

# Dior's \$146 Straws: How Sustainability Becomes Fashion's Business Drive

Manuel Gultom<sup>1</sup>  
{manuelgultom@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>}

Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** This paper trying to answer the question of how is the global community responding to the global environment threat? In the business context, the awareness of consuming sustainable products is rising. Consumers' awareness toward the products they are using, whether it's the ingredients or the process of production sustainability has changed the businesses into a 'greener' way of operation. We could see that the two sides (consumer and producer) are trying their best to take care of the environment, but in the specific case of Dior the write could also conclude that there is another motive beside sustainability awareness. Dior's product of an expensive set of glass straws could be seen as taking advantage of the trend not to raise awareness but just to bring more and more profits. So the conclusion is that environmental threat could also bring positive impact to globalism, in this context: multinational companies' profit.

**Keywords:** global community, global environment, sustainability

## 1 Introduction

In the current state of globalization, many actors around the world especially in the economic sector didn't put environment to their best interest. Because of this careless actions, human has accelerated the degradation of environment. One of the major environment catastrophe caused by industries either from the North countries or the South countries are productions that are made from unsustainable materials. Plastic waste is the prime example of the industry carelessness. From 1950 to 2010 the gathered data shows that in 1950 alone the world produced 2 million tons of plastics and in 2015 it has multiplied in nearly 200 fold reaching 381 million tons.

Pavani and Rajaswari (2014) explained that plastic, while popular to use because of its flexibility and various ways to produce it is giving negative environmental impacts that are direct and also indirect. Plastic waste becomes a big issue when it comes to marine life. The ocean with plastic pollution do so much harm to the birds, fish, mammals of the sea as the waste mistaken by the creatures as natural food. For example, plastic bags are often mistaken by the sea creatures a squid, and plastic pellets are of often mistaken as fish eggs (Pavani and Rajaswari, 2014). Plastic as a material is also cannot be buried in the soil as it prevents the production of nutrients in the soil. Burning or trying to dispose of plastics is also unsafe as they produce toxins when they are breaking down and then polluted the air, water, and the ground. Pollutants from plastic waste include heavy metals (cadmium and lead) and chemicals (benzene, dioxins, and other pollutants).

The plastic waste phenomenon has raised awareness of the world's population and the trend of using a more sustainable alternative has arisen. As stated by Bekmezci (2015), it's seen today that more consumers are getting more conscious about the environment and are preferring to buy products that responsive and responsible to nature and environment. Environment aware consumers made a huge expectation on companies to keep up with the sustainable and environmental friendly production trend. The main pollutant that the writer is highlighting in this writing is plastic and this paper trying to answer the question of "How is the global community responding to the global environment threat?" and the global community that want to underline here are international companies. The unsustainable trajectory that happened requires a dramatic change in human relationship with the planet (Chapin et al., 2009) and explore the motives of their respond and the impact of environment crisis to capitalism. The main company that observed to set as the main example of this issue is Christian Dior SE as they just launched a rather expensive set of sustainable straws earlier this 2019.

## **2 Underlining Problems**

### **2.1 Sustainability Trend Among Consumers**

In this current age, consumers are more concerned about on the sustainability of the products they eat or wear. Concern about tools they're using to accommodate activities is also growing. In their research about consumers green consumption behavior, Young et al. (2014) discovered that the decision to obtain sustainable products of consumers is consisted of five elements: (1) Green Values of Consumers (2) Choosing the Green Criteria (3) Barriers and Facilitators (4) Product Purchase and (5) Feedback. Based on those elements, the reasoning behind consumer's decision to go green is a mixture of their knowledge of the issue regarding environmental degradation and their knowledge about how sustainable the product that they want to buy (regarding the production process and the ingredients). Saunter & Shin (2019) wrote in their WGSN report that current generation of youth is deeply woven with sustainability as they grew up in the time where the impact of environmental carelessness become more visible. Current generation prefer brands that support positive messaging, sustainability, and inclusivity.

Van Helven (2019) wrote in her article that over 80 percent of Millennials across Canada, the United States, India, Australia, China, and the UK took the importance of sustainable products seriously and they want corporations to operate in a more environmental friendly way. Millennials are also expected to spend 150 billion dollars on sustainable product by 2021. The known positive traits of a 'green' product are easiness to use, longer life spans, easy recyclability, and low environmental impact, these factors point that sustainable products have the main motivators that needed by costumers in order to purchase: value through better quality and lower price (Young et al, 2009). The trend is increasing and reaching a global level but as Clark et al. (2009) concluded, the main demography of green consumers are the ones who live in a developed wealthy nations who have the luxury to choose what kind of material the products that they're willing to buy.

## **2.2 Sustainability Trend Among Companies**

The awareness of environmental damage had rose since the 1980's when UNEP (United Nations Environmental Programme) was implementing Cleaner Production (CP) and was proposed to prevent pollution from occurring in the first place, the result was cost effective and used all over the world (Young et al, 2009). The trend of "green" business has spread to most companies, e.g. Nike, Mark & Spencer, and IKEA have integrated green business model whether it's the production or the products themselves (Deloitte Sustainability Report, 2014). The awareness among companies on sustainability is actually preceded by the fact that consumers and investors are increasingly aware of how the environmental and social issues so they began to question how the products are made. This phenomenon forces companies to approach a more responsible supply chain management. Production design then become more increasingly apparent in their intention to be 'green'. Design for sustainability is not necessarily only about creating a new technology but about how companies could achieve growth while also reducing the negative environmental and social impacts of their products. That is why the design for sustainability trend is pillared by three factors: people, profit, and planet (Young et al, 2009).

Green or not, the main focus of companies is to generate profit. Product improvement in sustainability context has a positive impact on the growth of company, which also measured by profit growth. Fredriksen (2016), concluded that even though there were no significant finding in her study regarding financial profitability in green business, there was still increased in sales if the products and services are sustainable.

## **2.3 Fashion Industry's Participation In Sustainability Trend**

Sustainability in this current era has been one of the major considerations in fashion industry to implement in their designs. The fashion industry is currently undergoing a gradual change where they try to satisfy the consumers' need of more environmentally friendly products. Fashion industry is the second most environmentally damaging industry with 1.5 million tons of waste put into landfills every year (Khandual & Pradhan, 2019). Given all the critiques, though, it seems worth noting that companies operating in the fashion apparel sector were among the first to concentrate on sustainability issues with the establishment of supplier codes of conduct in the early 1990s. In the years that followed, clothing brands took various steps to demonstrate their contribution to corporate sustainability like establishing sustainability committees or working teams or developing sustainability programs and publishing sustainability reports (Arrigo, 2015). One of the most prestigious fashion companies, Kerring (the company that housed Gucci, Stella McCartney, Bottega Veneta, & Puma) made a trailblazing decision when Puma became the first company that ever launched an Environmental Profit & Loss (EP&L) account in 2011 and finally the entire Kerring in 2014 had released an EP&L account on their website (WGSN Futures, 2016).

The major rule in sustainable fashion is a production that helps the producers and their crafts in sustainable fashion. This form of sustainable fashion indicates the production and procurement of raw materials, as well as manufacturing, in such a way as to pay fair wages to workers or people living on the land, to ensure a safe working environment and to promote sustainable agriculture. Achieving a production level of zero-waste remains a challenging task, but most companies have begun to take action by using various ways to minimize waste. It has become common practice for designers to use discarded fabrics to produce trims such as

buttons, tassels, and embellishments, or sculpt them (Khandual & Pradhan, 2019). To order the assessment of environmental impact, it is important to analyze the sustainability of the item and the life cycle problems, such as garment washing, beginning from the design stage. Experimentation in the search for a more sustainable approach to fashion can involve finding new ways and tools to reduce the impact of fashion on the planet, for example by using three-dimensional scanning to measure the body of customers (Arrigo, 2015).

Both businesses (fast fashion or luxury brands) see corporate sustainability as a key driver of growth and invest capital and skills in the search for new innovative technologies and procedures to achieve sustainable development where benefit, environment and people are balanced (Arrigo, 2015).

#### **2.4 Sustainable Straws as an Example of the Trend**

One of the most tangible examples of trend change towards a more sustainable product is straws. The using of plastic straws is estimated in numbers as 175 million a day. It may seem like a big number but not as huge as other various types of microplastic that have released into the ocean with 8 trillion daily (Xanthos & Walker, 2017). The singular obsession toward plastic straws can be traced from the 2015 viral video of turtle with straws embedded into his nose, causing it to bleed (Perry, 2018). The panic towards plastic straws has created a new opportunity in business, by selling alternatives to plastic straws. In the United States other alternatives like metal, glass, and paper straws are more popular than ever (Glum, 2018). Small businesses have taken an advantage from this alternative straw trend and generated a lot of profit. With the help of e-business boom, the alternative straws reached its demographic easier. The search for metal straws on Etsy (an e-commerce website focused on craft supplies) up 205% over the past 6 months of July 2018 (Glum, 2018). The one example of those small businesses profiting from the trend is Koffie Straws, a New Jersey based sustainable straws business. With \$11.99/package they reported that the sales could reach 20,000 or 40,000 monthly.

What about the big businesses? Earlier in 2019, Dior has jumped on the trend train.

Christian Dior SE or simply 'Dior' is a luxury brand company based in France. Dior is chaired by Bernard Arnault who also chaired LVMH (Moët Hennessy – Louis Vuitton) that is also a huge luxury brand company. Unsurprisingly, Dior is also the main holding company of LVMH. Dior has six principal product lines: Couture, Wines & Spirits, Fashion & Leather Goods, Perfumes & Cosmetics, and Watches & Jewellery. On 8 August 2019, Dior has announced an introduction to its very own \$146 box of six hand-blown brown glass straws painted in metallic gold. Justin Fenner, a reporter for Business Insider said that "the product shouldn't come as a surprise since Arnault has enacted in earth – friendly measures like installing LED lights in stores and sponsoring UNESCO biodiversity programs". The current trend of sustainability has reached a lot of fashion companies not only Dior, for example Prada who produced nylon bags recycled from ocean waste and Ralph Lauren who created a line created from recycled plastic bottles called Earth Polo. Ferrier (2019) stated that the fashion industry has never been afraid to capitalize on a cause in order to sell products. Decision of launching a luxury straws product by Dior also drew criticism. Ellen Scott, a columnist for Metro Magazine UK said that the idea is 'ridiculous and 'silly'. She elaborated that what Dior do is like 'putting a plaster on sinking ship' – not contributing much to the environment crisis. Scott also criticized the relatively high price and the effort to distract people from the real issue: waste from corporations.

## **2.5Is Following the Trend Enough?**

Van Elven (2019) reported that although 72 percent companies mentioned the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in their annual report, only 27% actually implemented them in their business strategy. This could be simplified that the next goal for corporations is to actually do "walk the walk". Rather than just using sustainable materials and giving the consumers post purchase responsibility, it is important for companies to go for drastic change beyond expectation in order to reduce waste. Some companies who have change implement drastic measure are Adidas who pledged to only use recycled plastics by 2024 and Burberry who signed agreement to only use recyclable packaging by 2025 (Van Elven, 2019).

WGSN (World Global Style Network) reported the insight about future sustainability on their 'The Vision 2030' newsletter; they wrote that with the help of technology companies could increase the awareness of sustainability even further. The steps are (1) Educating consumers by sharing companies stories about their production to consumers, (2) Empowering consumers so they could make a conscious and educated decisions on their consumption and give them chance to communicate dissatisfaction to companies, (3) Fostering connection with consumers using technology to connect directly the consumers and the companies, (4) Promoting transparency in supply chain by using technology to collect and track the data from supply chains all around the world, and last but not least (5) Reducing waste with collecting data before production to know what kind of trend or in demand style before designing the products as it could lead to reducing waste from unwanted or unused materials. In a more specific manner, the WGSN also wrote about the benefit of 3D printing in the future. Apparels made from 3D printing will create some benefits that are environmentally friendly such are small in carbon footprint, no production waste, recyclable materials could be used, biodegradable materials could be used, the possibility of extending the life of existing products.

In a more general discussion about the whole environmental degradation issue, Chapin et al. (2009) proposed a strategy framework to tackle the issue of this rapidly changing planet. The frame work is called 'Ecosystem Stewardship' and defined as an action-oriented process aimed at promoting a rapidly changing planet's social-ecological sustainability. Recent developments describe three approaches in a world of imminent confusion and abrupt change that allow effective use of current understanding that are also an overlapping integration: (1) Reducing the vulnerability to known stresses (the environment damages), (2) Promoting resilience in the face of disruptions and instability to preserve optimal conditions, and (3) Transforming from unwanted trajectories when opportunities arise. The team addressed that all social-ecological systems are vulnerable to recent and expected changes, but have sources of adaptive ability and resilience capable of sustaining ecosystem services and human well-being through effective Ecosystem Stewardship.

Reducing the vulnerability to a global stress like the climate change is a bigger challenge since local community behavior often minimizes the stress exposure and also often minimizes the stress (e.g. building sea walls that prevent the rise of sea levels). Reducing global stresses require an international cooperation which sometimes lacks governance frameworks. Collaboration between influential nations can reduce global stresses (Chapin et al., 2009). Ecosystem Stewardship also shifts the philosophy of resource management from reactions to observed changes in proactive governance that shapes sustainability to prepare for the unexpected. This is similar to a business strategy that shapes markets in a changing and

unpredictable economic climate to maintain and build competitive advantage. The last step in Ecosystem Stewardship is to transform the unwanted trajectories to more favorable ones. Social-ecological transitions are always dangerous as the changes are large by nature, and the implications are unpredictable, including possible exploitation by special interest groups. Nevertheless, structural reforms are necessary to avoid the persistent trajectories of inequality, hunger, civil strife, and social-ecological mismanagement that so many parts of the world are marked by.

## 2 Conclusion

Referring to the question of “How is the global community respond to the environmental threat?” the write concluded that the respond has been positive. In the business context, the awareness of consuming sustainable products is rising. Consumers’ awareness toward the products they are using, whether it’s the ingredients or the process of production sustainability has changed the businesses into a ‘greener’ way of operation. We could see that the two sides (consumer and producer) are trying their best to take care of the environment, but in the specific case of Dior the write could also conclude that there is another motive beside sustainability awareness. Dior’s product of an expensive set of glass straws could be seen as taking advantage of the trend not to raise awareness but just to bring more and more profits. So the conclusion is that environmental threat could also bring positive impact to globalism, in this context: multinational companies’ profit

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