

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Desire for sustainable fashion spans all generations

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Antibad focuses on sustainable fashion. Image credit: Antibad

By SARAH RAMIREZ

More than half of consumers want fashion brands to be more sustainable, but they have differing ideas on how the industry can become more environmentally responsible.

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About one-third of consumers would pay more for a product from a brand that they believe is committed to sustainability, according to a new "[Sustainability in Fashion Retail](#)" report from ecommerce platform Nosto. Interest in sustainable fashion remained consistent across genders and age demographics.

"Preference for sustainability was consistent across age groups," said Matthew Levin, global head of marketing at [Nosto](#), New York. "There is this general belief that millennials and Gen Z are significantly socially and environmentally conscious, but it's clear that not only is that not true, but that on the whole all age groups have similar preferences.

"Interestingly, male consumers showed a slightly higher desire for the fashion industry to be more sustainable, but had less preference on almost every suggestion for how to actually make the industry more sustainable," he said. "It could be that female consumers who are closer to the fashion industry are generally more pragmatic when it comes to the realities of the tradeoffs in sustainability, but those that are committed feel more strongly about it relative to men."

Nosto's study is based on a survey of 1,000 consumers in each the United States and the United Kingdom conducted in April 2019.

Sustainable shopping

Although fashion brands and retailers have become more vocal about their sustainability practices, they are not engaging with environmentally-conscious consumers to their full extent.

Forty-five percent of respondents reported that it is challenging to know which fashion companies are truly committed to sustainability.



Stella McCartney is one of the most visible environmentally-friendly luxury labels. Image credit: Stella McCartney

Six in 10 consumers believe that brands can be more effective in promoting sustainably-made clothing.

Among strategies that brands can employ is spotlighting sustainable products when consumers are online shopping. Nearly three-quarters of respondents believe that clothes need to be clearly labeled when made in an environmentally-responsible fashion.

Thirty-five percent of consumers interested in sustainable clothing would also be interested in influencers and celebrities promoting these products, including 51 percent of consumers between 18 and 24 years old.

With the popularity of online shopping, packaging is one of consumers' main concerns. Seventy-five percent believe that fashion brands should work to reduce the amount of packaging, including 76 percent of respondents older than 65.

More than 70 percent also believe retailers need to provide fair working conditions, use renewable and recyclable materials and design clothing meant to last longer. Sixty-four percent of consumers believe brands need to reduce use of resources including power, water and textiles.

Despite 52 percent of consumers wanting a more sustainable fashion industry, less than 30 percent would pay more for a "sustainable" version of an identical clothing item. Instead, more than 60 percent of respondents believe brands should offer discounts on sustainable apparel.

Consumers apply eco-friendly tactics in other ways.

More than half of respondents admit to keeping clothing for longer because it is better for the environment, including 64 percent of consumers above 65 years old. This was followed by 61 percent of respondents between 45 and 54 years old.



The RealReal works to extend the lifecycle of luxury apparel. Image credit: The RealReal

Not publicly committing to sustainability can be costly to fashion brands.

Twenty-eight percent of all respondents would stop purchasing from a brand if it was revealed to not be committed to sustainable practices. Shoppers between 35 and 44 years of age were the most committed to this strategy, with 33 percent willing to reject a brand.

Sustainable marketing

As fashion labels introduce more transparent and stringent environmental standards, some are also taking care to mention sustainability values in marketing efforts.

For instance, British fashion brand Stella McCartney headed to the highlands of Scotland for its winter 2018 campaign.

The campaign featured lush photography and video set in the natural landscapes of Scotland, with models frolicking in the meadows to a frenetic bagpipe score. This effort married the brand's eponymous founder's sense of design with her commitment to preserving the environment and nature ([see story](#)).

Communications firm BPCM is responding to the need for sustainability-focused strategies with the creation of a dedicated division. The PR company, whose clients include fashion and luxury leaders such as Four Seasons, Oscar de la Renta and David Yurman, is committed to helping brands set and meet their environmental goals ([see story](#)).

"It's pretty clear that sustainability preferences are relatively consistent across age groups, so luxury brands that position themselves as sustainable would be wise to not make it an age-group specific strategy," Mr. Levin said. "Likewise, there are some noticeable preferences on certain sustainable areas that brands should focus on that resonate more with certain consumers.

"Women have the strongest preference for provide fair pay and good working conditions,' and both men and women scored highly on reduce the amount of packaging' and use renewable and recyclable materials,'" he said.

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