

SUSTAINABILITY

UN publishes Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook

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The report aims to assist fashion communicators in aligning their missions with global sustainability targets. Image credit: Shutterstock

By AMIRAH KEATON

In an effort to foster an urgent transition away from unsustainable patterns of apparel consumption, experts are offering a new resource to the industry's most influential voices.

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The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the U.N. Climate Change-convened Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action have released the **Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook**, aimed at assisting fashion communicators in aligning their missions with global sustainability targets. The groundbreaking guide arms the sector's insiders with messages that may transform consumer-facing actors into agents of change in the fight to advance circularity.

"There is so much power in the stories fashion tells," said Daniel Cooney, director of communication at UNEP, in a statement.

"If the fashion sector is to meet its sustainability targets, we need its enormous marketing engine to redirect its efforts toward sustainable consumption," Mr. Cooney said. "But there is a notable void for participation in this change from communication stakeholders.

"The Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook provides the practical guide that is needed."

The Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook was informed by a joint consultation with 160 global industry stakeholders as well as an in-depth peer review process, for which Fashion Charter signatories members include conglomerates such as LVMH, VF Corporation and Kering, as well as luxury brands and suppliers took part.

Sustainability's stakeholders

The Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook turns its attention toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on climate change, positioning both agreements as the industry's north star.

When considering fashion's role and responsibility in generating between 2 and 8 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, the need for support becomes clear. Excess emissions are, unfortunately, not the only factors at play.

Focusing on environmental and social factors, the report's findings are prefaced by the fact that ample pollution, water extraction and biodiversity impacts, including 9 percent of annual microplastic losses to oceans and the use of 215 trillion liters of water per year, are fueled by apparel production.

"The fashion industry recognizes the changes it needs to implement are systemic," said Ina Parvanova, director of communications and engagement at U.N. Climate Change, in a statement.

The Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook goes live

"Shifting consumer behaviors and confronting the role marketing and storytelling play within this are crucial," Ms. Parvanova said. "The Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook was developed in consultation with fashion stakeholders looking to effect change at this level.

"It not only provides a framework for addressing the Fashion Charter's commitment [to] communication, but in doing so gives practitioners around the world the means to support the industry's wider sustainability goals across environmental and social issues."

Presenting a number of practical strategies for fashion communicators to take action, the playbook gets into the weeds with tips to counter misinformation, reduce messages that perpetuate overconsumption, redirect aspirations toward sustainable lifestyles and empower consumers to demand greater action from businesses and policymakers, which make up the four main areas of recommended focus for this cohort.

In a near-direct callout of fast fashion fans, authors also flip what has become a production-focused script to one of consumption, a notion that fashion's largest markets must grapple with, manufacturing aside.

European Parliament also backed legislation to put an end to the wasteful practice earlier this month ([see story](#)).

As what the organizations call "key enablers in transforming the entire textile value chain," naming marketers, brand managers, C-Suite executives, educators, image-makers, publicists, members of the media, stylists and other communicators outright, a list of "do's and don'ts" are additionally provided.

Fashion forward

In order to reach the Paris Agreement's 1.5-degree goal, the United Nations entities encourage fashion employees to first lead with science, sharing evidence-based information more transparently while following regulatory policies.

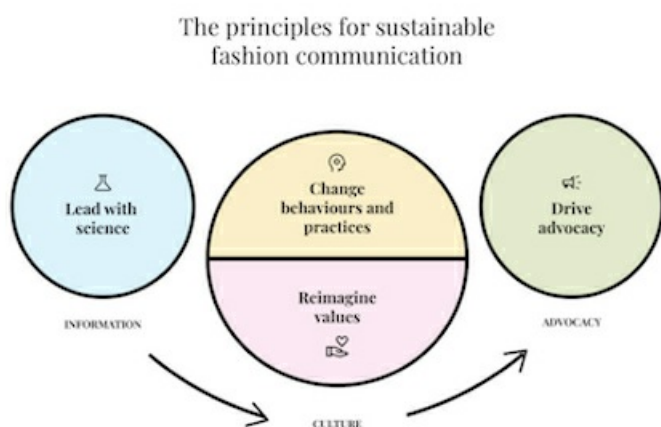


Image credit: UNEP/Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action

The report's next call to change behaviors and practices involves championing lower-impact shopping options and sustainable alternatives to the acquisition of new wear, supporting this shift with reimagined values, which entails "actively seeking to separate the belief that consumption and ownership lead to happiness and success.

Finally, an ask to drive advocacy folds in the use of one's platforms to motivate consumers as they embark on the pursuit of true citizenship, supporting dialogue with policymakers in the process.

"The balance between the science of sustainability and reimagining the fashion narrative is where communicators can excel," UNEP's Mr. Cooney said, in a statement.

As far as implementation is concerned, plans to administer support on an ongoing basis are led with the introduction of a master class in which fashion communicators will be able to learn more about how to adopt Playbook principles in their practice, according to the UNEP and Fashion Charter.

"Importantly, [The Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook] highlights how there is scope for huge creativity to envision and realize the world we want to live in," Mr. Cooney said, in a statement.

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