

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Luxury must be green or it is not luxury: Agatha Ruiz de la Prada

May 29, 2019



Alternatives such as clothing rental are making fashion more eco-friendly. Image credit: Panoply

By SARAH JONES

MADRID To drive a sustainable overhaul of the fashion business, the focus needs to be on consumer education, getting shoppers to buy less but buy better quality clothing.

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During a panel at the FT Business of Luxury Summit on May 21 moderated by *Financial Times* Paris correspondent Harriet Agnew, speakers pointed out the ways in which their companies are working to extend the lifecycle of fashion. Whether through repeated rental wears, long-term ownership or the circular economy, luxury is playing a part in helping the fashion business become greener.

"Luxury must be green or it's not luxury because the concept of luxury has a lot of relation with the green issues," said fashion designer [Agatha Ruiz de la Prada](#).

Lengthened lifecycle

Ingrid Brochard, cofounder of rental service [Panoply](#), noted that consumers only wear a small portion of their wardrobes. With social media, there is also a growing desire to not be photographed twice in the same look.

Clothing rental solves both issues, allowing garments to be worn about 40 times by different individuals. Women are more willing to rent for special occasions or pieces they know that they will only want to wear once, and the stigma against renting is dissipating.

"We have to take conscience of each production of clothes as an impact on the environment," Ms. Brochard said. "As we say, we buy more and more clothes, we wear less and less. But each production, whether fast-fashion or designer, is a disaster."

Along with tackling the issue of unworn pieces, Ms. Brochard sees rentals as enabling more consumers to buy into luxury fashion and experiment with their fashion. Whereas a consumer buying a garment may opt for a neutral hue, rental enables them to play more with color since it is less of a commitment.

Panoply is working to forge more partnerships with brands. In addition to buying merchandise similarly to a department store, the rental service is also in talks to get inventory from labels.

Along with the sharing economy, the circular economy is also growing in fashion. Secondhand luxury platform [Vestiaire Collective's](#) CEO Max Maximilian Bittner explained how the company is focused on extending the lifecycle of fashion through resale.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

Our #WCW this week is a French icon. Last name Kelly. First name Herms.

A post shared by Vestiaire Collective (@vestiaireco) on May 22, 2019 at 10:16am PDT

Instagram post from Vestiaire Collective

Mr. Bittner sees the potential for consumers to have a digital wardrobe, which will inform them of both what they have actually worn and the value of the pieces that they own.

The executive believes there has been a shift in how luxury brands look at the secondhand market, with companies considering resale less of a threat. Mr. Bittner sees an opportunity for brands to educate consumers on aspects such as secondhand value at point of purchase, similarly to how a car buyer would know the resale value of their vehicle.

Vestiaire Collective recently dropped its commission rates and prices by about 10 percent in an effort to attract more buyers and sellers.

With this change, which went into effect on April 10, Vestiaire Collective aims to help consignors sell merchandise faster and make luxury merchandise more accessible ([see story](#)).

Designer Agatha Ruiz de la Prada has a long history of supporting sustainable practices and environmental activism. When she originally talked about being eco-conscious decades ago, it was ignored, but today, sustainability has

come to the forefront.

The designer sees the need for consumers to invest more in fashion, buying fewer pieces that cost more and last longer.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

Por fin ha llegado nuestra nueva coleccin de zapatos! Ya disponible online y en #InstaShop
#agatharuizdelaprada

A post shared by Agatha Ruiz de la Prada (@agatharuizdlprada) on Apr 24, 2019 at 5:14am PDT

Instagram post from Agatha Ruiz de la Prada

Echoing the idea of extending the lifecycle of fashion, Ms. Ruiz de la Prada sees the potential to rent out some of her dresses, since they would otherwise likely only be worn once.

Consumer changes

Rather than being a burden, making moves into sustainability can boost a company's business, but getting consumers on board will be key to achieving green goals.

During the Apparel Importers Trade & Transportation Conference on Nov. 7, a session on sustainability delved into both the ways that brands are innovating as well as the challenges they are facing. From alternative textile sourcing to employee engagement, companies are rolling out initiatives across their operations, but beyond their own supply chain, they should be thinking about a product's post-consumer life ([see story](#)).

The last stages in a product's lifecycle are often among the most wasteful, since consumers today purchase more

clothing than before and more frequently discard garments. Per Fashionbi's "[Sustainability In The Fashion Industry](#)" report, brands can play a role in shifting consumption patterns through awareness initiatives and a focus on creating better quality, longer lasting fashion ([see story](#)).

"If as a brand you charge high premiums for the quality and work that you do I think it's in the brand's interest to educate consumers that there's a real value above and beyond the branding in the resale value that you have," Mr. Bittner said.

"Why do people pay double the price for a BMW versus a Peugeot besides the obvious reasons?" he said. "It's the fact that the BMW just has a better resale price after two or three years.

"If us as companies or participants in the ecosystem can convince consumers that what they're doing is not just consumption but investing in something which has a value afterwards, then it's a sensible decision to shift consumers' behavior."

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