

WWD

Fashion. Beauty. Business.



Shades of Red

In debt restructuring, Revlon plans significant layoffs.

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Disco Days

The Brooklyn Museum examines Studio 54's impact on American culture.

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Strain on The System

Virus concerns weigh on traffic at Paris trade shows.

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Picture This

A beautiful strangeness defies Antonio Marras' work, and it's not combined with his more complicated constructions. Here, he added artful, head-in-hands drama to that most basic of items, the white shirt.

For more of fall's graphic works, see pages 14 to 20.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DELPHINE ACHARD

BUSINESS

Coronavirus Crisis Could Spur Digital Strategies

- The environment stands to benefit as fashion brands step up ways to make up for travel restrictions.

BY JOELLE DIDERICH AND LILY TEMPLETON
WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM
ALESSANDRA TURRA

PARIS — As companies struggle to deal with the negative impact of the coronavirus, there may be a silver lining to the crisis: Fashion brands are stepping up digital strategies to facilitate doing business long-distance, with potentially beneficial long-term effects for the environment.

Standing in the Louis Vuitton show venue on the last day of Paris Fashion Week, chairman and chief executive officer Michael Burke said the house acted fast to compensate for the expected absence of 100 buyers and communications people from China, Japan, South Korea and the

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Not Shopping, Period

"No-buy" stints and zero-waste draw consumer interest. BY KALEY ROSHITSH

There is the growing consumer trend toward "buying less, but buying quality." There is the increase in renting and resale.

And then there is the ultimate in sustainability: not buying anything at all.

The climate crisis-induced anxiety is creating consumption comatoses for some consumers, with social media amplifying the gravitas of "no buy" years and "zero-waste" lifestyles into a movement all its own. Last May, there were just 2.5 million posts on Instagram tagged #zerowaste. Since then, the posts have nearly doubled to over 4.8 million.

"Consumers' growing interest in 'zero-waste' and 'no buy' in fashion and beauty signals growing sensitivities in consumers to question their purchases and align them with their values," said Elisa Niemtow, vice president for consumer sectors at Business for Social Responsibility. BSR, a global

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The Sustainability Scene

Not Shopping, Period

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non-profit, partners with fashion, beauty and luxury companies such as LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, Kering and Chanel on designing and implementing sustainable business strategies and solutions.

What do these consumers in developed countries value enough to forgo the luxuries of throw-away culture?

The environment – according to Joshua Spodek, host of the award-winning “Leadership and the Environment” podcast, who said: “People who have committed to avoid buying clothing for a year started not by thinking about clothes, but what the environment meant to them.”

“From a consumer perspective – sustainability is very broadly defined,” added Christine Barton, managing director and senior partner at Boston Consulting Group. The word can encompass everything from inequality to economic growth, gender equality and more, as defined by the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, a roadmap for corporations and citizens alike.

Whatever it means, global clothing and footwear production is set to increase 81 percent to 102 million tons in volume by 2030 – the equivalent of more than 500 billion T-shirts – according to the 2019 edition of the Pulse of the Fashion Industry report by Global Fashion Agenda and Boston Consulting Group.

Demand in Asia-Pacific and developing nations will drive that increase, but consumers in the developed nations are no longer able to ignore the waste problem, citing the burdens of “too much stuff,” “Amazon-ification” and overloaded marketing messages as drivers.

This sustainability-guided shopping abstinence could accelerate alongside a near-term worsening outbreak of the coronavirus, as CoreSight Research found in a February report of 2,000 adult Americans that U.S. malls would take the biggest hit from the potential of a pandemic.

So who’s not buying?

Women predominate in the trend of no-buy

and low-buy years, which don’t have to be a full year and also encompass many exceptions. Depending on the person’s inclinations, their prohibitions can range from a hard stop to buying any clothing or makeup at all, to the tamer option of “no new clothing,” meaning consumers can opt to shop via resale and rental alternatives (it’s technically not new).

The no new clothing trend aligns with secondhand’s growth, with resale growing 21 times faster than the retail apparel market over the last three years and apparel rental alone growing at a rate of more than 20 percent annually, according to GlobalData Retail.

Bedmate to the not-buying anything at all movement is the zero-waste lifestyle, in which a consumer aims to cut down on waste across their consumption habits. As seen on Instagram, it can include an enlightening (and privileged) journey to trash-less living that starts with a pilgrimage to the farmer’s market, community composting and even buying reusable alternatives to single-waste products like ear swabs, face rounds, tissues and so on.

Behind any of these behaviors are the ideals of a circular economy, where resources are limited so items are kept in play longer, as well as the notion of “all stakeholders” – causing consumers to pause at the one-click checkout to consider their individual impact on the environment.

MEET XIYE BASTIDA

One passionate participant in the no-buy movement is Xiye Bastida, the headline-grabbing 17-year-old climate justice activist from San Pedro Tultepec, close to Mexico City, who is grandly referred to as the voice of a generation – Generation Z.

On a warm day in January, Bastida is wearing white hoops and a matching jacket and sitting in an all-day café in Manhattan’s East Village, known for its indoor garden, off-duty celebrity sightings and psychedelic music – and good coffee, of course. In that order.

She is a supporter of the Green New

Deal, a proposed U.S. congressional resolution to tackle climate change and economic inequality in the U.S.; circular economy ideals, and is in favor of asking hard questions of the apparel and beauty brands that are dying to work with her. Two brands that passed Bastida’s vetting process were Nike and mostly vegan cosmetics brand Lush because they pay their workers well, she said.

Speaking about Gen Z, she said, “We don’t want to be treated as tokens – we’re stakeholders.” An “all stakeholders” approach, as urged by the World Economic Forum and the U.S.-based Business Roundtable association, is coming, with rejection of the previous “shareholder first” mentality that excludes younger generations in a lot of important conversations.

This is why the concept of extended producer responsibility – a strategy where the producer bears the burden of the product’s entire lifecycle from production to reuse and recycle – is appearing on the tongues of consumers. Globally, around 400 EPR systems exist with the majority in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development member countries, according to a January report from OECD. Legislation covers everything from waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE), mattresses and plastics to other forms of packaging.

No federal EPR laws exist in the U.S., but states such as Maine, Vermont and California have led with EPR bills or policies.

“Growth is not just about meeting the needs of shareholders, but also about meeting the needs of a wider group of stakeholders,” added Niemtzow, citing the workers who cultivate raw materials in a company value chain as well as communities around factory sites.

Niemtzow added: “Second, growth must be based on healthy fundamentals. A business which uses natural resources and labor without thinking through what and how it uses them will face an increasing number of business-critical disruptions, such as reduced availability and quality of premium raw materials.”

Time is of the essence, as Cara Smyth, founder of The Fair Fashion Center, sees the issue as far more pressing, citing “3,000 days left before irreversible climate change” at Bloomberg’s “The Year Ahead: Luxury” conference last November.

Of course, costs of raw materials, energy and labor are expected to rise. The industry is making investments at both ends of the value chain requiring between \$20 billion

to \$30 billion a year to generate a significant “step change” in environmental and social progress by 2030, as per a January report from Boston Consulting Group and nonprofit Fashion for Good.

“Fashion brands have to make a hard pivot... and focus on the quantifiable financial advantage of evolving to new ways of working.” –Pasha C. Chandra,

Diane von Furstenberg and Alante Capital.

Sebastian Boger, partner and managing partner at Boston Consulting Group, told WWD: “[Companies] basically have to start now before these costs are too expensive.”

But holistic “sustainability,” up until recently, has hardly been viewed by the fashion industry with near-term urgency, despite unlimited resources that will become scarcer for the \$2 trillion global apparel and footwear industry.

For the record, what Bastida hears from companies and business and political leaders sounds more like excuses.

And Gen Z might be losing patience. While the exact turnout for September’s historic Global Climate Strike is up for debate – the New York City mayor’s office counted 60,000 in Lower Manhattan and climate groups claimed 250,000 in the crowds – Bastida said she organized hundreds of thousands of protesters under “Fridays for Future.” But she’s also just a high school senior in the city who had to put a pause on trying to save the world, for the moment, to finish her college applications.

She even wrote about the impact of her clothing choices in her college essays.

Bastida went from shopping regularly every Friday with her friends at stores like Forever 21 and Urban Outfitters to striking every Friday. Her formal commitment to not buy any new clothing will end in March, since she started late after attending an Extinction Rebellion meeting about the act “Boycott Fashion.” But it’s unlikely Bastida will revert to old habits.

Her actions are not unlike the broader shift in consumer sentiment to sustainability that many consultancy firms have been analyzing for a number of years.

Ellie Muraca, a 21-year-old recent Virginia Tech graduate, said: “I feel suffocated in my apartment. I feel suffocated by all these things I have because I’m realizing I didn’t even want half of these things.” Muraca committed to quitting buying clothing and makeup “cold turkey” this January, entirely, as she put it, “removing myself from the beauty industry.”

She’s not alone in her claims. A January survey of 1,174 U.S. consumers conducted by YouGov PLC, a global public opinion and data company, found that 63 percent of Americans say they “have too much stuff.”

Regarding the challenges they faced in carrying out their vow, Bastida said: “The hardest thing to do was find things to do with my friends that didn’t involve buying things,” to which Muraca agreed.

Among the purchases Muraca did make were: a long-lasting, solid dish-washing block to replace the throwaway plastic pump bottles, ingredients to make her own toothpaste, fabrics to sew her own clothes and experiences such as a whale-watching trip and a master gardener class.

Also tapping into the trend, London Fashion Week and ReFashion Week in New York City, organized by the New York City ▶

Department of Sanitation, put a spotlight on clothes swapping, upcycling, recycling and mending.

The industry vies to connect the disparate systems and capture lost value. Increasing recycling represents an opportunity for the industry to capture some of the value in the more than \$100 billion worth of materials lost from the system every year, according to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation.

However, the movement is not just witnessed in Gen Z – it's cross-generational.

"I was definitely an emotional shopper," said Lauren Fay, founder of the nonprofit New Fashion Initiative, describing the experience as "cathartic." "It would make me feel in control. There was also this element of 'peacocking,' too, in wearing a new garment."

Fay started her no-buy year in 2017, extending into the beginning of 2018. Her commitment blanketed all clothing purchases. Although she is clothes-shopping again, today she does so in moderation.

SECONDHAND FANCY REIGNS

In the name of circularity, some non-buyers have made an exception for secondhand – be it resale or rental – and some boycotters emerge from their no-buy years as changed consumers.

Luckily, there's an opportunity to capitalize on the resale and rental markets, as traditional retailers already have.

"Ninety percent or more of what I buy today is secondhand," Fay added. Beauty was an exception during her no-buy year, with items with limited shelf-life, such as mascara, being "refreshed," which she said was already a small footprint. Towards the 11-month mark, Fay confessed she did buy a new pair of running shoes.

This "no buying" protest, if it's what it can be called, represents a major threat to an industry traditionally guided by selling more stuff.

"People have the agency to define their own rules," reiterated Fay, and she attributes the most important lesson in this behavior is not necessarily to stop buying but "buy less."

This is why Margaret Anadu, partner and managing director of the Urban Investment Group at Goldman Sachs, opted to rent from Rent the Runway Unlimited during her no-buy year last year.

"I definitely consider sustainability with every single item that I buy today but I haven't always. I've always been frugal so for most of my life I've considered whether something was worth the price it cost before purchasing," said Anadu, who added that the "Amazon-ification" of the world and proliferation of cheap random goods, "as well as having children, changed her outlook."

"The pressure and obligation that I felt was funny enough from 'more sustainable companies' like Everlane or Reformation. Companies like that, I think the sustainable

work they're doing is great, but it's still promoting that message of 'you need to have this piece,'" said Muraca.

As with the countercultural zero-waste lot on Instagram, being "that girl" means a puffed-sleeve, mini-dressed "Reformation Girl," or no-makeup, dewy-lid "Glossier Girl" – all subcategorical to the Kylie-Jenner-esque ideal "Instagram Girl." It compounds into a buy-this-and-be-me mentality that Muraca thinks is bursting at the seams.

The demand to fit into one of those categories still creates pressure to "buy new," further contributing to the situation of "too much stuff."

MOVE TO ZERO

The first known use of "zero-waste" was in 1970, according to Merriam-Webster, which also was the year that saw the dictionary debut of words such as "punk rock," "nonrecyclable," "war story" and lastly "granola."

Rejecting sustainability stereotypes captured by that last term (granola), which can be derogatory for environmentally concerned persons, zero-waste lifestyle blogger of "Trash Is for Tossers" Lauren Singer started Package Free, a Brooklyn-based retailer aiming to make it easier for all consumers to live more sustainably. Doing so is a trending pursuit among consumer packaged goods companies like Unilever and Procter & Gamble, which unveiled reusable products through partnerships with TerraCycle. Apparel brands – be it men's bodywear label T-Bô giving customers the choice to opt out of packaging or Nike open-sourcing its circular design principles – are also thinking zero-waste.

Designing with good intention and the planet in mind, Isabel Aagaard is one of the design-trained cofounders of Copenhagen-based LastObject, which started with a Kickstarter campaign last April on the idea of swapping out single-waste cotton swabs with LastSwab. It's a sleek biodegradable plastic case with a matching swab with its core being an enhanced polypropylene that is plastic and has glass fiber so that it's very difficult to break (end-of-life is best left to incineration, as Package Free informs on its web site).

The thought is the consumer should only have to buy one, ever. Right?

"Three days into the campaign, the first copycat came up and used our images, brand – everything," Aagaard told WWD, adding that "a lot of successful projects on Kickstarter are copied" by private-label manufacturers producing in higher volume and at cheap cost and quality.

"We feel so bad because we've created a market that is going to make the problem so much worse. We want to make a difference, we don't mind copycats, but we don't want more crap," said Aagaard. Her reusable swab is to single-use swabs, that designer is to fast-fashion.

NOT BUYING CLOTHES WON'T CHANGE FASHION

If consumers try no-buy or zero-waste lifestyles, enjoy it and then change their behavior – then what is halting the fashion and beauty industries from systemic changes of their own?

Unavoidably, the issue again becomes one of stuff. Is the problem then one of overproduction by companies or overconsumption by consumers? Brands will often finger-point and say "overconsumption," while consumers, evident in their no-buy stints and exploding interest in zero-waste, will counter "overproduction."

"If it were overconsumption, nothing would be on sale," James Reinhart, cofounder of ThredUp, told WWD. "Everything is on sale all the time, and there are exceptions, but there's too much stuff chasing too few consumers," said Reinhart reiterating of brands' claim: "I don't buy that argument at all."

"Me not buying clothes is not going to change the fashion industry, but it's going to change my outlook on life and on the things I have to buy and don't have to buy and it's going to change people around me," admitted Bastida.

Along those same lines, Kristen Fanarakis, founder of L.A.-based apparel startup Senza Tempo Fashion, told WWD last fall that: "The entire model of inflating prices because brands know they are going to be marked down needs to be addressed. Price things properly at the outset and don't produce so much that people know they can wait for the sale; this is the strategy many new brands like myself have taken."

Still, the complexity of the issues involved cannot be overstated. If production is reduced, will the fashion and beauty worlds need as many workers and, if not, what happens to employment, not just in those factories, but throughout the entire supply chain? How can the developed world dictate to the developing world not to overconsume or overproduce, since many factories are in developing nations? What is the right balance between "OK" consumption and overconsumption?

Niemtzow gave her perspective on growth in the "decisive decade."

"Businesses which succeed in the decisive decade will lead the way in terms of integrating purpose and values to their raison d'être, will innovate on new business models and practices that regenerate precious ecosystems and protect strong livelihoods alongside open, diverse societies," she said.

"Fashion brands have to make a hard pivot, to change the perception of sustainability from being more than just a bonus CSR initiative, and focus on the quantifiable financial advantage of evolving to new ways of working," said Pasha C. Chandra, head of global operations at Diane von Furstenberg and advisory board member at Alante Capital.

Uncertainty still plagues how, and if at all, regulation could be enacted for reaching industry-wide sustainability standards that go deep into the value chain. "We don't know what the end stage looks like," added Boger, who under Boston Consulting Group helped author both the Pulse of the Fashion Industry report with Global Fashion Agenda and Sustainable Apparel Coalition, as well as Financing the Fashion Industry with Fashion for Good.

Given the global reach of the fashion industry, a global or at least cross-national approach in regulation is needed, but as seen in the U.S. in regards to regulation for cosmetics and personal care, corporate intent can sometimes outweigh consumer interest.

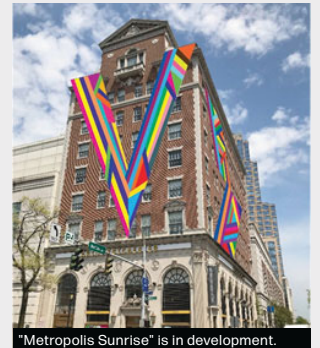
But, as marine biologist Ayana Elizabeth Johnson of Ocean Collective said at the annual fashion industry-focused Study Hall summit in February, "Policy follows culture," and at least in this case, consumer culture is changing.

Whether it's a meaningful shift for better or worse, well, it depends on who you ask. ■

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Sustainability Scene is a new recurring section in WWD that will cover all aspects of fashion and beauty's growing focus on sustainable business practices.

SHORT TAKES: The Fabric Arts, Science and Sustainability

"Metropolis Sunrise," a repurposed fabric art sculpture begins installation in Westchester, N.Y., among other happenings. BY KALEY ROSHITSH



"Metropolis Sunrise" is in development.

This week in sustainability news, textile arts and the science of microfibers came under focus. Meanwhile, brands such as Adidas commit to science-based targets, which is the first step in having targets independently verified against a set of criteria developed by the Science Based Targets initiative, a nonprofit aligning company targets with climate science.

ART OF RECYCLING: Pantone and Westchester community members donated 10,000 square feet of excess fabric to support the build of "Metropolis Sunrise," a large-scale art installation highlighting the importance of textile recycling. ArtsWestchester and artist Amanda Browder began work on the project, which is slated to be revealed in May.

SHEDDING LIGHT ON MICROFIBERS:

Wearing clothes can release even greater quantities of microfibers to the environment than washing them, according to new research from scientists at the University of Plymouth and the Institute for Polymers, Composites and Biomaterials of the National Research Council of Italy. Researchers call attention to textile design as a focus for sustainable design.

Professor Richard Thompson OBE, Head of the University of Plymouth's International Marine Litter Research Unit said: "The key story here is that the emission of fibers while wearing clothes is likely of a similar order of magnitude as that from washing them," in a statement.

According to research, up to 4,000 fibers per gram of fabric could be released during a conventional wash, while up to 400 fibers per gram of fabric are shed in just 20 minutes of normal activity, calling for an examination of fabric weave and yarn twist as part of sustainable design.

COMMITTED: Zipping along with sustainability commitments, zipper manufacturer YKK Corp. as well as Adidas and Arc'teryx committed to science-based emissions targets in February.

Xiye Bastida, 17-year-old climate justice activist.

