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## Fast Fashion, Luxury Fashion, and Their Sustainability Efforts

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**Fast Fashion, Luxury Fashion, and Their Sustainability Efforts**

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## **Abstract**

The apparel industry can be divided into two categories, fast fashion, and luxury fashion. It's no secret that the apparel industry has a negative impact on our world in terms of sustainability, greenwashing, pollution, and human rights issues. Although the entire apparel industry plays a role in this, fast fashion seems to be at the forefront of these issues. It is necessary to understand the growth and consumer obsession with fast fashion in order to grasp its negative impact. In the same way, understanding the importance of luxury fashion to the consumer, along with the strides being made by luxury fashion companies to combat the apparel industry's lasting and detrimental impact on our environment. By conducting research comparing fast fashion and luxury fashion, vital information will be gained to call attention to this issue. In order to fully understand the comparable differences between fast fashion and luxury fashion, a specific comparison between the luxury fashion company, Gucci, and the fast fashion company, Shein, will be conducted using tangible reports and available company information. To visually express the damage fast fashion has on the environment, a creative advertisement campaign has been created. This advertisement campaign, in theory, is meant to be from a luxury fashion company urging a fast fashion company to become more sustainable. This research and information are meant to serve as a benchmark for further research to be done and will allow for awareness and attention to be brought to the issue while explaining and addressing two vital components in the apparel industry.

*Keywords: Fast fashion, luxury fashion, sustainability, environment*

## **Introduction**

### *Background and Need*

In today's fashion industry, there are two basic categories from a broad scale: fast fashion and luxury fashion. The phrase “fast fashion” refers to the idea of inexpensive garments that reflect the more expensive luxury trends. Fast fashion had allowed for younger and less profitable consumers to gain access to the luxury fashion world, even though this creates a less sustainable society. A trend will emerge one day, and another trend will emerge the next, creating a cycle (Joy, 2012, para. 1).

Fast fashion is inexpensive, low quality, trendy, quick, and disposable. On the other hand, luxury fashion can be defined as, “established images in the minds of consumers that comprise associations about a strong degree of exclusiveness, selectiveness, extraordinariness, superiority, aesthetics, rarity, price, quality, and many other intangible features and symbolic meanings” (IGI Global, 2022, para. 1). Fast fashion and luxury fashion are not only logistically and fundamentally different, but also different in the way they impact and affect the environment.

It is important to understand all aspects of both luxury fashion and fast fashion. From an environmental standpoint, there are some specific examples that point to luxury fashion having made more diligent strides to combat the effects that their production methods have on the environment. To start, Versace is one of the leading luxury brands in the world, and in 2017, “Versace opened the first LEED-certified store in London on Sloane Street. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification indicates that the store was designed for efficiency, creating a healthier environment for employees and customers” (Fowler, 2020, para. 2). Gucci, another luxury brand of fashion known for their leather goods, have also been transparent about making their own sustainability strides. A. Fowler (2020) explained:

Under Gucci Equilibrium – the brand’s commitment to positive environmental and humanitarian change – it has released a new collection titled “Off the Grid.” This collection in particular highlights the circularity of resources, since the materials are recycled, organic and sustainably sourced. (para 12)

Brands like Gucci and Versace are making attempts to combat the negative effects that the apparel industry has on the environment. Even though there is much more room for improvement, this can be seen as an adequate start to a long road ahead.

Similarly, a highly recognized fast fashion company, Zara, has made statements about their sustainability efforts. Zara and their mother brand, Inditex, have made environmental statements and set high achieving sustainability goals. Even with these promises, there has been no evidence or results showing their alleged sustainability strides. Many fast fashion companies are creating waste, lying about their waste, and lying about their actions to cover up their intentions, just to stay face with the public (Dockrill, 2022, para. 4). Another well known brand that has really made its mark in the fast fashion industry is Shein. Shein is a fast fashion brand that was founded in 2008 but became immensely well known in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world. In-person shopping was at a halt, and for a lot of the world, money was scarce. All these factors made Shein a favorable option due to three components: inexpensive, online, and trendy. A common conception is that Shein is devastating for the environment, but Isobella Wolfe explained it on the website “Good on You”. Wolfe (2021) stated:

SHEIN gets our lowest score of “We Avoid” for the planet. Aside from using a couple of eco-friendly materials here and there, there is no evidence the brand is taking any

meaningful action to reduce its substantial impact on the environment. From hazardous chemicals to carbon emissions, to microplastics, SHEIN is making zero effort. On top of that, brands mass-producing such inexpensive, poorly made clothing perpetuate a throwaway fashion culture simply by existing. SHEIN would have to do a complete 180 to raise its score in this area. (para 4)

Brands like Gucci and Versace are making the strides to combat the negative effects that the apparel industry has on the environment. Even though companies like Zara and Shein have similar ideas to improve their sustainability efforts, there is no long term nor short term evidence they follow through on their promises.

### **Problem Statement**

Just as small strides are being made to increase sustainability in the apparel industry, large strides are also being made to devastate our world. Zara is a highly recognized company with a large following. With brands like Zara and Shein, it's hard for our overall population to have hope that something will change. "Beyond the negative economic impacts of disposing of fast fashion, its creation process is equally problematic, wasting an absurd amount of water and releasing an equally absurd amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere" (Daily Journal, 2022, para 1). Additionally, the problem at hand becomes the fact that these fast fashion companies claim they make sustainability strides, yet they have no actual action to their claims. On the other hand, there is evidence of luxury companies following through with their claims. Even those brands making their very best strides are only making a slight difference. This reality can be defeating for our environment.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purposes of this study were to (1) compare and contrast the approaches to sustainability between fast fashion brand, Shein and luxury fashion brand Gucci, and their sustainability practices and environmental impacts; and (2) to develop a call from luxury fashion to fast fashion urging more sustainable practices in the form of an advertising campaign with information and inspiration gained through a content analysis.

### *Research Objectives*

Therefore, the following research objectives guided this project: Fast fashion and luxury fashion seem to have very different approaches to sustainability and how their products impact our world.

- To compare and analyze different fast fashion brands and luxury fashion brands to increase overall understanding.
- A content analysis will be conducted by comparing one fast fashion brand and one luxury fashion brand to inform the content for the advertisement campaign.
- An advertisement campaign will be created to show results from information gained through the content analysis.



## Literature Review

Comparison between fast fashion and luxury fashion in the literature review will draw specific comparisons between fast fashion and luxury fashion and discuss their differences when it comes to their sustainability practices. Not only will sustainability aspects of both fast fashion and luxury fashion be discussed, but also a deeper dive into fast fashion at its core, fast fashion and its overall environmental effects including sustainability, pollution, and their factory working conditions. Finally, the literature review will conclude by exploring what luxury fashion means to consumers and companies' specific sustainability efforts.

### *Fast Fashion Overview*

To understand what characteristics contribute to fast fashion companies' reputation of lacking sustainability, it is first important to explore how fast fashion works. Fast fashion relies on speed and output. Instead of producing clothing based on winter, summer, spring, and fall, fast fashion relies on a 52-week calendar, creating new apparel for every week of the year. There is no way this can be an ethical or sustainable way of production (Colin, 2022, para. 9).

According to Colin (2022) fast fashion exists on the premise of creating a new trend or fad each and every week of the year. Consumers see these beautiful and creative apparel pieces that are produced by high end luxury companies, but the average person cannot afford most luxury items, let alone multiple items. Additionally, the price of luxury fashion is rising. Daziger (2022) found the following:

The average selling price of luxury clothing and shoes advanced modestly but still rose, from \$648 and \$486 respectively in February 2020 to \$653 and \$521 by May 2021.

However, the price increase of luxury accessories was off the charts, rising from \$456 to \$633, according to data compiled by Dataweave. (para 3 and 4)

The average American cannot afford those rapidly increasing prices set by luxury fashion companies. The next best thing could be to purchase the knock off, the less expensive version, or the item that can be thrown away with no hesitation. Repercussions to these actions must be considered. The fashion industry consumes about 79 billion cubic meters of water every year. They come in second place to agriculture when it comes to water consumption. In 2018, the fashion industry was responsible for 2.1 billion metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions. (Daily Journal, 2022, para 1). These statistics showcase the negative impacts fast fashion has on the environment.

### *Fast Fashion Growth*

Because consumers now have an alternate option to purchasing the high dollar luxury items, the fast fashion industry continues to skyrocket. For example, Bringle (2022) said:

The report, which includes data from a survey of approximately 500 U.S. consumers conducted in June 2022, found that 50 percent of respondents want to buy fashion trends within the same week they discover them. And 40 percent of respondents aged 18-44 said they were willing to compromise brand loyalty to get immediate gratification when shopping for trend items. (para 4)

In other words, Bringle's (2022) findings illustrate that even though it is established that fast fashion has many foundational problems and concerns, most consumers may weigh their options, and choose to compromise their brand loyalty rather than purchasing from the more sustainable company. (para 4)

Until recently, it has been hard to come by inexpensive, trendy or luxury looking clothes, but fast fashion has made that possible, and people are taking advantage of this newfound shopping experience. Another aspect that allows fast fashion to be so successful is their undeniable and prominent online presence and social media impact. Many of these fast fashion companies do not have brick and mortar stores, they only operate through social media and online stores. These days, a consumer can have a whole new wardrobe with just a few clicks on the computer or swipes on a mobile device. “The growth of these brands has amplified with the advent of social media, as digital channels deliver instant access to the latest trends and accelerate the demand for fresh product from consumers” (Bringle, 2022, para. 2). If a consumer is going to purchase a few inexpensive items off the internet compromising brand loyalty, that is an easier investment to make, rather than making a larger investment in-store. Online shopping provides a much simpler way of shopping for consumers.

### *Fast Fashion Environmental Effects*

As previously mentioned, the rapid production of materials, the social acceptability to quickly discard clothes, and their assertive social media impact are the main contributors resulting in environmental hazards associated with fast fashion. However, there are many more details to consider, including sustainability, pollution, and issues related to human rights.

### *Sustainability and Greenwashing in the Apparel Industry*

To understand how fast fashion impacts sustainability, it is important to have a basic understanding of the term. Sustainability in the fashion industry can be defined as “promoting the well-being of people, communities, and the environment” (*What is sustainability in the fashion industry, 2022*). Another common term in the apparel industry is circularity. Circularity

is the idea that clothes will have a second life. Clothes will either be repurposed into new clothing items, therefore using existing fabric and materials, or resold to thrift stores. This concept sounds appealing to many, and it has become so. Unfortunately, circularity is not always consistent in the fast fashion industry. Less than one percent of clothes are repurposed or recycled into new ones. Most garments end up in landfills or incinerated (Jasmin, 2022, para 2). Circularity is a great and sustainable concept in theory, but with fast fashion companies producing up to thousands of new items every week, one percent of recycled garments is a small fraction. Some fast fashion companies have released statements regarding their lack of sustainability and their want to do better. For example, “the Inditex-owned brand recently released its second limited-edition line of sustainable fashion made from captured carbon emissions. Zara again worked with LanzaTech, whose technology turns carbon emissions into fabric to avoid tapping virgin fossil-fuel resources, to produce the capsule of going-out fashion” (Andre, 2022, para. 11). This sounds convincing, but unfortunately there is no proof of action or evidence this is making a difference. This concept is known as greenwashing. According to Robinson (2022), greenwashing is:

When a company or organization spends more time and money on marketing themselves as being sustainable than on actually minimizing their environmental impact. It’s a deceitful advertising method to gain favor with consumers who choose to support businesses that care about bettering the planet. Greenwashing takes up valuable space in the fight against environmental issues, like climate change, plastic ocean pollution, air pollution and global species extinctions. (para 2)

Greenwashing could sound harmless, but it is an unethical practice used by companies to gain investors, clients, and customers who are looking to invest, work for, or purchase from

companies who practice sustainability. It is essentially a company posing to be something they are not.

### *Apparel Production Related Environmental Pollution*

Pollution is a huge environmental issue, and fast fashion has enhanced the problem. Many fast fashion companies use materials that are hard to breakdown, like plastic. They also contain harmful and hazardous chemicals that cause environmental issues that can become irreversible (Jasmin, 2022, para 14). “Past experience of water pollution in rivers around the world shows the immense difficulties—technical, economic and political—of cleaning up hazardous chemicals after release, including the very high expense of restoration programs and the impossibility of total decontamination” (Jasmin, 2022, para 14). Not only is water pollution specifically a problem, but it has also become a challenge in places where garments are produced. “According to the 2016 documentary *RiverBlue* which followed the textile industry’s contamination of China’s rivers, it was estimated that around 70% of China’s freshwater is contaminated by 2.5 billion gallons of wastewater produced by the fashion industry. Unfortunately, this pollution is largely unregulated and continues to occur” (Milton, 2022, para 10). To be more specific as to how the water becomes so polluted, “the main source of water pollution in the clothing production process is the “wet-processing” stage. After cotton has been spun and woven into fabric, it is wet-processed, in which the fabric is dyed, printed, and finished. Not only is this process water-intensive, but it also pollutes water” (Milton, 2022, para 8). So not only does this process pollute huge bodies of water worldwide, but also smaller bodies of water in communities' backyards.

### *Apparel Production Related Human Rights Issues*

It is also important to address human rights issues that takes place in the fast fashion industry. As mentioned earlier, “fast fashion works on 52 [weeks a year]: There's a new season every week” (Colin, 2022, para. 9). Thinking about that logistically, it seems humanly and ethically unattainable. Consumers often make light of the idea that our clothes are produced in foreign countries, but that is a very calculated decision made by fast fashion companies. Companies often use countries like Vietnam, India, and Bangladesh to produce most of their clothing because there is a major lack of oversight in these factories. Many of these factories are unregulated; therefore, these companies do not know exactly what unethical practices could be occurring (Ross, 2021, para 3).

If there is minimal regulation in these factories and production sites, there is no way to be sure these workers are in safe environments. Ross (2021) found the following:

It is estimated that less than 2% of them [workers] make a living wage. This leads to workers living below the poverty line and the European Parliament has even described the conditions of factory workers in Asia as “slave labor”. Many garment workers are working up to 16 hours a day, 7 days a week. The textile industry also uses child labor particularly because it is often low skilled, so children can be exploited at a younger age. (para 4)

This is more than a fast fashion or consumer issue, but rather a human rights issue that relies on individuals' desperation for income, with no other means to do so. The Dhaka garment factory collapse in Bangladesh is an example that illustrates how dangerous working conditions have become. The eight-story building housing multiple garment factories, in addition to a shopping center named Rana Plaza, collapsed six years ago, injuring 2,500 people and killing over 1,000

employees (Epatko, 2018). Epatko (2018) also noted that officials discovered the top four floors were constructed without building permits” (Epatko, 2018, para 1 and 2). These working conditions were so poor that it cost close to 4,000 deaths and injuries.

### *What does Luxury Fashion Mean to Consumers?*

The word luxury could be associated with the word power. Because of their price, luxury goods could tell us how much power or status someone has or even how well off they are. “The luxury we observe today is very much a climax in the timeline of events. Perishing is the era belonging to the possession or ‘thing’. Lucia Van Der Post, former editor of *How to Spend It* magazine, suggests that ‘old luxury’ is a thing of the past, and that people now want to be ‘emotionally touched by their experiences’ along with maintaining strong ideals of ‘sustainability and ethics’. According to experts, ten years from now the market will be fueled exclusively by people’s ‘emotional connections’” (Oliver, 2020, para 8). The word luxury can be associated with timelessness, such as a piece of art that is handcrafted and made to last a lifetime. Although luxury fashion has changed over the years, these pieces are still meant to last. Loeb (2022) explained:

Luxury brands share these features: they are expensive, high quality and long lasting, and have a limited distribution. You can wear a luxury brand garment several years after purchase and still get admiring glances. That’s because the design itself of a luxury garment is often futuristic and pleasing. (para 1)

Luxury has been around for hundreds of years, and fast fashion is just starting to emerge and consequently, adding a new competitor to the apparel industry.

### *Luxury Fashion and Their Sustainability Practices*

With the constant talk of sustainability and how it relates to fashion, the leaders of the luxury fashion industry, such as Hermes and Stella McCartney, have spoken out and shared examples of strides being made. Kruger (2022) discussed how: Not only have fast fashion brands been slow to find eco-friendly materials and sustainable ways to create product, but the luxury industry has also. However, in March 2021, Hermes released luggage made from mushrooms. It was a three year project, showing luxury brands are working to create eco-friendly products. (Kruger, 2022, para. 11).

Thomas (2022) discussed another luxury brand, Stella McCartney, which released a sustainably created option showcasing:

A prototype corset and trousers in Mylo, a lab-grown leather-like material made of mycelium – the root structure of mushrooms – developed by Bolt Threads in Silicon Valley. This spring, she is introducing the Frayme Mylo, a new handbag made out of the same material. She debuted it during her spring/summer 2022 show in Paris in October – the first mycelium to be presented on a runway. (para 6)

Although these processes are trial and error, companies are working hard to try and make a difference.

With countless examples of the negative impact fashion has on the environment, is the issue black and white? Or is there a gray area that still exists between fast fashion and luxury fashion? Luxury fashion companies such as Gucci, Versace, Hermes, and Stella McCartney have been making attempts to create an improved sustainability image for the apparel industry that have clear results. It appears the attempts at the same goal by the fast fashion companies, such as Shein and Zara, have been lacking in results and transparency, otherwise known as



greenwashing. Understanding the motives and history of both sides can allow for a much clearer picture.

### **Development Plan**

The importance of the analysis between fast fashion and luxury fashion is to present a possible explanation of the two sectors of the apparel industry. To understand the difference between fast fashion and luxury fashion requires going beyond a surface level analysis but could help explain the environmental state of our world directly associated with the apparel industry. To then understand what makes fast fashion and luxury fashion so different, a call for change must be made. Considering this, the advertisement campaign was implemented and visually explained the importance of environmental awareness in the fashion industry.

*The following steps were taken to create this thesis project:*

#### *Conducting a Comparative Analysis*

A comparative analysis was conducted in order to allow the reader to fully understand not only the fundamentals of fast fashion and luxury fashion, but their effects, whether beneficial or harmful, on Earth. A comparative analysis can be described as “how data or processes compare to one another and explains how they relate. This provides context for the analysis so the differences and similarities in the relationships between data sets are clear” (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021, para. 5). This included comparing the two sectors’ different roles in the fashion world and their objective meanings to people. An additional goal was to identify specific examples of sustainability, or a lack thereof, between different fast fashion and luxury brands. To gain a full understanding of our environment and the effects that can be had, it was important to look at overall sustainability, pollution, as well as human rights. This was not limited to

exploring the present-day issues, but also the history and growth behind fast fashion and luxury fashion. It was important to gather as many sources as possible to get a subjective view.

### *Developing a Content Analysis*

A content analysis was conducted by looking deep into a fast fashion company, Shein, and a luxury company, Gucci, by researching their individual websites and identifying when and how each brand represents and shows transparency about their own sustainability practices and their environmental support. I will also identify whether brands provide a sustainability statement on their websites and if there is any other information regarding sustainability or their environmental impact on their website to analyze similarities or differences.

### *Developing an Advertisement Campaign*

An advertisement campaign was created to incorporate a more creative aspect to the original comparative analysis and instill a call to action. The reasoning for this was to develop something tangible and result oriented to pair with the background information and research. By using creative skills and the information from the comparative analysis and content analysis, an advertisement campaign poster combination was created using Adobe Photoshop. This was made not just to question the fast fashion ways of production, but to plead with fast fashion companies, explaining there is more sustainable approach to producing fashion.

Making a compelling and persuasive advertisement campaign poster is necessary in order to compel the target audience. This was done by ensuring my advertisement appeal was made to

a specific audience and to avoid broad thoughts and ideas (Mollie, 2022, para. 4). It was essential to market to specifically the apparel industry. This included making the materials visually creative, appealing, and unique for it to stand out. Additionally, the messages within the campaign needed to be persuasive to convince fast fashion companies that becoming more environmentally friendly would benefit their companies as well as satisfy ethical ideals. “Keep in mind that customers buy products and services to satisfy a need. Persuade them that your product or service is the best solution” (*7 things to remember when creating compelling ads.*, 2018, para. 15). This advice was applied by proposing solutions through the campaign messages.

The following steps were followed to create the campaign materials:

1. Identify the audience
2. Select the platform to share the messages
3. Develop messages/materials
  - a. Adobe Photoshop was used to create the advertisement campaign
4. Seek feedback on the messages/materials and address edits

The development of the comparative analysis and the creative advertisement campaign comes together to educate and call for action to be taken. The comparative analysis alone was not enough to show and explain the idea of comparing fast fashion and luxury fashions effect on the world.

Ultimately, this advertisement campaign is meant to be seen on a large scale. Specifically, this would be ideal in a setting like Times Square in New York City or in Las Angeles, California, a fashion hub. Another concept for mass exposure would be a Vogue

magazine cover. This would allow for the audience, fast fashion companies, to see the message on a well-known platform.

### **Result**

While conducting research for both Gucci and Shein and their sustainability efforts, it was important to analyze certain portions of their brand identity and overall website. Both brands mission statements, vision statements, sustainability statements, About Us content, additional value and ethics information, additional website information, as well as any additional websites the brands might have regarding sustainability were considered.

To begin, Gucci's mission statement states, "The company's mission is to become the leader in luxury market at worldwide level" (*Gucci Mission, Vision & Values | comparably, 2024*). Though this does not mention anything about sustainability, we can gather Gucci is a luxury company who specializes in leather. Shein's mission statement states, "To serve as a leader in the industry and bring fashion into the modern era. We are a global fashion and lifestyle e-retailer committed to making the beauty of fashion accessible to all" (*About Us. About Us | SHEIN USA.*). This statement does not mention sustainability either, but explains Shein's goal to serve all people, not just the luxury clientele.

To continue, Gucci's vision statement states, "Gucci is reinventing a wholly modern approach to fashion. Under the new vision of creative director Alessandro Michele, the House has redefined luxury for the 21st century, further reinforcing its position as one of the world's most desirable fashion houses" (*Equilibrium. Gucci Equilibrium Homepage Comments.*). This does not mention sustainability, and further elaborates on Gucci's goal as a brand. Shein's vision statement begins by saying, "Making the beauty of fashion accessible to all" and continues,

“Consumers no longer follow a unified standard of what is considered "fashionable" or "beautiful". We believe that the clothes we wear reflect our personalities and we want to empower everyone to explore and express their individuality. To do this, SHEIN creates a wide range of options to fit any mood or occasion”. Though this does not directly touch on sustainability, Shein’s vision statement does say “SHEIN creates a wide range of options to fit any mood or occasion” (*About Us*. About Us | SHEIN USA.) which adds potential credibility to Shein’s inexpensive and overproduction of clothing. This statement also gives insight into Shein’s goal to reach everyone and allow them to explore their individuality, not just luxury consumers and not just luxury styles and trends.

Moving on, it was relevant to research both brands' sustainability statements. While researching one specific sustainability statement from Gucci, I came across a Gucci website that was tailored to Gucci’s sustainability efforts. This website could be located under the “What’s New” tab on their official website. This website is called *Gucci Equilibrium*, and their primary statement says, “Unifying the principles we uphold and the actions we pursue to treat our world and each other better, for our collective future.” The website continues, “We are reducing our impacts and creating sustainable supply chains to help protect and restore nature for the future” (*Equilibrium*. Gucci Equilibrium Homepage Comments). This website also includes the 2022 Gucci Equilibrium Impact Report that says, “Powered by collaboration and innovation, our 2022 Gucci Equilibrium Impact Report is a testament to our conviction to generate positive change for People and our Planet.” Along with this, the website includes a Plant Statement: “We look at the world around us in a holistic way and believe that it is our duty to be sustainable, responsible and accountable in everything we do. We are dedicated to seriously reduce our footprint along our entire supply chain and embrace climate-smart strategies to help protect and restore nature for

the future. What we can't reduce ourselves, we translate into conserving biodiversity and forests that lessen the impacts of climate change. To share the progress we are making with our community, we are transparent about all the metrics that underpin our ambitious targets that we are striving to achieve by 2025. These goals drive us forward every day to develop eco-friendly sourcing solutions, low-impact materials, manufacturing efficiencies and circular innovations so that we can act for a better tomorrow" (*Equilibrium*. Gucci Equilibrium Homepage Comments). Not only does this website include company sustainability information, but diversity, inclusion, and gender equality information. This website was simple to locate on their official website and included most of their sustainability information on this website. Similarly to Gucci, Shein had a 2021 Sustainability & Social Impact Report that said, "The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a framework for our environmental sustainability and social impact strategy. We support all 17 SDGs, which help guide our priorities and programs, and which will guide our future goal setting and reporting. We are a signatory to the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) and support the ten principles focused on human rights, labor, environment, and anti-corruption." More generally, Shein says, "Environmental sustainability is one of the sectors where the fashion industry needs urgent transformation. We believe that reducing supply chain waste and investing in modern production techniques are key starting points to building an environmentally sustainable industry. At SHEIN, we harness our fully integrated digital supply chain to limit excess inventory, reducing the possibility of production waste. In addition, we attempt to sell unsold or returned inventory at wholesale pricing before donating it to populations in need." They continue by saying, "We have invested in costlier thermal digital transfer and digital direct printing technologies in an effort to reduce water use throughout the production process of SHEIN-branded items" (*Sustainability & Social Impact*:

*Shein USA*). This sustainability information was not at the top of their website but could be found in the bottom left hand corner of the home page. Unfortunately, the link provided to view their actual report gives an error message and is unable to be accessed. On their international website, you can find their Social Responsibility information under “Company Info” at the bottom of their website along with “Help & Support and Customer Care”. Along with the sustainability information provided, there is also information on their efforts to support the community.

Within Gucci’s website, there is also information in regard to Gucci’s values and ethics. Gucci has a Code of Ethics attached to their website. They state, “Placing ethics at the heart of our business conduct is a powerful moral commitment, and the principle of trust is essential to the sustainable development of our business. This culture of integrity is of course based on compliance with laws and regulations, but equally on commitment to the values of the Group. It must be embodied by every one of Kering’s employees in their daily activities, whatever their nationality, location, position, or seniority in the business” (*Gucci Official site United States*). Though Shein did not have an easily accessible published code of ethics, there was a code of conduct that generally states “We (“supplier partner”), as a direct or indirect manufacturer or supplier of certain products, raw materials, or services to the Customer, hereby irrevocably agree and convenient to the Consumer that, during our procurement, production, promotion, sales and disposal of such products or services, we shall comply with the minimum standards set forth in the following code of conduct:” followed by 14 subsections including: “Legal requirements, Employment must be voluntary, Employees must be over 16 years old, No discrimination, Respect for freedom of association and collective bargaining between labor and management, Pay salary on time, No harassment or abuse of employees, Working hours, Workplace health and

safety, Minimize impact on the environment, Audit and supervision, Improvement actions, No Sub-contracting or Partial Sub-contracting, and Date of Effectiveness” (*Shein Supplier code of Conduct: Shein USA.*).

For more concise information, refer to *Table 1* to visualize a summary of the information provided above. The red circle indicates the topic listed did not mention sustainability or was not provided, while the green circle indicates sustainability was mentioned and included in the given topic.

*Table 1*

*Gucci and Shein Comparative Table*

Website/ Media Content	Gucci	Shein
Mission Statement		
Vision Statement		
Additional Platforms		
Available Impact Report		
Plant Statement		
Sustainability Statement		
DEI/Community Related		
Code of Ethics/Conduct		

## Design Process and Creative Works



For my design process, I wanted to create two graphics (Figure 1 and Figure 2) that could be presented together or separate. I also wanted to keep the overall design slightly visually uncomfortable and disturbing yet simple and straightforward so that anyone in the fashion industry would understand the message and call to action. The women in both graphics are black and white, along with the text, to enable the trash to contrast the other elements and project to the audience. For the text, I wanted the message to be stern, powerful, and direct in order to grab the attention of the fast fashion company it is directed towards.

In terms of my specific design process, I used Adobe Photoshop to create both of my graphics and used online photos that I altered to create the graphics. Initially, I created two drafts and sought out feedback before applying my final edits. Finally, I saved both graphics as PDF's and Adobe Photoshop documents to allow for any future edits to be made.

The following steps were followed to develop and complete the creative works:

1. Identify intended audience
  - a. Fast fashion companies and others within the fashion industry
2. Ideal platform/setting
  - a. Large-scale setting would be ideal for this message to be shared. Specifically, the cover of Vogue Magazine or in Times Square in New York City.
3. Manipulating images
  - a. Used online images and adjusted them 40% to make them my own by distorting and adjusting elements to further my message
4. Feedback on the messages/materials

- a. General edits from professors and peers included making the women larger to secure the main vocal point while saturating the trash to amplify its meaning

Figure 1

Sustainability Advertisement Campaign



Figure 2

Sustainability Advertisement Campaign

# IS THIS TRASH TRENDY?



## Conclusion

After analyzing the comparison between Gucci and Shein, it seems there is always more the fashion industry can do to enhance sustainability practices within each individual brand or company. However, the research showed that Gucci has produced more evidence of internal sustainability practices than Shein. Gucci Equilibrium website shows transparency and allows the consumer to conduct their own independent research on their sustainability practices. Shein's website dedicates a portion to explain their practices, but the inability to access their 2021 Sustainability & Social Impact Report and shallow sustainability impact information compared to Gucci is undeniable.

In terms of my first research objective, to compare and analyze different fast fashion brands and luxury fashion brands to increase overall understanding, this was achieved through the comparative analysis, specifically through the literature review, and through the content analysis. The second research objective, to develop a content analysis by comparing one fast fashion brand and one luxury fashion brand to inform the content for the advertisement campaign, was accomplished by comparing fast fashion brand, Shein, and luxury fashion brand, Gucci. Specifically, their mission statements, vision statements, additional platforms, impact reports, plant statements, sustainability statements, DEI/community related information, and code of ethics/conduct statements were all compared and analyzed and dissected. Once this was fulfilled, this information was used to fuel the message of the advertisement campaign. The third research objective, to create an advertisement campaign to show tangible results from information gained through the content analysis, was concluded by using the lack of environmental awareness from Shein, and creating a message that would urge a fast fashion to change their ways and become more sustainable.

Neither brand mentions sustainability in their mission or vision statements, and this is where concern lies. Mission and vision statements are vital when defining who a company or brand is, so when sustainability is not mentioned as their vision or mission, it could be taken as unimportant or as an afterthought.

The advertisement campaign delivers the message from a luxury fashion company to a fast fashion company, urging them to become more sustainable in their practices. Figure 1 and Figure 2 urge for a call to action to go along with the research conducted.

### *Discussion*

Though this creative advertisement campaign is seemingly small scale, the ultimate goal would be for this campaign to be presented on a billboard in a corporate fashion hub such as New York City or Las Angeles. Another large-scale concept would be for the campaign to be featured on a fashion magazine cover, such as Vogue. The creative pieces are meant to create urgency and allowing them to have a large-scale platform would further this goal.

Many sources cited in the literature alluded to fast fashion companies lacking overall sustainability, and my results suggested the same. Though many sources focused on fast fashion, my results show the entire industry has work to do.

### *Limitations*

In terms of limitations in this research, only fast fashion company Shein and luxury company Gucci are researched for the content analysis. To decide which companies that would be used, I wanted to avoid any personal bias. To do so, I chose Gucci and Shein because they are both leaders in the industry in their own right. Additionally, I chose Shein and Gucci because I was not previously familiar with their specific sustainability information on their websites and

other platforms. Though both companies are influential, their practices may not represent the entire fashion industry. Sustainability efforts and environmental impacts can vary among companies, and the study might miss nuances in strategies. With this being said, these findings might not be accurate and applicable in a broad sense. In terms of future research, more companies should be researched to gain a broader understanding of sustainability in the fashion industry.

#### *Recommendations for Practice*

The advertisement campaign could be implemented in a large-scale scenario. Because this campaign is meant to reach a larger audience, as mentioned before, New York City or Las Angeles could potentially be ideal locations for this message to be exposed. The cover of Vogue could also reach a large audience, those who work in the fashion industry and fast fashion companies.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

In terms of future research, more companies should be researched to gain a broader understanding of sustainability in the fashion industry. Using different companies could create a broader perspective and add further insight into the issue at hand. Different brands could also be used to add additional information to the comparison analysis and content analysis; therefore, possibly creating a new message for the advertisement campaign.

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## Appendix A

### Additional Tables

#### Table #2

*Content Analysis Research*

	Gucci	Shein
Mission Statement	“The company`s mission is to become the leader in luxury market at worldwide level” ( <i>Gucci Mission, Vision &amp; Values   comparably, 2024</i> ).	“To serve as a leader in the industry and bring fashion into the modern era. We are a global fashion and lifestyle e-retailer committed to making the beauty of fashion accessible to all” ( <i>About Us</i> ).



Content Analysis Research

	Gucci	Shein
Additional Website Information	<p><i>Gucci Equilibrium</i>: “Unifying the principles we uphold and the actions we pursue to treat our world and each other better, for our collective future” (<i>Equilibrium</i>. Gucci Equilibrium Homepage Comments).</p> <p>(Menu—&gt;What’s New—&gt;Our Commitment)</p>	<p><i>Social Responsibility</i>:</p> <p>View our 2021 Sustainability &amp; Social Impact Report <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p>“The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a framework for our environmental sustainability and social impact strategy. We support all 17 SDGs, which help guide our priorities and programs, and which will guide our future goal setting and reporting. We are a signatory to the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) and support the ten principles focused on human rights, labor, environment, and anti-corruption” (<i>Sustainability &amp; Social Impact: Shein USA</i>).</p>

Gucci	Shein
<p><i>Plant:</i></p> <p>“We are reducing our impacts and creating sustainable supply chains t help protect and restore nature for the future” (<i>Equilibrium</i>. Gucci Equilibrium Homepage Comments).</p> <p>(Menu—&gt; What’s New—&gt; Our Commitment—&gt; Planet)</p>	<p>“Environmental sustainability is one of the sectors where the fashion industry needs urgent transformation. We believe that reducing supply chain waste and investing in modern production techniques are key starting points to building an environmentally sustainable industry. At SHEIN, we harness our fully integrated digital supply chain to limit excess inventory, reducing the possibility of production waste. In addition, we attempt to sell unsold or returned inventory at wholesale pricing before donating it to populations in need.</p> <p>We have invested in costlier thermal digital transfer and digital direct printing technologies in an effort to reduce water use throughout the production process of SHEIN-branded items” (<i>Sustainability &amp; Social Impact: Shein USA</i>).</p>

	Gucci	Shein
Additional Brand Sustainability Websites	<p><b>2022 Gucci Equilibrium Impact Report:</b></p> <p>“Powered by collaboration and innovation, our 2022 Gucci Equilibrium Impact Report is a testament to our conviction to generate positive change for People and our Planet” (<i>Equilibrium. Gucci Equilibrium Homepage Comments</i>).</p> <p>(Impact Report <a href="#">HERE</a> )</p> <p><b>Plant Statement:</b> “We look at the world around us in a holistic way and believe that it is our duty to be sustainable, responsible and accountable in everything we do. We are dedicated to seriously reduce our footprint along our entire supply chain and embrace climate-smart strategies to help protect and restore nature for the future. What we can’t reduce ourselves, we translate into conserving biodiversity and forests that lessen the impacts of climate change. To share the progress we are making with our community, we are transparent about all the metrics that underpin our ambitious targets that we are striving to achieve by 2025. These goals drive us forward every day to develop eco-friendly sourcing solutions,</p>	



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low-impact materials, manufacturing efficiencies and circular innovations so that we can act for a better tomorrow” (*Equilibrium*. Gucci Equilibrium Homepage Comments).

\*The website not only has sustainability information, but diversity, inclusion, and gender equality information\*

\*“Key Articles” linked to website sectioned either “People” or “Planet”\*

	Gucci	Shein
Values/Ethics Information	*Found code of ethics*	
Vision Statement	<p>“Gucci is reinventing a wholly modern approach to fashion. Under the new vision of creative director Alessandro Michele, the House has redefined luxury for the 21st century, further reinforcing its position as one of the world’s most desirable fashion houses” (<i>Equilibrium</i>. Gucci Equilibrium Homepage Comments.</p>	<p>“SHEIN is a global fashion and lifestyle e-retailer committed to making the beauty of fashion accessible to all. We use on-demand manufacturing technology to connect suppliers to our agile supply chain, reducing inventory waste and enabling us to deliver a variety of affordable products to customers around the world. From our global offices, we reach customers in more than 150 countries” (<i>About Us</i>. About Us   SHEIN USA.).</p>