

Why transparency of sustainability in the clothing industry will be the thing of the future

Maddyness spoke to Sandra Capponi, Co-founder of 'Good On You'. A startup that rates and showcases the sustainability of clothing brands in an easy to understand system. Allowing the consumer to be aware of the choices they are making and what they are supporting through their purchase.

Consumers are demanding the right to have transparency in both the life line and life cycle of their clothing. More and more people are not only becoming more aware, but demanding more knowledge and transparency into where their clothes are coming from and how they are made.

Much like the 'farm to table' movement of the food industry, clothing or more specifically the disposable nature of fast fashion is coming under scrutiny. How can you be sure you are supporting businesses that 'do the right thing'? Ones that do not employ child labour, or test on animals, use harmful chemicals etc.

Good On You is crunching the data and working with brands to understand how they can create a sustainable product and what they can change and adapt in their practice. To gain further insight into this topic we interviewed Co-founder Sandra Capponi.

[Maddyness] Good On You launched in 2015, do you feel like the consumer appetite for sustainability in fashion has increased in the last year specifically?

[Sandra] In the last few years especially, there have been more and more signs that consumer demand for sustainable fashion is on the rise. The majority of people now say they would pay more for sustainable products, and they're putting their money where their mouth is.

Global fashion platform, Lyst recently reported that their sustainability-related searches increased by a massive 75% in 2019, compared to the previous year and 37% since the start of 2020. The sheer growth of consumers who are actively using our digital platforms to find and buy from sustainable brands has increased and has even become accelerated since the COVID-19 crisis. We actually saw a 20% monthly growth in sessions from April to June, and a doubling of conversions as the pandemic drove consumers to be even more motivated to shop sustainably.

Luxury retailer Farfetch, who use Good On You ratings to power their Conscious Edit, are also seeing a stronger sales growth of sustainable brands compared to the rest of their marketplace.

You give brands a rating out of 5 on people, planets and animals, can you explain how much data and information you go through to reach your conclusion on brand sustainability?

Sustainability issues are complex, and information is fragmented; there are hundreds of industry standards and certifications, and no consistent framework for company reporting. We started Good On You because we want to make sustainable shopping easy for people. We created a simple rating to help consumers know the impact of brands on the impact issues that they care about, like environment, labour and animals.

Behind this simplified rating system is a robust process that looks at the widespread impact of the fashion industry. Our ratings technology then aggregates all the leading standards and publicly reported data for a brand. Good On You, considers over 100 sustainability issues, collecting over 500 data points for each brand to arrive at an impact score from 1 'We Avoid' to 5 'Great'.

Why is transparency from brands both important from a social impact perspective and also from a bottom line perspective?

Transparency is really key to Good On You's ratings approach and goes to the very core of our purpose to empower consumer choices.

It's widely accepted that transparency is an important first step on the path to sustainability. It drives accountability for brands, and improves performance over time. Brands that don't take responsibility are facing consumer backlash and risk big losses. Like Boohoo for example, who saw a 20% drop in their share price after recent modern slavery allegations.

But most of all, consumers simply cannot make informed decisions if a brand doesn't share their practices and policies. Brands that don't disclose any information score poorly on Good On You and will eventually lose customers as they switch to those that rate better.

You highlight brands that are doing this really well, can you talk us through some success stories?

There are so many great examples of brands stepping up and proving that sustainability and style can go hand in hand. We've rated close to 3,000 brands so far and over 500 of those score highly, at 4 or 5 out of 5 - each with a unique story to tell.

I love brands like [Outland Denim](#) who keep raising the bar on what it means to create responsible, sustainable fashion. They started out trying to solve one big problem, the trafficking of women in Cambodia, and have evolved over time to be leaders in sustainable denim innovation. They use certified organic cotton

and low impact non-toxic dyes in all of their products, and they trace all of their suppliers to ensure the fair treatment of workers. They're also transitioning their jeans to a leather-free, vegan patch made from jacron paper. That's why we rate them 5 out of 5 for each impact area – people, planet, animals – and 'Great' overall.

Also inspiring are brands like London-based Mother of Pearl and New York's Mara Hoffman which had very different beginnings, steeped in the world of luxury fashion, but have made bold commitments to transform their successful brands and convert to more sustainable practices. I think it's important to acknowledge that sustainability is a process, and it's tough for brands to navigate. We should celebrate progress when it's due and support brands that are sharing their journey.

Micro-plastics is a new part of sustainability that is yet to be addressed fully by the clothing industry. What are you doing as a brand to further this conversation?

The science behind sustainability issues, and the industry's understanding of them, is constantly evolving. To reflect this, Good On You's rating methodology is always evolving too.

We just released an updated version of our rating system, which captures the most pressing, emerging issues in fashion today – including microplastics, which are shed from synthetic fibres and released into waterways, wreaking havoc on the environment. Leading brands are starting to address the issue through their own research and materials' development and we now recognise this in our ratings.

This latest release also looks more closely at fashion's impact on climate change, deforestation, modern slavery, gender equality and animal welfare, as well as how brands responded to the COVID-19 crisis. Fast fashion brands are now penalised for their wasteful business models, while innovations in the circular economy are further rewarded.

The future for Good For You seems bright. What are your long term goals? What can we as consumers do to help our planet and buy sustainably?

Up until now we've been focussed on scaling our ratings algorithms and building consumer trust in our brand. There are currently over 700,000 monthly users of Good On You, and this number is growing rapidly! So, we are ready to bring our solution to millions more.

We're also now widely recognised as the industry standard for sustainability, and so we're gearing up to work with more fashion retailers who want to leverage our credible ratings to connect with their own customers on these issues. Longer term we plan to expand to other consumer verticals, like beauty, where the issues are similar and consumers' appetite for sustainable alternatives is just as strong.

Consumers have a huge role to play in driving better outcomes for our planet. It's their spending power that ultimately incentivises business behaviour. With the power of consumer choice there's a real opportunity to create a sustainable future in fashion, and beyond.

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