3 Resistance and Criticism of Government Interventions

While many stakeholders acknowledged the good impact of government efforts, there was also widespread scepticism about their legitimacy and effectiveness. Some participants expressed worry that government statements are frequently unclear and fail to address the intricacies of sustainable fashion, such as labour practices and environmental effect. One influencer commented, „Sometimes it seems like government initiatives are more about image than genuine change. „They should be held accountable“ [26]. This critical perspective is consistent with the findings of Kim and Kim [28], who claim that government actions can be regarded as performative rather than substantive, thereby undermining public trust.

4.4 The Role of Collaboration

Another key takeaway from the interviews was the need of coordination among government bodies, fashion labels, and social media influencers. Participants emphasised the need of good communication and collaboration in creating a more authentic conversation about sustainable fashion. For example, one policymaker stated, „We need to work closely with industry leaders and influencers to create nar-

atives that resonate with the public“ [26]. This viewpoint is congruent with the findings of D'Ambrosio et al. [29], who emphasise the importance of multi-stakeholder initiatives in improving sustainability and increasing public involvement.

4.5 Visual Storytelling as a Mechanism

The content analysis found that visual storytelling is a common method used by both the government and fashion firms to promote sustainability messages. Postings with attractive visuals of sustainable actions, such as recycling or environmentally friendly products, received substantially more attention than text-only postings. This tendency demonstrates the power of visual communication in altering public perception, as emphasised by Prensky [30], who emphasises the function of images in influencing customer behaviour.

6. Conclusion

This study investigates how government actions influence social media discourse on sustainable fashion and how the public responds. The findings indicate that governments use channels such as Instagram and Twitter to promote sustainable fashion as a shared responsibility, boosting awareness through campaigns, eco-labeling, and influencer partnerships. These initiatives involve a wide range of audiences, adding to the expanding discourse around sustainability. Scepticism about the validity of official communications emerged as a major problem, emphasising a disconnect between government initiatives and public trust [28]. This shows that legitimacy in the digital era necessitates openness and constant participation. The study contributes to discourse power theory by revealing how governments use social media to alter public opinion about sustainability.

To build public trust, governments should present clear, verified information, utilise simple language, and promote interactive involvement through Q&A sessions and influencer relationships. Fashion firms must link their sustainability promises with government message while maintaining openness. Influencers should also be wary of greenwashing and confirm their support.

While this study focused on Twitter and Instagram, future research might look into additional platforms, employ quantitative approaches to gain deeper insights, and investigate cross-cultural disparities in government initiatives on sustainable fashion.

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