

SUSTAINABLE FASHION  
**AT THE HEART  
OF CARBON  
NEUTRALITY**



# Introduction

As the environment is progressively gaining global attention, fashion brands are following suit by ensuring their garments are eco-friendly. With fashion names, such as Asos and Primark, recently announcing new sustainability commitments, and celebrities increasingly investing in carbon-neutral clothing, the movement is gaining traction around the world. Accounting for approximately 10% of global carbon emissions, and nearly 20% of wastewater, the fashion industry has made sustainability a key focus in fashion houses, with international designers and companies engaging in sustainability and changing the way they do business.



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In September 2021, Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week gathered experts from business and industry to explore the nexus between fashion

and sustainability for designers and brands, and consumer awareness around buying habits.

# ADSW Web Series, September 2021

In the eleventh episode of the **#ADSW Web Series, "For the Love of Conscious Fashion"**, Corinne Sawers, Associate Partner at McKinsey & Company, spoke of the need for the fashion industry to be sustainable. With a paradigm shift taking place in the world around both climate and, more broadly, hitting against our responsible use of

resources, consumers are beginning to understand the change that is required. "We have to address this," she said. "We don't really have a choice anymore – how clothes are made, how people shop for clothes and the lifetime of clothes, needs to change drastically."



## Corinne Sawers

Associate Partner at McKinsey & Company



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"The startups are a critical part of the system because they develop new technologies or new innovations, which are then either copied or scaled by the current bigger companies, and they also put pressure on bigger companies because they show what is possible and they educate consumers."

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She expressed optimism, along with Katie Brill, Vice-President of Public Relations and Communications at Junk Kouture, although there remains room for improvement. Speaking on the company's target audience – Generation Z, Brill

mentioned their ability to have lasting positive change as sustainability is an inherent part of their DNA. Conversations around the climate crisis as well as the shifts and trends with secondhand shopping and thrift flipping, have made this

generation consider the impact that the industry has, along with their own shopping habits. "As this generation rises, they're making up 40% of the consumers, and they're seeking more sustainable brands and products," she noted. "So big brands have to be aware that this age group is hyper aware

of the environment and how best they have to create consciously because younger people are asking more from brands." From thrift flipping and learning to sew, to upcycling, youth are making sustainable fashion trendy through social media, becoming micro-influencers for change.



### Katie Brill

Vice-President of Public Relations and Communications  
at Junk Kouture



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For Araceli Gallego, Co-Founder at Goshpia, catalysing change will happen from the bottom up, based on a shift in consumer behaviour, which will trigger larger companies to change. But such a move will take time, as many consumers are not ready to embrace the sustainable fashion revolution. Gallego mentioned the need for a push towards educating the young generation to raise more awareness, while policymakers will also need to help and support small and independent

eco-friendly fashion brands, to ease competition with larger companies. In addition, disruptive technologies have a key role to play in the field, with the potential of printing clothes to specific sizing and 3D printing. "The future is going to be more disruptive," she added. "Only 1% of the clothes are recycled and H&M in Hong Kong is actually working on a technology that will help recycling and diving blended materials."





## Araceli Gallego

Co-Founder at Goshpia



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Increasingly, companies are adopting new practices, such as introducing smaller capsules which are 100% sustainable. The Giving Movement, for instance, is positively impacting the environment and humanity by including donations from its sales. All of the brand's fabrics are sustainably sourced and ethically produced, such as its polyester, which is made from recycled plastic bottles, and its

spandex, which is also recycled. "So all the yarns within the fabric are recycled and, every collection, we're innovating more and more," said Kharunisa Suhail, the company's Head of Design. "So we're always trying to find the latest technology within sustainable fabric." The Giving Movement is also working towards creating timeless designs for consumers to wear over a long period of time.



## Kharunisa Suhail

Head of Design, The Giving Movement



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For Goshpia, core values are represented under three S's, namely Slow fashion, which ensures nothing is mass produced, Sustainability, by using organic materials, and Socially responsibility, which

entails ethical fashion and certifying fair wages and trade. "This is how we find brands to be a part of our family," Gallego explained. "With every purchase, we plant a tree as well."

Eventually we want to have a whole forest, and this is very important to try to reach that carbon neutrality." Junk Kouture is also playing its part in sustainability, by offering schools and young students in second level education a free

programme to challenge them to look at waste differently and to create wearable fashion out of nothing but 100% recycled materials, before showcasing their sustainable creations.



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Much work is taking place behind the fashion scene, as research by McKinsey over the last year has found that the two main goals for most leading companies in the industry are to ensure a cleaner production of clothing, and producing less by introducing more circular material flows. "Those are both very hard and much easier said than done," Sawers explained. "The startups are a critical part of the system because they develop new technologies or new innovations, which are then either copied or scaled by the current bigger companies, and they also put pressure on bigger companies because they show what is possible and they educate consumers." She spoke of an interesting relationship between the importance of small companies often leading the way. "It's also about engaging regulators, but none of this is happening enough," she added.

Yet when it comes to shifting consumer habits, the research is promising, as 55% of apparel consumers said that they have made changes in

their behaviour in the last 18 months, with less impact on the environment, and they are willing to buy less volume of clothing. According to Sawers, the importance of newness of fashionability has become much less significant in recent years, which she found to be critical, along with more inherent values of durability and integrity of the brand. "The power of social norms and social stigmas is critical," she said.

As the world continues to shift towards more eco-friendly fashion, key players are emerging within the advancement of sustainability in the industry. Today, H&M are considered one of the largest changemakers within the field, by influencing many consumers and investing heavily in several startups that are attempting to be sustainable with new innovations and fabrics. "One of the four pillars of the brand is sustainability," Suhail said. "A lot of smaller startups, like The Giving Movement and many of the fashion brands that are startups, are creating a desire for a more sustainable wardrobe."

## RECOMMENDATIONS



The important thing to keep in mind is to provide consumers with options that are more sustainable and more environmentally friendly that can help them to make a more conscious decision.



Consumer power is important as they have driven huge shifts in what the large brands are doing so this should not be underestimated.



Everyone has to act together as it will serve as the most influential element, including startups, investors, established corporates, regulators and consumers. At the end of the day, we're all in it together.



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