

Do Shoppers Care About Sustainable Fashion?

Millennials are thought to be at the forefront, but results are mixed

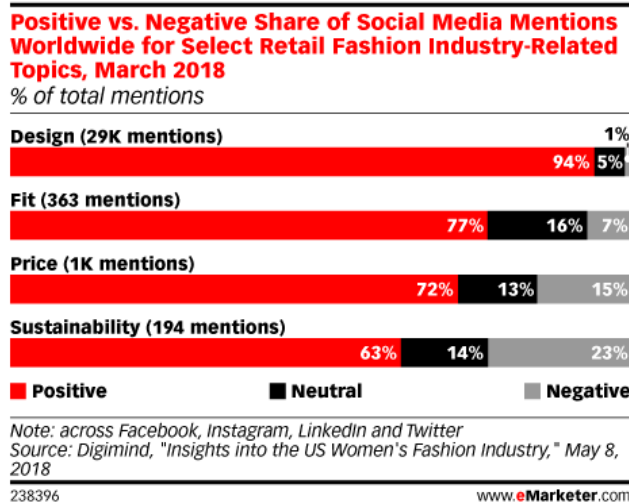
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Sustainability issues have bubbled under the surface of fashion for some time, especially concerning fast-fashion brands like H&M, Zara and Forever 21 that compete on rapid interpretation of high-end trends and low prices. Brands like Everlane and Reformation have emerged as counterpoints, promising transparency in the supply chain, labor practices, textile sourcing and more.

But how much do eco-friendly practices really matter to clothing shoppers?

A March 2018 analysis of social media sentiment (on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn) surrounding fashion brands by **Digimind** found a mix of interests. Subjects like design and price got the most mentions by far, and the tone for both were mostly positive. Issues relating to fair trade and sustainability were tagged in fewer posts but had higher levels of criticism; 23% that mentioned sustainability were negative, though 14% were neutral and 63% were positive.



Among the top trending hashtags were #shopmycloset, which is the concept of styling the clothing you already have instead of buying new items, and #poshmark, which is an online social marketplace (Poshmark) where users list and buy fashion items, follow each other and participate in themed selling events.

The resale market is set to grow 49% in 2018, according to research by ThredUp, a digital resale platform. Women ages 18 to 24 were the largest shoppers of second-hand clothing last year, with a 40% penetration rate, compared with 33% for women overall. Whether consciously or not, the rise of resale fashion complements the move toward more sustainable apparel.

Millennials are thought to lead the charge for sustainable fashion, which is true to some degree. A survey published in March 2018 by Element Three and SMARI reported that sustainability was a product attribute that 87% of US millennial internet users would be willing to pay more for, second only to making life easier (91%) and tied with delivering on promises (87%).

A study published in February 2018 by LIM College, a fashion-focused business school, that surveyed students and alumni ages 18 to 37 from LIM College, RMIT University in Australia and London College of Fashion found 34% of respondents said their fashion purchases were driven by sustainability and eco-consciousness. But this reason paled

in comparison to ease of purchase (95%), price/value (95%), uniqueness (92%) and brand name (60%).

This isn't necessarily a case of shoppers not putting their money where their mouths are. There isn't a critical mass of clothing brands that meet the criteria of being sustainable and well-priced, with unique designs appealing to younger shoppers.