CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

There are many concerns regarding the numerous environmental and social impacts the fashion industry has created in the last decade. In 2020, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) shared a global sustainability report, in which they stated concerns towards the environmental impacts of the fashion industry. Particularly, due to the industry's high involvement towards the production of chemical pollution, excessive waste, such as land filling, and high carbon emissions during the production process. In 2018, it was estimated that the industry contributed 2-8% of the global carbon emissions, and if left alone, it was expected to increase by 2.7% in 2030 (Berg et al., 2020).

The problems arise due to the production and consumption behavior shared between actors in the fashion industry. The rise and involvement of the *fast fashion* phenomenon in 2010 also plays a significant role. The phenomenon has encouraged fashion brands to create and produce more 'trendy yet affordable' clothes with various designs and styles that change every season, or even weeks. The rapid production process of the industry has resulted in numerous issues, both socially and environmentally. The cheap prices of clothing produced by fashion brands are oftentimes deemed to be unethical, intentionally or not, especially during the production process. In order to maintain the 'cheap' or 'affordable' image, certain fashion brands would hire lower paying workers to minimize its manufacturing cost. While environmentally, the fast paced production process

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would result in the overproduction of clothing, not including the short usage period of the clothing which created a mountain worth of discarded clothes piling up.

McKinsey & Company shared their reports in 2020 regarding the estimated carbon footprint that the fashion industry generated in 2018. It was stated that over 70% of the emissions were generated from the upstream activities, which includes materials production, wet processing, and fabric preparation. While the other 30% were generated from downstream activities, such as retail operations, the use-phase, and end-of-use activities.

On the other hand, fast fashion has also influenced consumers' consumptive behavior as it encourages them to purchase more 'new, trendy, and affordable' clothing that follows the current trends. In the process of fulfilling the consumers' needs, brands have often put little to less attention towards the environmental impacts the businesses created. Big brands, such as Zara and H&M, have been frequently mentioned in previous researchers as famous brands who conducted such behavior, especially when these brands are the ones who initiated the *fast fashion* trends in the 21st century (Tokatli, 2008). These brands would often produce a large sum of clothing items in a short period of time to keep up with the trend created at the time. Which resulted in the creation of what is known as a 'single use clothing', based on the consumer's preference of purchasing affordable clothing that came in various designs and sizes, and always on point of trends. Thus, in the long run, it resulted in various environmental and social issues. Environmentally, the dyeing process of clothing would result in water contamination with a high probability of its toxicity reaching and getting

consumed by humans, which enter through the food chain. While socially, the process of fast production would often be associated with the unethical treatment of workers, such as long hours of work but low workers wages.

Fortunately in recent years, concerns and awareness towards climate change and sustainability have somehow increased during the Covid-19 pandemic (Lee & Weder, 2021). Which has resulted in the increase of consciousness regarding the current environment conditions and its association with the fashion industry, which is known to be the third largest contributor to the world's Greenhouse Gas emissions. In addition, Brydges et al. (2020) also explain the opportunity or possibility of the pandemic in the creation and change of the current business models of the fashion industry towards more sustainable models. Particularly, in the five aspects of the fashion industry. They suggested that instead of pausing the sustainable initiatives, the fashion industry should use the time "to reflect, retool, and rebuild a more inclusive, as well as environmentally and socially sustainable, industry" (2020, p. 304). Thus, such awareness is shared between both the brands and consumers. Particularly, with consumers demanding large fashion brands to rethink their business strategy by going more green and becoming more sustainable. Wren (2022) added that, "after a series of exposés and controversies surrounding fast fashion's impact in the early 2010's, fast fashion leaders have adopted various sustainability initiatives and claimed to be more "eco‑friendly". Initiatives like the use of eco-friendly materials and natural dyeing are often done by several large fashion brands. They have also provided other alternatives for consumers to recycle their clothing to minimize the fabric waste.

Thus, to provide more concrete proof to the customers regarding their green initiatives, some brands have shared & communicated the result of their actions through the publication of reports & social media posts that consists of various information about the material the brands use, the production process, and the end process. This is done to convince the brands' loyal audiences regarding their movement and ideal goals to maintain sustainability through their products by making sure that their product or brand has followed the correct procedure as a sustainable fashion brand.

These reports are shared through the brands' various media platforms, and mostly digital. It is done so to adjust with the current era that has gained easy access to the internet and the current preference of people who mostly access information through their phones, tabs, or laptops. Thus, many brands have adjusted to the audience's behavior and shared their green progress through both their websites and social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Along with the increase of interest & usage of social media, particularly Instagram worldwide. It is then decided that Instagram posts will become the main source of data to analyze in this research, especially with the brand's Instagram account accessibility & trackable history.

Focusing on one of many topics under sustainable fashion, the researcher had chosen to analyze the topic regarding eco-fashion and green communication that has become quite a topic in the discussion of sustainable fashion. Green communication and transparency are found to be important in the industry of sustainable fashion as it portrays the brands' value and goal, including their credibility as a labeled 'eco-fashion' brand. The writer has realized that brands'

communication through digital platforms have become a huge part of the brands'
branding process and analysis on the social media contents are important in
knowing and proving that Everlane has applied the motive of green
communication or just focusing on creating a brand image that focuses on green
fashion to gain more interest and attention from the audience, especially with the
current trend of "sustainable fashion" going around since 2020.

The issue of climate change has also become one of the many reasons that
influence the trend and people's awareness. As it has become the main concern in
the past years, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lee & Weder (2021)
stated that in Australia, there is an increase of attention in the emergence of
eco-marketplace during COVID-19. In their research, they also explained the
importance of that slow fashion, also associated with sustainable fashion. They
stated that it is more than just a concept and has become the current trend of
self-expression, and the increase of awareness regarding sustainability in the
fashion industry and the society. Thus, it makes it more urgent to analyze brands'
credibility based on their social media posts, especially through Instagram due to
the increase of digital users and the way that its algorithm would easily reach
large audiences around the world. Particularly, the visual and text elements that
are used by brands when delivering their vision and mission because both of those
elements possess the ability to construct persuasive messages and able to entice
the audience to do something, in this case urging customers to do something
sustainable with the brands or making some donation through purchasing the
brands' products (Al-Subhi, 2022).

Everlane was chosen to be the main object of analysis for this research. The main reason being the brand's constant claim and value of being "radically transparent". The brand has oftentimes communicated their initiatives and activities of collaboration with other organizations through their digital platforms in the form of reports or a variety of social posts in their website and social media. In one of the brand's social media accounts, Instagram, it has posted several contents related to their annual reports regarding their sustainable initiatives.

There were three relevant articles that discuss the way fashion brands' usually communicated their sustainable activities to their audience through digital platforms, particularly social media, throughout different countries (Reilly & Larya, 2018; Lee & Weder, 2021; Brydges, Henninger, & Hanlon, 2022). The articles showed that in recent decades, with the audience' increase interest towards the use of social media, fashion brands have then shifted their way of communicating their green campaigns and initiatives to mostly digital in order to gain dynamic interactions between the brands with the audiences.

Previous study by Wren (2022) was conducted to analyze the SSCM practice, which is a part of many sustainable initiatives that fashion brands could do, done by two major fashion brands, H&M and Everlane. The research was done through an in-depth analysis of the brands' websites, particularly the clothing lines and reports regarding their operation and production process. Although similar, previous research has not analyzed the way Everlane communicates or reports their sustainable initiatives through their Instagram account, which is done by analyzing the text and visual contents of relevant posts. Thus, in order to analyze the Instagram posts that were chosen, the writer will use two linguistics

theories, the social semiotics theory by Kress & Van Leeuwen and transitivity theory by M.A.K Halliday. Some relevant articles were found that used similar methods to analyze text and visual objects (Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017; Al-Subhi, 2022). Thus through this research, the writer focuses on analyzing Everlane's sustainable reports shared through their social media, particularly Instagram posts, to understand the brand's way of communicating things and to know how "transparent" they have exactly been according to what they have claimed to be. The research will be done by analyzing the text and visual contents of relevant posts.

1.2 Research Question

How did Everlane use texts and visual elements to communicate the brand's green campaigns through their Instagram posts from 2019 - 2023?

1.3 Purpose of The Study

The purpose of this study is to identify Everlane's method of communicating the green campaigns to their audiences using texts and visual elements through their Instagram account from 2019 to 2023.

1.4 Scope of The Study

This study focuses on analyzing the visual and textual aspects of Everlane's Instagram posts from 2019 to 2023. From the overall posts in Everlane's Instagram account, there are 5 single posts selected for this research. The posts were selected based on the content of information, which is about the brand's green campaigns, with the highest engagement. The visual image in the

post is analyzed using social semiotics theory, while the text in the image and the caption is analyzed using transitivity theory.

1.5 Significances of The Study

This research is expected to raise readers' awareness on the topic of eco-fashion, particularly the way sustainable brands communicate and inform audiences about their green campaigns through social media platforms. This research will also serve as a reference for social semiotics studies on Instagram posts that discuss green fashion. The author hopes that by reading this research, readers can obtain a deeper understanding of green campaigns that are communicated through image contents using social semiotics & transitivity theory, particularly in the practice of analyzing Instagram posts.