

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

65pc of consumers want fashion brands to commit to CSR: report

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More consumers expect fashion brands to use ethically sourced materials. Image credit: Stella McCartney

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Today's consumers expect companies across sectors to be committed to social responsibility, particularly firms in the fashion and personal care industries.

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According to a new report from Clutch, 65 percent of shoppers believe fashion companies should embrace corporate social responsibility. Brands also need to discover opportunities to share their ethical commitments with consumers.

"People expect businesses across all industries to commit to corporate social responsibility, no exceptions," said Toby Cox, content writer at [Clutch](#), Washington, D.C. "With the rise of social media and the Internet, people expect greater transparency from companies and want to know where products came from, how they were manufactured, how the materials were sourced and how the company treats its employees and host communities.

"This reflects the age of the socially-conscious consumer and people's desire to support companies that share their values," she said.

Clutch surveyed 420 U.S. consumers for its report. More than a third, 35 percent, of respondents were between ages 18 and 34.

Responsible standards

Shoppers have high expectations for how the fashion sector handles social responsibility.

Fifty-eight percent of respondents feel that fashion brands should commit to using ethically-sourced materials. Companies should also aim for recycled or locally-sourced products, according to a respective 48 and 42 percent of respondents.

One brand that is taking its commitment to sustainable sourcing a step further is U.S. jeweler Tiffany & Co., which is disclosing the origins of its newly sourced diamonds to customers.



Tiffany and Co. puts sustainability under a magnifying glass. Image credit: Tiffany & Co.

Tiffany's Diamond Source Initiative will let customers know the country where their stones were mined, with plans to allow consumers to trace the production journey of the diamonds from mine to retail by 2020 ([see story](#)).

A minority of respondents, 29 percent, believe brands should ban use of fur in their products, and 23 percent believe brands should discontinue use of leather.

Although exotic furs have long been associated with luxury, more brands have been vocal about going fur-free. Fashion labels Prada and Burberry are among the latest to draw attention to their use of fur ([see story](#)).

Additionally, 64 percent of respondents believe the health and beauty sector also needs to commit to corporate social responsibility.

In the same manner as fashion, consumers interact with personal care products on a daily basis. This long-standing relationship may explain why people have higher expectations for those industries than others.

Clean beauty is becoming another key word within the personal care industry as sustainability and wellness take over in all aspects of retail, and luxury retailers are some of the first to take it on.

Both Barneys New York and Bloomingdale's are among the luxury brands and retailers who are hoping to capture the wellness-conscious beauty consumer with new concepts ([see story](#)).

Clutch also found that 52 percent of consumers expect corporate social responsibility from travel brands they patronize.



Peninsula Hotels is among the luxury hospitality groups cutting back on plastics. Image credit: Peninsula Hotel

Hospitality groups such as the Peninsula Hotel and Marriott International have been increasingly transparent with their guests about their newest sustainability efforts, which aim to benefit people and the planet. Environmental efforts do ultimately impact brands' bottom lines, whether through additional expenses or appealing to more travelers ([see story](#)).

Consumers' shared desire to incorporate healthfulness and eco-friendliness into their lives is also evidenced in the topics they talk about on social media. They are additionally seeking out ways to make their fashion greener, with topics such as durable goods and sustainable fashion popping this past year ([see story](#)).

"Luxury brands are uniquely positioned to make an impact due to their high-level of recognizability and the fact they

tend to have an intensely loyal customer base and large social following," Ms. Cox said. "These brands also tend to be global, having customers and followers throughout the globe and also relying on a global supply chain, which opens up a lot of opportunities to speak out on matters that are relevant to their brand and the wider global community."

Tech responsibility

The technology sector faces its own challenges regarding corporate social responsibility.

Seventy-two percent of consumers believe the priority for tech companies should be protecting personal data.

Due to the growth of the Internet of Things, privacy will likely turn into a luxury item in the future, with consumers trading data for ownership in goods.

Personal information has now shifted to mean behavioral data instead of simply an individual's social security numbers, name and more. The true value will be when businesses start to apply machine learning to these data points and be able to predict how consumers will react in the future and how to get them to buy services and goods.

For businesses, this vast data mine can be helpful, but for individuals there are many drawbacks and concerns ([see story](#)).

Complaints and protests against social network Facebook continue to reemerge on other social media platforms following negative press.

Concerns about Facebook's revenue growth and a steady stream of data privacy controversies have contributed to the company's stock falling 40 percent from its record high. The social network is still recovering from the Cambridge Analytica scandal, accusations of disinformation and high-profile departures.

Experts, however, caution against luxury brands giving up on the still-powerful platform ([see story](#)).

"Luxury brands are highly visible and recognizable, which means people are watching and won't show mercy if a luxury brand suddenly becomes the center of attention for being socially irresponsible," Clutch's Ms. Cox said. "If that's not reason enough to be transparent about social responsibility, luxury brands should consider what defines value and makes their products so valuable to customers."