The Sustainable Fashion Community of Practice: Leveraging Sustainable Fashion in the Context of Covid-19



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Abstract:

The Geographies of our worlds fundamentally changed as the Covid-19 pandemic and its ensuing lockdowns set in across the globe. This thesis uses the sustainable fashion community of practice on Instagram as the empirical vessel through which to explore the changes that occurred during the pandemic. The ultimate aim of this thesis is to offer novel insights which are situated in the context of the pandemic about how a sustainable fashion agenda may be leveraged.

This thesis makes two key contributions. First, it makes a case for the recognition of the sustainable fashion community on Instagram as an online community of practice. Furthermore, I demonstrate how the practices associated with being in a community of practice, e.g. exchange, productive enquiry and building shared understanding, contribute to leveraging a sustainable fashion agenda for the sustainable fashion community of practice. I also demonstrate how the practices of blogging and influencing within the community contribute to leveraging a sustainable fashion agenda. Second, I demonstrate that the act of dress and the meaning of our clothes shifted during the pandemic, simultaneously recognising that reconnecting with the life, meaning and journeys of our garments helps to leverage sustainability in fashion, and that the sustainable fashion community too embody these approaches.

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1 Chapter One – Introduction

The empirical focus of this thesis is the sustainable fashion community on Instagram. Through the methods of digital ethnography, asynchronous interviews and solicited diary writing exercises, I use the sustainable fashion community as a vessel through which to explore approaches to sustainability and fashion consumption. More widely, this thesis coincided with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, and so the thesis also investigates shifts in relationships to clothing and sustainability as a result of the pandemic. The ultimate aim of this thesis is to offer novel insights which are situated in the context of the pandemic about the future of sustainable fashion and how a sustainable fashion agenda may be further leveraged.

This thesis makes two key contributions. First, it makes a case for the recognition of the sustainable fashion community on Instagram as an online community of practice. Furthermore, I demonstrate how the practices associated with being in a community of practice e.g. exchange, productive enquiry and building shared understanding contribute to leveraging a sustainable fashion agenda for the sustainable fashion community of practice on Instagram. I also demonstrate how blogging and influencing within the community contribute to leveraging a sustainable fashion agenda. Second, I argue that the act of dress and the meaning of our clothes has shifted in the pandemic, simultaneously recognising that deeper engagement with the lives, journeys and meanings of our clothes helps to leverage sustainability through an extension to the lifecycle of clothes.

The research and writing of this thesis occurred over the peak of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. The thesis could not escape the pandemic, and thus it reflects the narratives around influencing, sustainable fashion, consumption, dress and online communities at the time of the pandemic. Theoretically, it engages literatures on online communities of practice to sustainability (Wenger, 2005; Wenger, White and Smith, 2009), as well as literatures on material culture (Woodward, 2018; Miller, 2001) and the biographies and journeys of things (Kopytoff, 1986; Cook, 2004), which are key concepts in the sustainable fashion literature. Examination of these literatures culminates into a thesis which presents a unique and timely approach to sustainable fashion which is reflective of these unprecedented times.

1.1 Research Aims:

1. To explore the sustainable fashion community of practice on Instagram and investigate how the community approach and leverage sustainability in fashion.

2. To investigate how the community responded to the Covid-19 pandemic, referring to wider shifts in our relationships with clothing and sustainability in the pandemic.

1.2 Research Questions:

1. What characteristics does the sustainable fashion community on Instagram have that make it a community of practice?
2. How does the community approach and leverage sustainability?
3. How did the community respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and how did relationships to clothing and sustainability change due to the pandemic?

First, I will cover some key definitions and background context of this thesis, before outlining the structure of the remainder of the thesis. Social media and particularly the app Instagram are central to this thesis. Instagram is the platform on which I first discovered the sustainable fashion community, and hence it was the location in which I carried out my research in the form of digital ethnography, asynchronous interviews and diary writing. Social media can be defined as a group of internet-based applications built on the technological foundations of Web 2.0, allowing for the creation of user generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, In: Van Dijck, 2013). This has resulted in a new layer through which people organise their lives at both an individual and community level (Van Dijck, 2013), with the online and offline world increasingly interconnected and inseparable.

The rise of the Internet, Web 2.0 and social media has transformed the landscape of the global media landscape. This thesis specifically engages with the fashion media landscape, which has undergone the same transformative changes. Rocamora (2012) suggests that one of the key changes is that fashion now operates in the 'permanent present', whereby the newness in fashion (which was once centred around twice-yearly fashion weeks and seasons) is now constantly 'on', and constantly new. The continued connectivity of the fashion media has fed off and sustained the new permanent present of fashion media.

Another way in which the rise of social media has transformed the fashion industry is through disintermediation. Crewe (2017) refers to Rocamora's ideas of the disintermediatory effects that the internet and social media has had on fashion markets, hence devolving power from the traditional fashion authorities to more diversified participants such as bloggers and influencers. What the rise of the internet in the fashion industry has resulted in is a social reality in which technology and fashion are intersecting realities that exist in

mutual connection. This is coupled with an overarching context in which social media is now ingrained into our everyday lives.

With this new social media-based fashion landscape, the fast fashion industry and social media are inherently tied. This connection is further reinforced by bloggers and influencers. Fast fashion is connected to online influencers and bloggers, as they advertise the latest fast fashion, so that users can simply tap on the photo to know the price and follow a link to purchase it. Social media also perpetuates over consumption from a cultural perspective. For example, research by the Hubbub Foundation suggested that 17% of young people questioned said they wouldn't wear an outfit again if it had been posted on Instagram (Environmental Audit Committee, 2019). Social media and fast fashion are therefore inherently and perpetually connected to one another. There is concern that the new 'permanent present' nature of fashion, which is perpetuated by blogging and influencing, is driving fast fashion and encouraging over consumption and waste (Environmental Audit Committee, 2019, p.1). Fast fashion is a business model of fashion based on quick turnarounds, low prices and constantly emerging trends. The model is criticised for its environmental and social impact including pollution, exploitation and excessive carbon footprint.

This research operates within the context of social media and fast fashion influencing, by investigating it's oppositional phenomenon: sustainable fashion. The sustainable fashion concept (Mckeown and Shearer, 2019) has emerged as a direct response to growing awareness and concern about the negative social and environmental costs of the fast fashion industry. Sustainable fashion is associated with "fair working conditions, a sustainable business model, organic and environmentally friendly materials, certifications, and traceability" (Henninger, Alevizou, & Oates, 2016, p.400). This thesis investigates how sustainable fashion is leveraged within the online community and by the bloggers and influencers within it. I should note here that not all members of the community identify as a blogger or influencers, but many also do, with a seeming preference towards the title of 'blogger', although the two terms are often used synonymously (McCall, 2019). Therefore, despite the predominance of fast fashion within the sphere of social media and influencing, sustainable fashion communities and bloggers do exist. This research seeks to uncover these communities and to explore how they promote sustainability.

The research for this thesis occurred as the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns were unfolding. This fundamentally changed the spatialities of our lives as we knew them. As we were no longer able to go outside or into public spaces, our

lives turned inwards into the spatiality of the home. Business and commerce temporarily came to a halt. This resulted in some interesting changes in terms of sustainability, influencing and fashion, which this thesis aims to trace and discuss, so that the research is not acting 'outside of' the context in which it occurred.

In addition, this research is a response to the longstanding problem of fashion being marginalised within academia and Social Sciences. This is based on a grossly misinformed stereotype of fashion being a trivial or superficial field of study (Entwistle, 2019). Fashion, along with sustainability, has recently garnered more attention from academics, particularly as the fast fashion industry has come under fire for the environmental and social injustices caused by the fast fashion model (Siegle, 2019; Wicker, 2020; Brookes, 2019).

In summary, this thesis uses the sustainable fashion community on Instagram as a vessel through which I will identify how sustainability in fashion is leveraged by online communities, and how clothing and dress has changed in the pandemic, in order to offer novel and situated insights into the future of sustainable fashion.

The next chapter of this thesis is the Literature Review, which will explore the literatures of online communities, sustainable fashion, influencing and blogging, the Covid-19 pandemic and finally material culture and meanings of clothing. Chapter Three is the Methods Chapter, which explores each method used, the chronology of the methodology and finally offers reflections on the methods used and the ethical considerations made when conducting research in this thesis. Chapter Four is the first of the analysis chapters and the case is made here for the recognition of the community as a community of practice, which then offers reflections on how this model leverages sustainability. The chapter then goes on to explore how the practices of bloggers and influencers within the community contribute to leveraging the sustainable fashion agenda. Chapter Five explores how meaning and attachment to clothing changed in the pandemic and what this means for sustainability. Finally, Chapter Six presents a conclusion which pulls the threads of the thesis together to offer novel insights into the future of sustainability in the fashion industry.

2 Chapter Two - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review begins with a brief history of the internet, social media, and online communities of practice. It then moves on to define sustainable fashion, fast fashion, the circular economy and uncovers the challenges that the literature presents in defining these concepts. When discussing fast fashion, I refer to the work of influencers and bloggers and examine how influencing has positively reinforced the proliferation of fast fashion model. This leads me to a discussion of the growing body of literature on work of influencers, which I frame in the Covid-19 pandemic. Within my discussion of Covid-19, I also discuss the geographies of the home and how these shifted during the pandemic, before finally drawing on material culture literature to discuss the meaning associated with our clothes.

2.2 Internet and Social Media

> "Technology and culture of networking [has] freed communities from the tyranny of geography" (Ryan, 2010, p. 8)

The rise of the internet in the early 1980s has transformed how people live, work, communicate and shop (IBM, 2020). Now, it is ingrained into our lives and is difficult to imagine life without it. The first implementation of the internet is often referred to as Web 1.0, or the 'read only' web, as there was very little interaction or participation involved in using the internet (Naik, 2009). The advent of Web 2.0 shortly after the millennium marked a shift to more interactive networked communication (Van Dijck, 2013), known as the 'read-write' web. Web 2.0 is fundamentally premised on participation. There is contested discussion around the future shift to Web 3.0, which is predicted to be based more on users' cooperation (Barassi and Trere, 2012). Critical engagement with the terms Web 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0 have argued that the use of the terms portrays web developments as temporary and evolutionary and thus not reflective of the technological transformation they have caused. In addition, the use of the terms is said to disguise the entrenchment of the internet in users' everyday lives. Finally, the terms are also problematic as they have a tendency to assume users' practices; where in the epoch of Web 2.0, users are 'participating' in the internet, and in Web 3.0 they are 'co-operating' in the internet. These assumptions are barriers to explorations of the lived realities of being on the internet (Barassi and Treré, 2012).

The invention of the internet marked a new type of networked communication which has helped to form online communities, allowing communities to be 'freed from the tyranny of

geography' (Ryan, 2010), and based around a new, digitally- mediated societal structure, of which online communities form a part.

2.3 Communities and Online Communities

There is a romantic notion attached to community, where community is understood as a form of 'togetherness' (Frug, 1996). To overcome romanticising the term, Frug (1996) takes the perspective of community being the social relations that structure interactions between individuals, rather than being formed around a sense of 'togetherness'. Frug (1996) demonstrates this point by arguing that in cities, there is a lack of common identity, which means that the 'we' feeling may not be generated. The notion of togetherness ignores what Frug (1996) calls the hard part of community building, which is to deal with the differences of the group. This demonstrates that although individuals may be part of a geographical community, it is the social relations between individuals that leverage a sense of community.

The geography and spatialities of communities are therefore complex and diverse if we define community not as physical closeness but rather based on social interactions. This definition allows for communities to also be found in digital spaces. In the digital age, communities are formed and maintained in online spaces by both social networks and technology (Harrison, 2015, In: Fletcher and Tham, 2015). These are called virtual communities and the inclusion of technology offers the benefit of connecting people despite geographical distance or boundaries.

Fuchs and Sevignani (2013) outline the process of formation of communities on social media platforms, suggesting it is a threefold process of cognition, communication and cooperation. Cognition is where users post their subjective knowledge grounded in their experiences of society, communication is the process of interacting with others in a symbolic exchange of message, and collaboration where users engage in joint activities such as buying and selling things. What this engenders is the capability for humans to come together online to form communities based on both feelings of togetherness and new social relations that enable the collaborative creation of novel objects in the world. "These novel objects are grounded in human cognition and communication, from which a new quality of a social system emerges by repeated and routinized interactions that create results on a higher level of social organization" (Fuchs and Sevignani, 2013, p.238). This higher level of social organization may be represented in the form of an online community.

Whilst this thesis is not specifically concerned with questions or theory on identity and internet, it is an important concept in terms of community and how communities come together. Specifically referring to identity, Castells (2004) notes that “societies are increasingly structured around the bipolar opposition of the Net and the Self” (p. 3), and that identity results from tensions between these two poles (Pirogan and Katzenback, 2017). Identity is therefore pulled into question in communities, as it was previously demonstrated that social relations help to form a common identity and sense of ‘we’ within communities. Identity also comes into question when individuals interact with the internet, leveraging their sense of ‘self’, a concept that will discussed further in the ‘Influencing’ section of this literature review.

2.3.1 Communities of Practice

Communities of practice are a key piece of the scholarship on communities. The theory of communities of practice was originally developed by Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave in 1991 in their book on a model of situated learning. Communities of practice can be defined by three dimensions (Wenger, 1998). First, a community of practice is a group that cohere through mutual engagement, which describes people engaging with one another to collaborate. Second, they join together with a joint enterprise, which describes a group of people working together with a shared cause or purpose. These first two dimensions create a shared repertoire between members of the group; the third defining feature of a community of practice. A shared repertoire describes how the community of practice negotiate meaning, identity and tools. This repertoire can include “experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice.” (Wenger, 2005, p.2). The joint enterprise aspect of a community of practice is of particular note because the joint enterprise and cause is what sets communities of practice aside from communities of interest, as real action is pursued.

Building on the community of practice concept, Wenger, White and Smith (2009) recognize that technology- enabled communities of practice have proliferated. A core argument in this literature is the mutual influence of community and technology in digital habitats. Discussions of digital habitats are useful to flesh out understandings of digital communities, as along the ecological metaphor, they describe the online environments in which people are at home, which have been created and mediated by digital artifacts (Wenger, White and Smith, 2009). In short, digital habitats are where communities dwell online. Digital habitats have become richer, better defined and easier identifiable. This is due to an explosion of new technologies as tools that facilitate convergence of networks and content. These technologies extend how

communities' express boundaries and are organised. The technologies also allow large groups to share information with ease. Technology has therefore facilitated the proliferation of digital communities of practice.

Technology has enabled communities to form and interact in new ways, but communities also play a critical role in the invention of new technologies through cultivating tools to meet their needs. As these technologies spread, they are shaped and reshaped by other communities in turn (Wenger, White and Smith, 2009). This is exemplary of Fuchs and Sevignani's (2013) concept of novel and creative objects being formed from 'higher level of social organisation', under which online communities fall. It has therefore been established that technology and the critical role of communities in utilising technologies has allowed communities of practice to proliferate.

In particular, social media and the participatory nature of Web 2.0 has enabled the promotion of knowledge creation, dissemination and preservation, particularly through social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram. Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, wikis and RSS feeds have improved the richness of online landscapes in terms of communicativity and interactivity, becoming ever like face to face communication (Oguz et al, 2010), further reinforcing the argument that technology has allowed communities of practice to proliferate.

2.4 Sustainable Fashion/ Fast Fashion

Fashion is big business in the UK. The fashion industry contributed £32 billion to the UK economy in 2017 (Environmental Audit Committee, 2019). Fashion currently runs predominantly on a fast fashion model. The Environmental Audit Committee (2019) define fast fashion as:

> "a term used to describe a new accelerated fashion business model that has evolved since the 1980s. It involves increased numbers of new fashion collections every year, quick turnarounds and often lower prices. Reacting rapidly to offer new products to meet consumer demand is crucial to this business model" (p.1)

What this definition leaves out is the plethora of injustices associated with the fast fashion industry. Environmental injustices resulting from our production and consumption of fast fashion garments include excessive consumption and waste, excessive water use, the release of synthetic fibres and microfibres into the natural environment, and the excessive

carbon footprint of garments (Environmental Audit Committee, 2019). Social injustices are extremely prevalent within the fast fashion industry too, centred around the exploitation of workers (including children). Exploitation of workers is often associated with global South countries as fashion has a globalised supply chain, where issues like poor working conditions, slavery and underpayment are rife. These poor conditions have resulted in disasters such as the 2013 Rana Plaza fire and factory collapse, where a textile factory in Bangladesh collapsed and 1,134 people were killed (Safi and Rushe, 2018). The social issues surrounding sustainability are not, however, limited to the global South, as the investigative journalism and scandal surrounding Boohoo's exploitation of factory workers in Leicester, UK, in the summer of 2020, revealed.

The globalised spatial construction of fashion production has served the fast fashion model well (Crewe, 2017). Through globalised supply chains and exploitation, clothes are produced and sold very cheaply, and the violation of workers basic rights to maintain competitive advantage for the brands they work for has become commonplace within globalised supply chains (Klein, 1999). Since fashion has become so cheap to buy for consumers, a cultural shift has occurred in which consumers consume more, and more frivolously than ever. Crewe (2017) argues that commodity fetishism via forms of 'geographical association and dissociation' has enabled the fashion industry to mask it's social and environmental injustices whilst simultaneously seducing consumers into buying more garments with short lifetimes. Seasons have become futile, and trends come and go. The fashion industry works at lightning speed.

The sustainable fashion movement is a response to the fast fashion industry. Before I unpack sustainable fashion, I will first define sustainability. Perhaps the most ubiquitously known definition is 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs' (Brundtland Commission, 1987). Securing a sustainable future is the challenge of our time. Sustainability will only be achieved if climate change is halted, and the Paris Agreement target of keeping warming below 1.5C is achieved. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) were designed as a framework to help businesses and organisations to achieve sustainability.

Despite multiple frameworks being assigned to sustainability, and goals being set to halt climate change, sustainability has been critiqued for being an 'empty word', as it lacks clarity unless contextual reference is given (Ehrenfeld, 2019). In addition to this, Fletcher and Tham (2019) report in their Earth Logic report that:

> “Despite the significant increase in awareness, interest, knowledge, measures and technologies directed to fashion and sustainability in recent decades; levels of environmental impact have shown no net reduction. In the Pulse of Fashion 2019 Update’s words: “fashion companies are not implementing sustainable solutions fast enough to counterbalance the negative environmental and social impacts of the rapidly growing fashion industry”” (Lehmann et al, 2019, In: Fletcher and Tham, 2019, p.20).

Despite sustainability being a mega trend, it appears that this status makes sustainability all the more difficult to implement. Ehrenfeld (2019) purports that this is because of the way that society views sustainability. Using the work of cognitive scientist, Iain McGilchrist, whom argues that the human brain’s two hemispheres present different ways of viewing the world, Ehrenfeld (2019) argues that the way that we currently view the world, society and sustainability is through the left sides of our brains; mechanistically and driven by self-interest. Ehrenfeld (2019) is an advocate of replacing this point of view with complexity and care, something that Fletcher and Tham (2019) support, posing the following question: “Sustainability communication in fashion has been dominated by technical, quantitative language and management terminology spawned out of scientific reductionism. What would happen to fashion if this was replaced by the language and practices of relationship and care?” (p.62). Ehrenfeld’s (2008) solution for achieving this ‘right-side’ thinking and establishing practices of care is for sustainability to become known as the ability to flourish, as flourishing offers a normative goal to attain.

There is no standard definition for sustainable fashion in a qualified or quantifiable sense (Arthur, 2019). This is made increasingly complex given there are other terms frequently used synonymously with sustainable fashion, such as ‘ethical fashion’, ‘circular fashion’, ‘slow fashion’, or ‘responsible fashion’. Take for example, an article published in The Ecologist in 2015, with a headline reading ‘Sustainable fashion is slow fashion - because fast comes at a price’. This headline conflates the two terms and suggests that they are not only part of the same lexicon but also have the same meaning. Another example of the synonymity in terms around sustainable fashion is when Henninger, Alevizou and Oates, (2016) defined sustainable fashion as part of the slow fashion movement, commenting that the term is ‘used interchangeably with eco, green and ethical fashion. The overlap between the descriptors is problematic for clarity purposes and therefore I take a different approach in this thesis to defining sustainable fashion.

The approach I take is that sustainable fashion is the umbrella term under which terms like slow fashion, ethical fashion and green or eco fashion come under. This reflects a similar perspective to the one that Fletcher and Tham (2014) take in their Handbook of Sustainable Fashion; they prescribe a view of sustainable fashion that is from a bird's eye perspective whilst also being targeted and telescopic. This is to allow for a full understanding of the complexity and interconnected nature of the social, cultural and ecological understandings of sustainable fashion. Despite the nuances and complexities of defining sustainable fashion, which would be a great avenue for future research and could take up a whole thesis in itself, I can summarise that ultimately, sustainable fashion is an umbrella movement that works in opposition to the fast fashion model, rejecting and undoing the notable environmental and social injustices of the fast fashion system, and striving for an alternative, better, fashion future. Ehrenfeld (2008) proposes two requirements to get the 'sustainability as flourishing' idea off of the ground in the fashion industry: first, industry leaders and stakeholders must decide on a meaningful definition and goal, and second, we must understand what causes unsustainability and replace them with cultural drivers that would bring the flourishing forth (Ehrenfeld, 2014).

In addition to the issues with qualifying and defining sustainable fashion, quantifying it is also a challenge. Critics have argued that sustainable fashion severely lacks rigorous scientific data, technical papers and peer- reviewed journals. Much data used when contextualising the sustainable fashion industry comes from seemingly reputable source such as McKinsey, The Ellen MacArthur foundation and The World Bank. However, an investigative report by Aiden Wicker (2020) showed that these data are not from scientific sources and commented that "this is what happens in the fashion sustainability space. One organization puts out a fact, and four other organizations link to it, and then nobody remembers or cares who first made the claim" (Wicker, 2020). Another example of an issue with quantifying sustainable fashion is using transparency as a metric for sustainability. Fashion Revolution is a disruptive not for profit organisation with the vision of 'a global fashion industry that conserves and restores the environment and values people over growth and profit'. They produced a Fashion Transparency Index in 2020. H&M ranked top in this transparency index, above well known 'sustainable fashion' brands such as Patagonia. Whilst they did clarify in the report that transparency does not equal sustainability, this report was criticised for causing conflation between the two terms, and for celebrating H&M despite their fast fashion model and environmental injustices. Sustainable fashion clearly has a data issue, as well as definitional issues.

One attempt to remedy the lack of a meaningful definition and goal of sustainability in the fashion industry is Fletcher and Tham's (2019) 'Earth Logic' report, which provides a detailed plan to leverage sustainability in the fashion industry. Essentially, the plan involves prioritising the environmental health of the Earth and deprioritising economic growth and profit. Radically anti-capitalist, the manifesto puts forwards six research landscapes through which deeper engagement with sustainability can be leveraged, where each landscape involves a diverse range of actors. They are:

1. less: Grow out of growth
2. local: Scaling, re-centring
3. plural: New centres for fashion
4. learning: New knowledge, skills, mindsets for fashion
5. language: New communication for fashion
6. governance: New ways of organising fashion

From: Fletcher and Tham (2019, p.42)

2.4.1 The Circular Economy

In Earth Logic, Fletcher and Tham (2019) present a strong argument against the circular economy as a solution and saviour to the fashion industry's serious social and environmental issues. As a concept, the circular economy has been gaining traction over the last fifty years. Early discussions of the circular economy by Stahel and Reday (1976) conceptualise an industrial 'loop economy'; a model which would allow industries to profit without the cost and risk associated with waste, as waste is prevented (Geissdoerfer et al, 2016). Stahel also coined the 'cradle to cradle' expression which now forms a key part of circular economy thinking. The cradle to cradle concept indicates that 'everything is a resource for something else', therefore waste need not exist at all (Braungart and McDonough, 2002). Cradle to cradle, the loop economy, biomimicry, natural capitalism and the blue economy are all examples of schools of thought which have shaped the circular economy concept. Therefore, the circular economy should be considered a framework as it draws on a variety of specific approaches, which all gravitate around a basic set of circular economy principles (MacArthur, 2021).

The contributions of the Ellen MacArthur foundation to advancing the circular economy is essential context when discussing the circular economy. The foundation is a collaborative hub for businesses, academics and policy makers (Geissdoerfer et al, 2016). According to the MacArthur foundation, the circular economy aims to redefine growth and design waste

out of the economy system. The three key principles pf the circular economy are to: 1) design out waste and pollution, 2) keep products and materials in use, and 3) regenerate natural systems.

Since it's conception in the 70's, the circular economy has developed, becoming a business concept strongly associated with the sustainability movement due to its dedication to designing out waste. The inclusion of the circular economy into sustainability literature has led to a conflation between the two concepts and a 'blurring of their conceptual contours' which 'constrains the efficacy of using the approaches in research and in practice (Geissdoerfer et al, 2016, p.757).

The literature around the circular economy and the fashion industry has begun investigating how fashion companies' business models pivot in order to adopt circular approaches (Kant Hvass & Pedersen, 2019). According to Colucci (2020), to help move toward a more sustainable fashion industry, "scaling up alternative business models is deemed a desirable scenario: The whole fashion industry needs to embrace a deeper, more systemic change and scale low-carbon solutions" (UNFCCC, 2018, In: Colucci, 2020, p. 858). There are, therefore, many different approaches to implementing a circular economy within the fashion industry. However, Colucci (2020) also identifies that implementing business models based on the circular economy in the fashion industry may be hindered by "factors such as the lack of scalability, incompatibility with fashion customers' value propositions, changing consumer needs, lack of relevant technological expertise, and difficulties related to changing the supply chain" (p. 858).

In addition, Fletcher and Tham (2019) more radically argue that the circular economy has gained traction in the fashion industry because it aligns with and therefore encourages 'business as usual' practices. They argue that in reality, the circular economy has serious limitations due to the way in which it is situated in growth economics; the circular economy is optimised to grow and thrive with the circulation of more materials, regardless of whether this goal respects the ecological boundaries of the Earth (Fletcher and Tham, 2019). This therefore renders the circular economy inadequate at truly leveraging sustainability in the eyes of some.

Despite the challenges presented by Colucci (2020) in implementing and scaling the circular economy, and the questions raised by Fletcher and Tham (2019) around whether the circular economy is actually a viable or sustainable solution at all, new circular business models based on rental, resale, and refurbishment are expected to come to fruition over the

next decade. Despite the pandemic, which threw the fashion industry as a whole into turmoil, the UK clothing rental market value is expected to reach £2.3 billion by 2029, a stark increase compared to the estimated £400 million it was valued at in 2019 (GlobalData, 2020). Rental, resale and refurbishment is environmentally attractive because it can stretch the product lifecycle and still keep offering newness to consumers (McKinsey & Company, 2019). In the eyes of Fletcher, Tham and Ehrenfeld, newness is exactly the problem. Cultures of affluent industrialised economies are characterised by consumption and a cultural pressure to consume (Walker and Giard, 2013). Given this reality, sustainability is as much a cultural problem as it is an environmental one.

To summarise this section on fast fashion, sustainable fashion and the circular economy, this literature review has revealed a problem that pervades sustainability as a term, as well as sustainability in fashion: a persistent blurring of the conceptual contours and definitions given to sustainability. In terms of fashion, the perspective I take is that sustainable fashion is an umbrella term for many parts of the puzzle that is sustainability in fashion. These puzzle parts include (but are not limited to) reducing the environmental impact of fashion, extending the lifecycle of clothing, and reducing the cultural need for excessive consumption.

2.5 Influencers and Blogging

Indispensable to the rise of the inherently unsustainable fast fashion model are social media influencers and bloggers. In the space of just a few years, fashion blogging and influencing has become a staple of the fashion media landscape (Mora and Rocamora, 2015) and fast fashion and influencing are inherently related and perpetuate one another. However, the rise of influencer marketing is not just limited to fashion. In many other industries, influencer marketing has overtaken traditional forms of marketing, where branded content produced by influencers is believed to have more direct and authentic engagement with customers than brand generated content does (Adweek, 2015). This is set to increase as social media becomes increasingly entrenched in our lives (Vyatkina, 2019). Despite its increasing hold on advertising and marketing, influencing is facing considerable criticism as regulators, consumers and leaders have identified misleading influencing practices (Mintel, 2020), leading to subsequent regulatory changes in how products are advertised online.

The terms blogging and influencing are often used interchangeably because they usually refer to the same thing. According to McCall (2016), almost all bloggers are influencers, but not all influencers are bloggers. ‘Bloggers’ would traditionally have referred to someone with their own website or blog site, however influencers are also now commonly bloggers too

because they refer to their Instagram as a ‘visual’ blog. For the purpose of this thesis, the terms will be used interchangeably, and when discussing my participants, will reflect the term with which they call themselves. Ultimately, influencers and bloggers are individuals with the primary aim to influence their audience through textual and visual narration of their everyday life (Abidin, 2016).

Central to the activities of influencers is commercialization; Instagram and other social media platforms have been commercialized by influencers, where Instagram can be viewed as a marketplace for attention and commerce. Within this marketplace, influencers utilize strategies to remain relatable and seemingly authentic, despite the rush to commercialization (Leaver et al, 2020), which (sometimes) renumerates influencers for their work. Authenticity is closely tied to commercialization. Authenticity can be defined as a concept used to evaluate how genuine or original objects or individuals are, or are perceived to be (Maares, Banjac and Hanusch, 2020). Authenticity is an emergent mode of capitalist production, in which creative authenticity has converged with the commercial sphere (Banet-Weiser, 2011). Previously, the authentic/ commercial binary was oppositional, however, the convergence of the two is a mark of contemporary neoliberal economies (Banet-Weiser, 2011). Marketers and branders make use of user or consumer generated content in order to reach these contemporary consumers (Banet-Weiser, 2011); therefore, authenticity is ‘part of the brand’ of influencers. For influencers, there remains a perceived distance between authentic creativity and commercialised industry, which perpetuates the idea that there is a cultural space which has escaped capitalism’s hold, in which authenticity can flourish (Banet-Weiser, 2011). However, the reality is that there has been a convergence between the commercial and the authentic, resulting in influencers consciously enacting authenticity labour and presentations of their entrepreneurial self, to simultaneously present a ‘true’ version of oneself, as well as commodifying oneself (Maares, Banjac and Hanusch, 2020).

The way that this commodification works is because “followers become a network of advertorial capillaries by duplicating, amplifying and multiplying the influencer content to their own circle of followers and personal friends” (Abidin, 2016, p.89). This exemplifies the far-reaching nature of influencing, where the influencer has the capability to reach many more people than just their followers.

Brooke Erin Duffy is a key scholar in the field of enterprising social media creators on platforms such as Instagram. She argues that influencers and bloggers are motivated to do what they do by the notion of ‘getting paid to do what you love’, a premise central to the new media economy. The new media economy is characterised by electronic commerce and

technologies that are revolutionising economic activity (Pratt, 2000). Social media is an example of such revolutionary electronic commerce, which is revolutionising economic activity through the commodification of individual's every day social media usage. Such usage deems some types of content more popular than others, resulting in some types of content being reimbursed through paid ads for content (Maares, Banjac and Hanusch, 2020). The path to being reimbursed for content, however, is often fraught with needing to work for free and 'not getting paid to do what you love' (Duffy, 2020).

Garnering attention is another characteristic of new media work and is crucial to 'getting paid to do what you love', as the social media economy is guided by logics of attention and reputation (Duffy and Hund, 2019). The attention economy is how influencers and bloggers may garner attention on Instagram, and it is tied ever closely to the algorithmic logics that structure our Instagram experiences. In a space in which consumption of images is fleeting, grabbing attention is a challenge. Those with good access to the attention economy do so through visual self-presentation (Marwick, 2015) and practices of 'aspirational production', an attention-seeking practice whereby an individual presents herself in a high[er] social status position (Marwick, 2013).

Presentation of the self (in order to occupy the attention economy) is an important concept in literature on fashion bloggers and influencers. Bloggers are utilizing digital technologies such as blogs and social media to turn their personal lives and styles into online businesses (Brydges and Sjoholm, 2019), therefore presentation of the self is key to the business model of influencing, as well as presenting one's authentic self. Duffy and Hund (2015) contend that three tropes come together to present the self under the ideal of 'having it all' and presenting oneself in an entrepreneurial way on social media. These tropes are passionate work, staging the glam life, and carefully curated social sharing. Together, these tropes speak to a process of self-branding and presentation which is socially mediated and disguises the labour, capital and discipline necessary to emulate the tropes. The presentation of self is therefore benchmarked against criteria that individuals must satisfy, which are further marked by persisting social inequalities of class, race, gender and more.

The careful manipulation of authenticity, garnering attention and presentation of the self by influencers on Instagram can perhaps be best summarised by Leaver et al (2020):

> "Influencers of all shapes and sizes produce content daily, representing their best selves in the main Instagram feed while carefully crafting a more approachable and engaging self in their dialogues in Instagram Stories. The mobile camera

> photographic sensibility has been thoroughly redirected to, and through, the Instagram lens. Indeed, virtual Influencers are, to some extent, the indigenous lifeforms of Instagram: dazzling entities who, at their best, combine communication, commerce and a very twenty-first-century sense of authenticity and engagement, without existing in the world outside the platform at all." (Leaver et al, 2020, p.163)

In summary, the rise of influencer marketing is part of the new media economy. Within influencing and blogging, authenticity, garnering attention and presentation of the self are ways in which influencers brand themselves to achieve the ultimate goal of 'getting paid to do what they love'. At least, it was until the Covid-19 pandemic threw influencing (and the world) into a period of uncertainty.

2.5.1 Influencing and Blogging in the Covid-19 Pandemic

Two conflicting narratives around influencing arose during the pandemic. The more arresting of those two narratives; the end of influencing, and less remarkable, how the pandemic has provided new opportunities for influencers. Influencers have come under fire since the pandemic started, with headlines such as 'Could the Coronavirus Kill Influencer Culture?' (Wired, 2020) and 'Is This the End of Influencing as We Knew It? (Vanity Fair, 2020). Both articles criticised the behaviours of some influencers and suggested that influencer content can come across as mindless during the time of the pandemic. This is because the inspiration influencers offered to our consumption choices before the pandemic have been rendered futile and mindless given that priorities have shifted and the goal of many is to simply make it through the pandemic alive. For example, influencer Arielle Charnas featured in both articles to illustrate the backlash that influencers are coming under. Arielle had seemingly used her status to get herself a Covid-19 test and then flouted lockdown rules to move from her home in New York to the Hamptons. Arielle was criticised and her privilege was called into question, leading influencers to be more responsible and careful in what they post. Both articles recognised that inauthenticity had been a problem for influencers even before the pandemic started. The grip of influencers was appearing to slip, in that the preferred aesthetic shifted from a seemingly clean stylized aesthetic to a rawer aesthetic; a messy, dark, confessional and honest depiction of life behind the camera (Vogue, 2020).

With that being said, other coverage of influencing during the pandemic has identified new opportunities for influencers. With reference to fashion influencers, Vogue suggested that influencers are seeing 20-50% higher views on their content (DBA, 2020) and that this increase in online traffic offers opportunities *so long as it is done right*. What 'right' looks like

currently is a multi-dimensional approach to content that is thoughtful and considered in its approach. This cautious narrative was mirrored by Barro (2020), who contended that there was a rise in micro-influencing in the pandemic, where individuals whom have a 'genuine' interest in a brand promote the products without compensation. Barro (2020) purports that being 'genuine' is representative of 'doing it properly', as the interest in the brand is real and authentic, as opposed to being paid to promote a product. There is clearly a shift, then, to desire for authenticity in influencing. The Vogue (2020) article concluded that with perceived inauthenticity on the rise, well-rounded influencers are preferred by brands to create content which resonates with audiences at this time, as well as the rise of micro-influencers whom have a 'genuine' interest in the products.

There is, however, another side to the argument on micro influencers, which is why I apostrophise the word 'genuine', which Abidin (2020) discusses in her book '(Not) getting paid to do what you love', where influencing and blogging may be representative of exploitation. This is because micro-influencers promote products with the hope of one day securing financial compensation to do so. In the mean- time, they do it for free, and are exploited in their time and labour for doing so.

A link that hasn't been made explicitly enough yet in media coverage of Covid-19 and influencing is how the perceptions of influencers and their content has changed alongside how the audiences' consumption patterns have changed. An influencers primary role is to influence people into buying the products they promote (Abidin, 2016). This role cannot be performed, and the work of the influencer cannot go on as before when the priorities of the audience have fundamentally changed. Social structures have collapsed into the home and we are trapped in domesticity, rendering some types of consumption of paramount functional importance (groceries, toiletries) and others comparatively irrelevant. Marketing and analytics company McKinsey have tracked these changes in consumption, reporting that:

> "consumers are dramatically pulling back on discretionary spending in most countries excepting China. Some of the categories showing the most precipitous declines include restaurants, apparel, footwear, jewelry, accessories, travel, and entertainment out of home…. consumers expect to spend more on basics such as groceries, household supplies, and in some countries personal-care items." (McKinsey, 2020, p.4)

These changes have been nicknamed the 'quarantine of consumption'. It follows that the changing spatiality of our lives, from the public to our homes, as well as shifts in what

consumption choices we prioritise, have in turn changed how and why we consume. This by default renders some types of influencers content as irrelevant as the market for the consumption of these goods ceases to exist. In combination with apprehensiveness towards influencers anyway, a questionable future lay ahead for influencers and how brands use influencing as part of their marketing strategies.

Other key themes that the quarantine of consumption speaks to are transparency and sustainability, according to the Business of Fashion's 'State of Fashion Report: Coronavirus Update' (2020). The report states that these values were present in the consumer mind-set before the pandemic but that the 'quarantine of consumption' is accelerating some of these consumer shifts, with "growing antipathy towards waste-producing business models and heightened expectations for purpose driven, sustainable action" (p.4).

In summary, "engagement in sustainability has deepened during the Covid-19 crisis, with European consumers wanting fashion players to act responsibly and consider the social and environmental impacts of their businesses" (McKinsey, 2020). In addition to these changes, the Covid-19 pandemic has also reinforced influencers' place in our global media constellations, as whether their publicity is good or bad, it has proved that they are here to stay. This leaves us with two seemingly contrasting narratives; sustainable fashion on the rise, but influencers who are inherently connected to the fast fashion paradigm are also here to stay. Next, this literature review the changes that the Covid-19 pandemic made to our individual geographies and the geographies of home.

2.6 Geographies of the Home

As Covid-19 shifted the spatialities of our worlds inwards and forced us to retreat from public spaces into private, the geographies of the home are an important scale to consider in context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the work of influencers, which also moved indoors. Geographical work on the home has paid attention to the gendered aspects of family life, domestic labour (Pratt, 1997) and domestic violence. It has been identified as one of the most emotive geographical concepts, "inextricable from that of self, family, nation, sense of place, and sense of responsibility towards those who share one's place in the world, home is a concept that demands thorough exploration by cultural geographers" (Duncan et al, 2003, p.395).

Humanistic geographers hailed the home as a site of authenticity and belonging in the 1970s and 80s (Moore, 2002, In: Brickell, 2012). Critical approaches to the geographies of home seek to interrogate this position, approaching the home as "a turbulent sea of constant negotiation rather than simply some haven for the self" (Miller, 2001, p.4). In embodying this critical view of the home, Blunt and Varley (2004) approach the home as a space of paradoxical notions; of belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, desire and fear. This paradoxical view works to interrogate normative associations between the home and positivity, recognising that the home is not a positive space for all (Brickell, 2012).

The paradoxical notions outlined above represent the home as a varied and complex site of study because it represents a multitude of meanings including identity, privacy and security, which also vary according to class, ethnicity and family size (Williams, 2002). As well as these social differences, the home is presented as a space saturated in emotion, meaning and relationships. Another key theme in the geographies of the home is that the home is not a bounded entity. Rather, it is a porous space in which it is open to and constructed by the communications and social relations beyond it (Brickell, 2012).

The key themes presented so far come together in summary of Brickell's (2012) three proposed components to a critical geography of home. First, the home is a physical location but also an imagined space of emotion and belonging. Second, the home is a locus of personality and belonging differentially experienced according to social difference (age, gender, sexuality etc.). Third, the home is porous space where the personal relations within it transect with public and political worlds.

All of the themes outlined above with regards to the geographies of the home become more complex when considering the lockdown to stop the spread of Covid-19. On 25th March 2020, 1/3 of the total global population were in a state of lockdown to varying degrees, which meant they should stay at home, and were unable to work outside of the home, engage with their community and family, and unable to travel. This process of geographical containment to reduce the spread of the virus addresses place and space in a physical sense. Massey (1994) counters this conceptualisation of space in a purely physical sense, arguing that our relations and connections with each other are our social space; alike to the literature presented earlier on communities. In understanding space as both physical and social, it is clear that the pandemic has radically changed the geographies of the everyday, as lockdowns meant we are required to be physically and socially distant from one another (Arai, 2020).

In the space of the home, routines of employment, exercise and family life were adapted as the world as we knew it collapsed into the space of the home. The home started to embody the more negative paradoxical notions as highlighted above. Fear, alienation, violence, and heightened emotions took up more space in the home. No discussion of the geographies of home during the Covid-19 pandemic would be complete without recognition of the rise of domestic violence and abuse due to the lockdown which increases the opportunity for violence and reduces victims' access to support services.

The focus of fashion and dress in this study may seem unimportant or menial compared to the many issues that our society has faced under Covid-19, but under the premise that clothes are intimately attached to us and our lives (Crewe, 2017), they are of great significance. This will be demonstrated in the next section.

2.7 Clothes, Meaning and Love

Material culture is a field of study that recognises that objects are not inert, rather they are invested with meaning through association and use (Woodward, 2018). These meanings are not fixed and can change over time. Empirically, material culture studies can involve the analysis of an endlessly diverse range of objects or things (Tilley et al, 2006). Tilley et al (2006) summarise that within the interdisciplinary field of material culture, studies often take one of three forms: First, they may refer to a particular material domain such as clothing or food. Second, some move beyond the specificity of one case to understanding social relations of broader categories such as art or consumption. Third and finally, they may be more holistic and attempt to analyse a range of material domains within the ambit of case studies.

Daniel Miller's (1998) theory of shopping foregrounds would fit into the second category of types of material culture studies. His theory of shopping denotes that shopping is a central way in which love can be communicated, manifested and reproduced. Miller recognises there are other rationales for shopping, such as hedonism, but he claims that love is easily dominant as the motivation behind the bulk of an actual shopping practice. Shopping has been viewed as an expression of individual subjectivity and identity, but Miller recognises that shopping is also an expression of kinship and relationships. He also accepts that other terms for love can be used, such as care, concern, obligation or responsibility, but argues that as a practice, love is quite compatible with all the other alternative descriptors.

When exploring meaning and consumption, Woodward (2018) suggests that there is no static ‘meaningful object’. Instead, objects take on meanings through their relationships between people, through their relationships between different objects and the different contexts in which they operate, so that meanings emerge and may change. People and things therefore act as coagents in producing meaning. The act of consuming objects is a medium through which social relations can be performed and affirmed (Woodward, 2018). As consumption is an embedded socio-cultural practice, constructing meaning through objects is also a way of marking aspects of the self. Given that the consumption of objects is an embedded socio-cultural practice, the consumption of objects can also be a moment for subversion or changes to the shared meanings that are fostered when consumption happens (Woodward, 2018).

2.8 Conclusion

This literature review has pulled together the threads of a variety of literatures, from social media and communities of practice, to sustainable fashion and fast fashion, to the Covid-19 pandemic and how this changed many aspects of our lives and culture, including our relationship to home, the meanings associated with dress, and the work of influencers. These bodies of literature support the investigation of the research questions, as the work of Wenger and Lave (1991) provide a framework through which to examine a community of practice. The discussions of sustainable fashion and fast fashion can be used as a springboard to critically interrogate how the sustainable fashion community of practice approach sustainability. Finally, the section on Covid-19, geographies of the home and the meaning of our clothes allows me to explore responses to the pandemic and how our relationship to clothing may have shifted as a result.

3 Chapter Three – Methods

3.1 Introduction

The methods used in this thesis are all digital to reflect the digital nature of empirical subject (the sustainable fashion community on Instagram). The methods employed were all qualitative, and included digital ethnography, asynchronous interviews, and solicited diary writing exercises. I had fifteen participants in total, ten of whom did the asynchronous interview and five of whom took part in the diary writing exercise. I found and reached out to these participants through my ethnographic observations into the Instagram sustainable fashion community.

To give a brief overview of the methodology, I conducted digital ethnography within the sustainable fashion community on Instagram. Through this ethnography, I was able to secure access to participants for asynchronous interviews and diary writing to ensure I was able to produce data to achieve the aims of this thesis (see Figure 1). Conducting my data collection phase over the course of the pandemic meant I could access data on how the sustainable fashion community of practice leverage sustainability and how clothing and dress changed over the pandemic. A particularly useful part of the data collection, which will feature heavily and be expanded upon in Chapter Four, were the 'Instagram challenges' that members of the sustainable fashion community partook in. Examples from the community include the 'Isolated Wardrobe Challenge' and the 'Sustainable Seclusion Style Challenge', both of which required participants to engage with certain prompts and post it to their Instagram accounts whilst in lockdown. These challenges were alike to many of the challenges that went viral in the pandemic, and quickly became the cornerstone of my ethnography.

Summary of methods	**How it contributed to achieving research questions and aims**
Digital Ethnography	Allowed me to explore the sustainable fashion community in its 'undisturbed natural state' (Hine, 2004) to respond to research questions one, two and three. I was able to observe the community and how they approached sustainability (RQ1&2), trace how they responded to the pandemic (RQ3), and write a field diary about what I observed. Conducting digital ethnography also meant I gained access to participants for the diary writing and asynchronous interviews.

Diary Writing	Provided an opportunity to deepen my ethnographic field notes. Enabled me to understand how members of the community perceive the community (RQ1). Provided opportunity for me to understand how partaking in Instagram challenges during the pandemic formed part of the community of practices' activities, and what the challenges meant in terms of sustainability (RQ2&3). Offered participants a chance to reflect on their relationships to clothing and sustainability during the pandemic (RQ3).
Asynchronous interviews	Provided an opportunity to cross reference my ethnographic field notes. Enabled me to understand how members of the community perceive the community (RQ1). Allowed me to understand what sustainability meant to members of the community (RQ2).

Figure 1: Table to demonstrate how the use of each method correlated to research aims

Covid-19 caused some challenges when the research for this thesis was being conducted. Prior to the onset of the pandemic and lockdowns, I was in the early stages of collecting data on the emotional and 'behind the scenes' labour involved in influencing. This involved an auto-ethnographic method, where I went out into public spaces with Nottingham- based influencers to take pictures for their Instagram accounts. Here, I was the photographer, taking pictures which would likely later be posted to their Instagram accounts. I recorded some field notes using a dictaphone as I was going, and then did a written reflection of the interactions afterwards. I was also hoping to then interview them on what goes on 'behind the scenes' of Instagram influencing.

Once the pandemic rendered this unfeasible, I had to change my methodology and the empirical topic of this thesis. This is where the sole focus on the sustainable fashion community came in, and where my all-digital methods were developed and honed. My research ended up reflecting and mirroring the common shared experience of many who experienced lockdowns; as social lives and relationships moved online, so did my research. Upon reflection, this made my research all the more interesting and timely which provided opportunities that I wouldn't have otherwise been afforded, Overall, once I had implemented the necessary changes and personally dealt with the onset of a global pandemic, it was not

too problematic for me to adapt this thesis to the unprecedented context in which I was writing.

3.2 Ethnography

Digital ethnography was at the core of this research; through the digital ethnography I conducted, I managed to find and secure participants for the asynchronous interviews and diary writing. I followed Skeggs' (1994) conceptualisation of ethnography, where ethnography is a theory of research rather than a method per se. In viewing ethnography this way, many other methods can be employed within the ethnographic practice. In addition, I took inspiration from literature on fashion research and took a combination of approaches, as Crane (2000) argues that "analyzing how changes in fashion and clothing choices are related to other aspects of social and cultural change requires a combination of theoretical approaches, since these cultural phenomena can be viewed from different perspectives" (p.236). To ensure I could access the multitude of perspectives, I used a combination of three methods to also support the different aims of this thesis.

Those I made use of included participant observation via ethnography, asynchronous interviews, and solicited diary writing, all of which will be subsequently discussed in detail. The ethnography took part in two steps. First, a covert approach was employed to observe web interactions in a type of "undisturbed natural state" (Hine, 2008, p.262), in order to familiarize myself with the community. The importance of observation within ethnography cannot be understated here, as "ethnographers have an extremely broad methodological palette ... however, one method above all others is fundamental to ethnographic research. This method is participant observation, the cornerstone of ethnography" (Boellstorff et al, 2012, p.65). The digital ethnography and observation were aimed at getting a good understanding of the community and gaining access to participants.

I then took on a more overt approach in my ethnography, where I used diary writing and asynchronous interviews to supplement the observation, so that participants could provide a cross checking and verification process of my findings (Hine, 2000), and my findings were constructed in a participatory manner. The diary writing and asynchronous interview activities were aimed at accessing the more nuanced and personal detail on emotion and the impact of Covid-19. I will now, in turn, reflect on each part of the research; the covert ethnographic observation phase, and the overt asynchronous interviewing and the diary writing phase of data collection.

3.2.1 Unpacking Digital Ethnography

The term ‘digital ethnography’ is synonymous with a plethora of other names given to the process of conducting ethnography within online spaces. These include ‘virtual ethnography’ (Hine, 2000), ‘netnography’ (Kozinets, 2002), ‘digital ethnography’ (Murthy, 2008) and ‘ethnography of the virtual worlds’ (Boellstorff et al, 2012). Often, these terms are used synonymously, but Caliandro (2014) highlights that they have some distinct theoretical and methodological paradigms.

The most relevant of the synonyms is ‘netnography’, as coined by Kozinets (2002). It refers to web-based ethnography developed within the domains of consumer culture and can be noted as a type of ethnography that would allow the researcher to immerse themselves in online cultures in an unobtrusive manner to understand culture and shared identity (Caliandro, 2014). Mixed methods are emphasized here, as well as a two-phase process of observation followed by participatory research and interaction (Caliandro, 2014). This is the approach I took with first conducting covert observation before moving on to overt research methods.

On the other hand, digital ethnography is a style of ethnography that studies the cultural conditions of a contemporary networked society through the internet. The main field site is represented by digital publics, which are social spaces constructed “through the networked technologies and the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology and practice” (Boyd, 2011, p.39). The use of publics to describe the research participants instead of community allows the researcher to examine the vast amount of interactional processes that occur within digital spaces that are not always part of a community. For example, an individual has many loose relationships on social media and uses them to manage their own social network through self-presentation. Methodologically, digital ethnography tends to employ natively digital methods including discourse analysis and network analysis.

My ethnographic method shares similarities both methodologically and theoretically with netnography, despite its epistemological departure from consumer culture given that it investigates a community that opposes consumer culture. With that being said, a key part of my observation was examining interactional processes within a particular social space (Instagram community), which I refer to as a community rather than a public. Within the literature, the terms ‘digital ethnography’ and ‘netnography’ are conflated and used synonymously. From here onwards, I will continue to use the term digital ethnography, but

recognize that my methodology is theoretically and methodologically aligned to netnography. I make this decision based on the way in which this research examines a digital community and digital habitats (Wenger, 1998).

3.2.2 The Digital vs Real Debate within Ethnography

This research is interestingly placed, as it investigates an online community as well as changes that have occurred in 'real life'. To talk of 'online' and 'real life' as two separate things, however, could be interpreted as theoretically incorrect. The binary opposition of the terms 'digital' to 'real' or 'online' to 'offline' is false, and misrepresents the relationship between online and offline worlds, suggesting that online worlds are not real or physical (Boellerstoff, 2016). In this research, I take the position that the digital realm is very much physical, real and ingrained into our lives. This binary is one of the most important theoretical and political sticking points that pervades contemporary theories of technology (Boellerstoff, 2016). Boellerstoff (2016) critiques scholars for succumbing to this misrepresentation. The critique most relevant to this research is of digital ethnographer Christine Hine, whom Boellerstoff (2016) criticizes for portraying the real world as the physical world, and by consequence the virtual as unreal. The false opposition of digital vs real is one widely visible, and thus something that I was careful to avoid in my own research, especially whilst collecting data.

Despite coming from a slightly different ethnographic tradition of ethnography of the virtual worlds, Boellerstoff (2016) provides an example which gives me a strong rationale for the use of digital ethnography as the main method in this research. He discusses a group of friends who, in the physical world, are located in France, England, the US and Brazil, and met through the virtual reality gaming site 'Second Life'. He argues that an ethnographer researching this group would not fly to each country, and as each person does not meet in the 'physical world', the principle of 'follow the people' (Marcus, 1995) applies in as such as meeting in the place in which they normally would; Second Life. It thus follows that using digital ethnography in the forms of observation and online interviews over the platform of Instagram is the most appropriate method for my research, as the Instagram sustainable fashion community are mostly situated on Instagram.

As well as dealing with the false opposition of offline and online spaces, digital ethnography must grapple with other complexities in the nature of digital spaces. Airoldi (2018) reports a relative lack of research conducted on social media sites given their transient and individually unique nature. That is, individual experiences of social media sites are shaped

by their interactions with the platform itself according to semantic and algorithmic logics. Social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram and YouTube represent main sites of internet user's digital lives (Marwick, 2013) but are under researched due to the volatile, transient and unique nature of the platforms. This research seeks to fill this gap, and to recognize this volatility in a way that does not negate the quality of the research.

It is thus essential to clarify that my research is of course affected by the volatile and transient essence of digital platforms. The information I am able to access via social media is information that cannot be truly replicated as my unique constitution of algorithmic and semantic logics is what shaped the interactions I was able to have, as well as the data I was able to collect. An example of this, as noted in my field diary, is that after I followed one sustainable fashion influencer, two more followed me, presumably as a result of Instagram's algorithm recommending my profile to them. I was then able to organise an interview with one of the influencers that subsequently followed me, demonstrating how the algorithm uniquely and with volatility affects the outcomes of my research.

The impact that algorithms have is that an element of control is taken away from the researcher (Airoldi, 2018). I do not, however, see this as a drawback; the nature of my research collection mirrors the nature of the field in which it is investigating. In addition, Quinton and Reynolds (2019) suggest that this lack of control leads to fewer opportunities for co-production/co-creation of research, however I disagree with this to some extent, based on the premise that the algorithms actually helped me to gain access to more participants with whom to co-create my research, whilst recognizing that it also prevented me from recognizing other members of the community as the algorithm led me to interact with certain accounts.

In summary, I approached the wide and limitless space of potential data collection within social media with the knowledge and understanding that my own personal algorithmic logic, biases and lack of control shaped my research process. Though I never classed myself as a member of the community, knowing of the community before embarking on this research also made my approach to the research on social media easier. Through seeing the community play out, I had a route to access participants, and a way in which to approach the research.

3.3 Diary Writing and Asynchronous Interviews

Before I provide a chronological recount of my methodology, I will give an overview of the overt methods I used: digital diaries and asynchronous interviews. Diaries can be defined as accounts “produced specifically at the researcher's request, by an informant or informants” (Bell, 1998, p.72). Diary writing is a useful tool to give access to in depth, nuanced and emotional data as it allows participants to give detailed and personal insights into their lives (Day and Thatcher, 2009). This is data that participants might have omitted in interviews and is data I certainly would not have accessed in my digital ethnography as the nature of social media is that it is carefully curated and only represents a small portion of individuals lived experiences. Diaries have been cited as a research method that provide empowerment and to gain better understanding of people’s lived experiences (Meth, 2003). This is what made diaries an appropriate tool to use to uncover the realities of being involved in the sustainable fashion community, emotional attachments to clothing and how dress has changed over the Covid-19 pandemic. One potential drawback of the use of diaries is that solicited diaries will most likely differ from what a participant may write in their own personal diary, and so researchers must be aware of the participant perhaps writing about what they think the researcher wants to hear (Meth, 2003). I purposely left the diary prompts extremely open (see Appendix 2) to give the participants to speak freely about whatever they felt compelled to.

Similarly, asynchronous interviews are noted to offer more empowerment for participants than traditional interviews. This is because they allow participants to share their lived realities free from the time, pressure and space constraints of traditional interviews (Gubrium et al, 2012). Asynchronous interviews were also an appropriate alternative to face-to-face interviews given that social distancing measures were in place. Regardless of this, they also felt appropriate because so much of our lives are now lived online. Academically, asynchronous interviewing has been found to be a viable alternative to face to face, especially when geographical boundaries are a barrier to investigation (Meho, 2006). However, asynchronous interviewing has greater risk of non-response from participants than with synchronous interviews, as participants may be distracted by their everyday lives and exceptional circumstances (Gubrium et al, 2012).

I also favoured asynchronous interviews over synchronous interviews, which could have taken place on Zoom, because my interview data collection phase took place relatively early on in the pandemic, in April and May. These months were very emotional times for many, and so I had to approach my participants carefully and thoughtfully. For that reason, I preferred asynchronous interviews over synchronous Zoom interviews, in order to place

minimal expectations and requirements upon my participants. The asynchronous interview gave them the opportunity to answer the questions in their own time and space, which is more empowering for the participant. In all of my interactions with my participants, I emphasised that I understood if they did not want to participate given the particularly challenging times. I distributed my asynchronous questions in a word document that participants could edit (see appendix 3) and emphasised that they could take as long as they needed to complete it.

3.4 Chronology of the Methodology

My methodology followed the following timetable:

- March 2020 (lockdown): Pivot research and embark on covert and observatory digital ethnography to get a feel and overview of the sustainable fashion community on Instagram
- March 2020 (lockdown): Closely follow the sustainable fashion challenges in my ethnographic notes
- April 2020: Embark on a preliminary stage of data collection within a Facebook sustainable fashion community of practice
- May 2020: Instagram data collection phase including call for participants
- July 2020: Data collection phase finishes

The empirical focus of this thesis is communities on *Instagram*, but I did conduct some preliminary research within a comparable sustainable fashion community of practice called Collaction Slow Fashion Season. This is a Facebook group which I have been part of this group for three years now and have done research work with before. This was to trial out the asynchronous interviews and diary writing activities since they were new methods to me. The purpose of the group is to act as a platform to 'share ideas, tips and hacks for a great Slow Fashion Season'. It was originally called 'Slow Fashion Summer' but has evolved into 'season' so that people can carry out this challenge at any time of year. Given that this platform is based around a challenge, I thought that investigating this community on Facebook would tie in nicely with the challenges and sustainable fashion community on Instagram, as both are representative of groups of people coming together with a specific aim.

I reached out to this community through a post on the Facebook group explaining my research focus and methods. I sent those who responded a list of asynchronous interview questions for them to answer in their own time and send back to me as a trial run for my

Instagram based data collection. No respondents were interesting in writing a diary alongside this. This preliminary step of the research highlighted to me that I should perhaps separate the two activities; asking some participants to do the asynchronous interview, and others to do the diary, as no participants in the preliminary study were willing to do both. It was at this point that I moved my research solely and only on to Instagram.

Following this preliminary step of research and bearing in mind that I had been conducting my covert ethnographic research on Instagram for a few weeks now, I started to become more overt on Instagram by following and interacting with people from the sustainable fashion community. This was a reflexive process, where the algorithm aided my research as it meant that more people from the community were following me first and following me back. I followed up on some of my ethnographic findings, including the challenges I had followed in my ethnographic field work in March and April. The #isolatedwardrobechallenge was the first big challenge that took place once lockdown started. I began to private message people who had or were taking part in a sustainable fashion challenge, asking them if they'd be willing to answer some of my asynchronous questions. The respondents were willing to participate for the most part, however I found that some responses lacked the emotional depth I was after to address meanings and feelings towards clothing in the pandemic.

Given that I had made some connections in the community from reaching out to participants via DMs, I decided it was a good time to put out a formal call for participants to participate in diary writing exercises to provide the emotional depth in data which I was lacking. I made the infographic shown in Figure 2 to recruit participants from the sustainable fashion community. I asked some people I had asynchronously interviewed in the first round to share the post to their stories, so that the post would reach more of the community. This is an example of my thesis research working within the prevailing algorithmic logics. I had a good response to the call for participants. I purposely left the diary writing exercise open ended, indicating that they may write as much or as little as they wanted and in any format. The main prompts I gave was that I was interested in what they were wearing each day, why, and how it made them feel. The research phase culminated in fifteen participants in total (see Figure 3), ten of whom did the asynchronous interview and five of whom did the diary writing exercise. This is in addition to my ethnographic field work, to produce a participatory approach to my investigation into the sustainable fashion community of practice.



Figure 2: An infographic made to recruit participants into a diary writing activity whilst in lockdown.

Participant name	Type of participant
Lotte	Diary recruited from Instagram call for participants
Penny	Diary recruited from Instagram call for participants
Natalia	Diary recruited from Instagram call for participants
Fatima	Diary recruited from Instagram call for participants
Lauren	Diary recruited from Instagram call for participants
Matilda	Asynchronous interview participant recruited via DM
Marianne	Asynchronous interview participant recruited via DM
Ellen	Asynchronous interview participant recruited via DM
Dani	Asynchronous interview participant recruited via DM
Sophie	Asynchronous interview participant recruited via DM
Katie	Asynchronous interview participant recruited via DM
Jess	Asynchronous interview participant recruited via DM
Rose	Asynchronous interview participant recruited via DM
Sinead	Asynchronous interview participant recruited via DM
Lucy	Asynchronous interview participant recruited via DM

Figure 3: Table to show list of participants and how they were recruited.

All participants identified as female and were between the ages of 18-30. This is an interesting point of analysis because both sustainability and fashion influencing are gendered spheres. Sustainability and green products are overwhelmingly marketed towards women (Hunt, 2020), a concept called the eco gender gap. Hunt (2020) cites research conducted by Mintel, which suggests that women are more powerful consumers and are still disproportionately associated with the domestic sphere. In combination with the embedded social and cultural notion of women as caregivers who are more likely to extend their care to the planet, sustainability is a gendered trend. Influencing is also a gendered field, where individuals in the trajectory of fashion and lifestyle women predominantly identify as women, where interviews conducted within influencer agencies revealed that 70% of influencers identify as women (Abidin, 2016). In my ethnography, I do not recall coming across any individuals who identified as male within the community. This, however, does not mean that they exist, just that I did not observe them.

3.5 Reflections from the Field: Insider vs Outsider and Positionality

The insider/ outsider dichotomy (Merton, 1972) is something that researchers often have to manage in ethnography. It refers to the line between being an 'insider' with intimate access to a community and an 'outsider' with more neutrality and natural curiosity in the cultural norms of that group (Abidin, 2020). Fluidity between the two is common (Merriam et al, 2001). Abidin (2020) wrote a reflective piece on her ethnography in the field of social media influencing and micro-celebrities, and I have managed to tease out many similarities between her experiences and my own. First, she indicated an element of personal performativity to self-brand her digital persona and 'social media currency' and noted how she used her own social media to "tailor make versions of myself with small variants in identity inscriptions to be flexible and adaptable" (p.58).

This is something I found myself doing too and reflected on afterwards. I was grappling with my insider/ outsider status and took active steps to edit my social media profile to become more of an insider in the community. I should first note that I used my personal Instagram account to conduct this research, as opposed to one set up purposefully for the research. In previous fieldwork experiences, I experimented with contacting people from a research Instagram account separate from my personal one. I found that this was less successful than contacting participants from my personal account, as the research account lacked relatability and potential participants could not identify who was behind the account, which reduced their willingness to speak with me. I therefore knew from previous experience that it would be beneficial to conduct this research from my personal Instagram account.

In ‘self-branding’ my digital persona and tailor making versions of myself, I made some minor adaptations to my Instagram account. These included editing my bio so that it included the statement ‘Geography and Fashion Researcher’ and made sure that the fashion story highlight was visible on my profile so participants could see that I too have an interest in sustainable fashion (see Figure 4). My account also includes lots of pictures of myself so that participants can recognize and feel some degree of familiarity with me when I message them. This demonstrates my efforts to tailor make myself and selectively perform aspects of my identity (Abidin, 2020) by emphasizing my interest in fashion to foster a relationship between myself and participants based on our common interest of fashion.

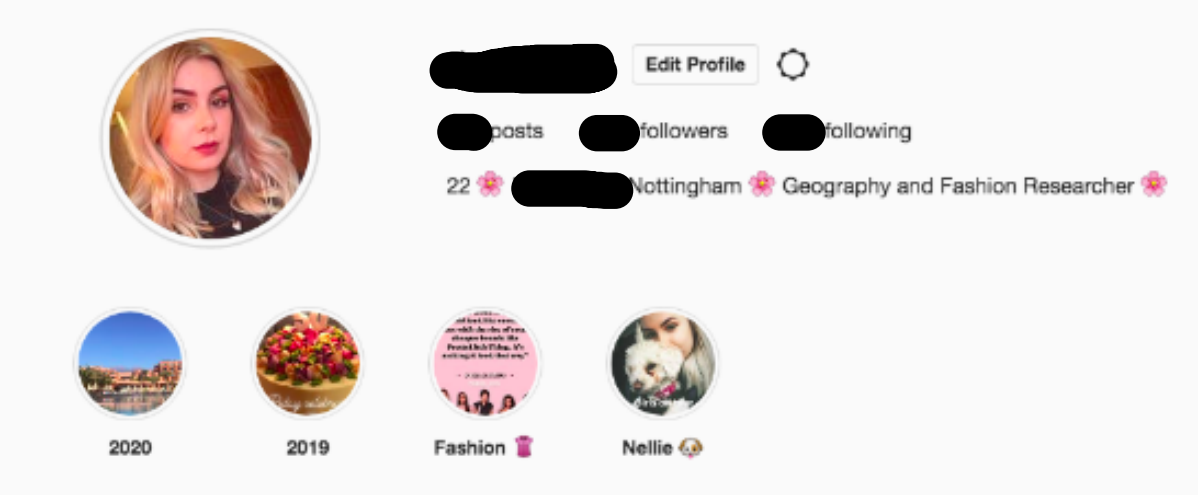


Figure 4: Screenshot of my own Instagram profile showing adaptations made to establish common interest in fashion with participants.

Finally, I’d like to take the opportunity to reflect on my positionality here. Positionality “reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013 p.71). The social, political and cultural position that I occupied during this research was likely one that was shared with majority of my participants; a community of working-class and middle-class individuals, whom mostly identified as female and were in their twenties. My similar social, cultural and political status to my participants could raise some questions of bias in terms of how the research process played out. I did immerse myself into the community and gain some level of in-group knowledge, however I also attempted to maintain some critical distance from the community. I was able to do this by not remaining as part of the community after my data collection phase was finished, in hopes of maintaining some objectivity of the community. Ultimately, my insider status is somewhat a double-edged sword; what was gained from being an insider perhaps meant

that at times I was less able to see a bigger picture (Mercer, 2007). I hope that awareness of my positionality will somewhat mediate any concerns about bias within the research process.

3.6 Analysis of data

Textual analysis was employed to decode the asynchronous interviews and diary extracts. The method used was thematic coding, which included writing analytical memos which were then turned into codes or themes, which in turn produced the framework for the analysis chapters (Flowerdew and Martin, 2013). As the themes that informed the analysis emerged from the data, this thesis made use of an inductive approach where the research was conducted before theory was ascribed to it (Kitchin and Tate, 2013). An inductive approach to this research was most appropriate given that I embarked on this thesis with a knowledge that a sustainable fashion community of sorts existed on Instagram, but no preconceived ideas about relevant theory. Therefore, the relevant theory was ascribed and discussed following the data collection and analysis phase.

Visual analysis was a secondary analysis tool I made use of. Visual analysis acted as a way in which I could break down and decode my ethnographic findings. Examples of this were the instances where I looked at a specific Instagram post from a member of the sustainable fashion community in the analysis. Visual analysis is appropriate for this study given that the platform that thesis is focused on is Instagram, a picture and video sharing platform. Visual analysis and visual culture render our realities of living in a digital, cross-mediated world as valid, where visual content is socially and culturally important (Spencer, 2011). We all 'read' images with our eyes, yet how one decodes the features of the image depends on how they read the cultural codes embedded within it, which is a completely unique and subjective experience (Spencer, 2011). This is why visual analysis was employed in this research in addition to textual decoding of the captions that accompanied images.

3.7 Ethics

Conducting social media research can be a daunting prospect given the conflicting research and guidelines in doing so (Evans, 2015). In order to ensure I maintained careful ethical standards throughout, I followed the principle set out by Tagg et al (2017), in reconceptualising ethics not as an external set of guidelines but as being at the core of research, driving decision-making at all steps of the process. I also ensured to follow all ethical guidelines set out by the University of Nottingham and obtained written consent from interview and diary participants (Appendix 1). There are four key areas of concern within

social media research ethics; public vs private, informed consent, anonymity and risk of harm (Townsend and Wallace, 2020), each of which I will now discuss in turn in reference to my own research experience.

First is the debate around whether content posted on social media is public or private. When individuals have private accounts that may be viewed by anyone, this research could be considered as part of the public domain. The extent to which individuals are unaware of how their data posted publicly may be used is a key point of consideration. The nature of social media is that comments and posts are made fleetingly and without any real consideration of who may view them or how they may be used. Therefore, researchers must make an informed decision about the original intention of the data that were shared by the digital user. This, however, is still problematic because a social media user's data may be used without any informed consent, and so 'participants' in research aren't actually aware of their participation (Townsend and Wallace, 2020).

Concerns regarding anonymity are particularly salient within social media research, as social media companies tend to store data and meta-data for long periods of time, and if direct quotes are used from participant's social media sites, they are easily searchable, as much data is publicly available under people's names (Quinton and Reynolds, 2019). Anonymity (or lack of) is something I had to ensure I protected for my participants, and so I have not included any direct quotes from social media in this thesis without direct perimission. Where pictures and quotes were used, I also asked for and was granted direct permission (see Figure 5).



Figure 5: Image showing a conversation on Instagram asking for direct permission to use pictures.

The reason why anonymity is so important is because lack of it could lead to harm to participants. The Association of Internet Researchers suggest participants may be vulnerable even if there are no indications on their social media sites that they may be considered vulnerable. In this sense, social media accounts should not be taken to be a full reflection of a person, as they are by nature carefully curated. The individual's potential vulnerability may mean they are unaware of the ramifications of posting data online in publicly available spaces (Quinton and Reynolds, 2019). I therefore constantly had to monitor my own practices to ensure no harm was coming to potential vulnerable participants, especially those who were unaware of their participation in my covert stage of research and protect them with anonymization.

The use of diaries in research have been highlighted before as potentially having therapeutic affects for participants (Thatcher and Day, 2009), where diary writing activities can feel similar to therapy or counselling meetings for participants. The researcher should be sure to not overstep their role as a researcher but remember that confidentiality may be broken should they think the participant is in acute danger to maintain ethical conduct. This may place emotional stress upon the researcher also, which is another important consideration to make. This aspect of ethical conduct was particularly problematic for me considering that this research was situated in the midst of a pandemic and country wide lockdown. I was aware that harm could have arisen from asking participants to discuss emotional topics related to Covid-19.

An example was when I received a diary response back from a participant in which she indicated she had low mood and was feeling very down. I did not feel that this was severe enough to have to break confidentiality and contact the relevant authorities, but I did feel a sense of responsibility as she had confided in me through the diary. I made sure to check in with her a few weeks after her participation, but not to overstep my mark as a researcher.

In summary of the methods chapter, the methods employed were all qualitative, and included digital ethnography, asynchronous interviews, and solicited diary writing exercises. The pandemic did pose some challenges to the research process, which I aimed to overcome by including the pandemic as an area of enquiry within the thesis.

4 Chapter Four- The Sustainable Fashion Community of Practice

> *Communities of practice are often not formally recognised, "yet when it is given a name and brought into focus, it becomes a perspective that can help us understand our world better" (Wenger, 2005, p.2)*

4.1 Introduction

The core argument of this chapter is that the sustainable fashion community on Instagram is an *online* community of practice, but a fully-fledged community of practice nonetheless, given that this thesis avoids the assumption that digital could equal 'not real'. As the literature review outlined, communities of practice are communities that cohere through mutual engagement and joint enterprise, resulting in a repertoire of resources (Wenger, 1998). I present this argument based on qualitative data collected which revealed that the sustainable fashion community of practice have a joint cause of promoting sustainable fashion, which they leverage through mutual engagement on social media, by sharing their knowledge and 'educating others' with their shared repertoire of resources. This chapter will use Wenger, White and Smith's (2009) conceptualisation of communities of practice as a framework with which to relate the qualitative data collected as part of the study back to.

Simultaneously, it will demonstrate that the fact they are a community of practice is what enables them to promote and leverage the sustainable fashion agenda. A key contribution of this thesis is recognising the sustainable fashion community as a community of practice, as well as a critical investigation into what the community contribute to leveraging sustainability in fashion.

When I embarked on this research, I did so with an instinct around a community existing because I had observed it from the periphery for a short period of time, since my own interests had led me to follow sustainable fashion accounts on Instagram, which then led me to seeing an overarching community. This positionality within the community is something I was acutely aware of throughout the research process. I saw people coming together on Instagram and connecting based on their shared interest in sustainable fashion. I saw people swapping clothes, commenting and sharing each other's posts, sharing tips and tricks on upcycling clothes, and celebrating each other's charity shop finds. It felt welcoming and supportive. The diversity in how members of the community defined themselves was something I remarked upon in my field diary; from 'slow fashion supporters', to 'charity shop shoppers' to 'ethical fashion' accounts, 'thrifters' and 'sustainable

fashion' accounts, to Instagram handles with play on words relating to 'threads', 'sewing' and 'second hand'. Despite their definitional difference, I saw how the community identified as one collective, united in the aim of promoting sustainable fashion. It was the variance in definitions and the unity in the communities' goal with which I can substantiate the claim from the literature review that sustainable fashion is an umbrella term. Under the umbrella of sustainable fashion, slow fashion shoppers, thrifters, upcyclers (and the rest) gather. Sustainable fashion was their common interest, their cause, and their way of enacting change.

The description I gave above, however, was merely an instinct; a sort of knowing that the community did exist, which had led me to embark on this research in the first place. I knew I had to substantiate this with evidence from members of the community themselves. This was an instance in which my ethnographic findings were substantiated by the asynchronous interviews and diaries, demonstrating participatory research. My participants also identified the existence of an overarching community. My participants' two main rationales for belonging to the community were their common interest of sustainable fashion, and because they felt supported and celebrated within this community:

> "I most definitely feel a part of a community, especially the sustainable fashion side of Instagram as this is such a friendly and supportive corner that I'm glad to be a part of. There is a huge sense of community with people sharing each other's pages, a lot of positive feedback on posts and stories that have been posted. I am happy to be a part of this." - Jess

> "Like all places in life, I do sometimes feel like there are the "cool kids" and maybe some cliquey-ness, but generally the community for sustainable fashion is extremely friendly and everyone is incredibly supportive of each other, celebrating each other's style and finds." - Sinead

> "I also wanted to be able to share my thoughts about the fast fashion industry in a creative way and curate an Instagram feed totally focused on slow fashion, by following people with similar interests." - Sophie

The perspectives of Jess, Sinead and Sophie demonstrate that they unanimously feel that a sustainable fashion community exists. This thesis has therefore overcome a first major sticking point; confirming my ethnographic findings and instincts that a community does exists. Although the community is not physically tangible, this does not mean it is not real, as

was argued in the methods chapter. Rather, this community exists through the social interactions within it, where social capital is the glue that holds communities together (Frug, 1996).

In addition, these thoughts from participants demonstrate that mutual engagement occurs in the community through support, sharing other people's pages, giving feedback on posts and stories, sharing thoughts and celebrating other people's style and finds. Their joint enterprise is sustainable fashion, and their repertoire of resources come in the forms of posts and stories. I will now go on to contextualise these comments and demonstrate that the sustainable fashion community is a community of practice. Furthermore, I will show how being a community of practice lends itself to leveraging sustainability in fashion. The theoretical framework that this chapter will adhere to is Wenger's (1998) concepts of joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire of resources. In addition, it will also use work by Wenger, White and Smith (2009) in which they categorise seven types of activities in which communities of practice may engage in. Figure 6 shows a diagram which maps some activities as informal and others as more formal, and some activities as occurring from the community and others with the community.

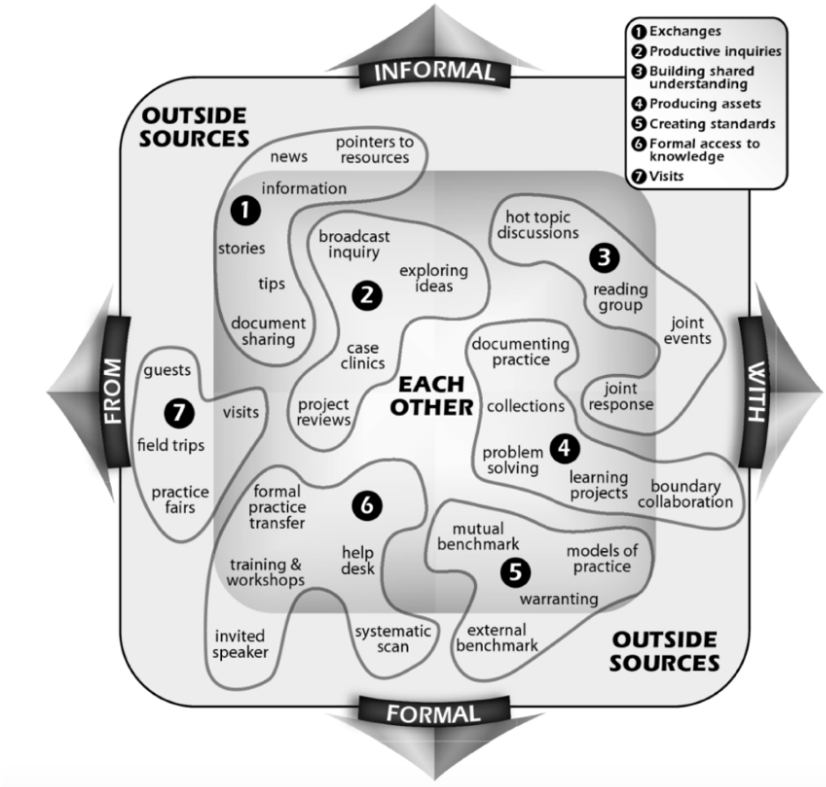


Figure 6: *Diagram to show and categorise the range of activities in which communities of practice may engage (Wenger, White and Smith, 2009).*

4.2 The Characteristics of the Sustainable Fashion Community of Practice and Sustainability

4.2.1 Exchanges

In relation to Figure 6 above, the sustainable fashion community of practice resonate most with the ‘informal’ and ‘with’ activities, particularly in categories one, two, three and four. I’ll begin with category one; exchanges. It is very commonplace in the sustainable fashion community of practice to exchange stories, tips, news and information and to direct people to resources. Members of the community share stories in the literal and Instagram sense. They share posts with news, tips and information with one another, they share thoughts, comment and like on each other’s posts and share each other’s pages. These are acts of mutual engagement. Figure 7 shows the Instagram story highlights of two individuals from the sustainable fashion community. Clicking on each highlight would allow you to see a thread of more posts related to that title. For example, under the ‘resources’ highlight, the community member has organised a plethora of posts relating to the injustices associated with fast fashion. This is exemplary of a form of exchange from category one of Wenger White and Smith’s (2009) diagram, ‘pointers to resources’, and is representative of the community’s repertoire of resources, demonstrating that the sustainable fashion community fit the definition of a community of practice by satisfying these criteria.

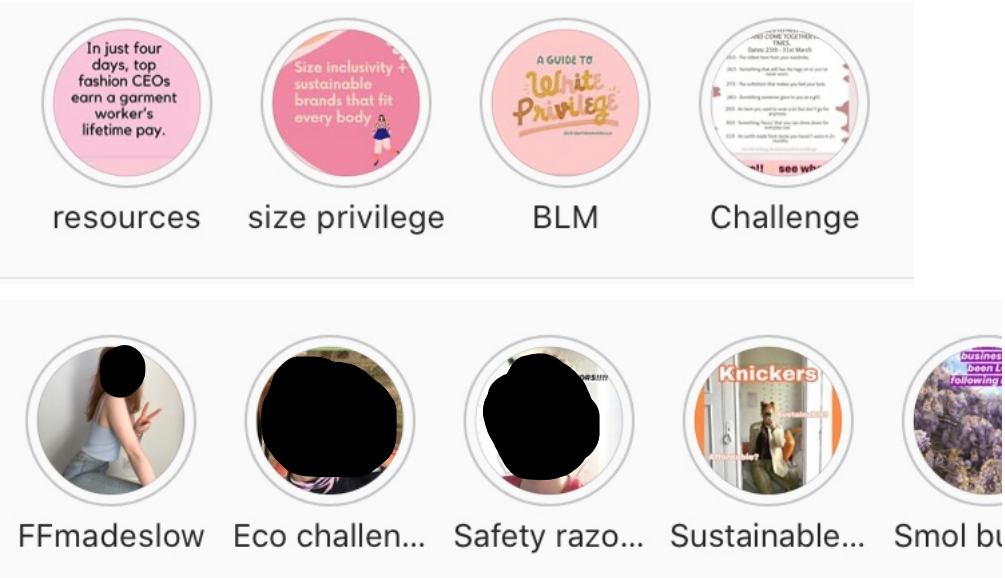


Figure 7: *Screenshots of Instagram story highlights from community member, organised into different sections so that when viewing the profile, you may access different resources and threads.*



Figure 8: Images of popular informative posts shared amongst the sustainable fashion community, found from a 'resources' story highlight.

These easily shareable resources from Figure 8 are exemplary of how information and document sharing occurs within the sustainable fashion community of practice. It also aligns with category four from Wenger White and Smith's (2009) diagram; producing assets. These informative resource assets are something that people can easily refer back to, access and share. This is a very commonplace activity and is an important way in which the community share and disseminate their message and therefore leverage their sustainable fashion agenda by highlighting the injustices of fast fashion.

4.2.2 The Challenges

Notice that a 'challenge' highlight is present in both of the two examples of Instagram story highlights seen in Figure 7. I briefly mentioned the Instagram challenges earlier in the Methods Chapter, noting that they became the cornerstone of my ethnography. The Instagram challenges carried out in the sustainable fashion community are an example of mutual engagement and which comes to form a repertoire of resources. The challenges also align with categories one, two and four from Wenger White and Smith's (2009) diagram; exchange, productive inquiries and producing assets.

Partaking in Instagram challenges was a phenomenon that peaked in popularity during the Coronavirus lockdown. As Covid-19 limited our access to public spaces and forced us to

stay at home, social media challenges in a variety of forms became very popular on social media. These included the #DontRushChallenge, where participants would pass around a makeup or hair brush like a wand that magically upgraded their look, the #BinIsolationOuting, where people would dress up to take the bins out, the #TrickShot challenge where people bounced ping pong balls off of pots and pans, and the #LooRollChallenge, where people would do kick ups and tricks with a loo roll instead of a ball, as well as the press up challenge, the run 5km for the NHS challenge, the baby photo challenge, first couple picture challenge and the 'Until tomorrow' challenge. These types of challenge typically involved sharing clips of the challenge on social media and nominating friends to attempt the challenge. Not only did these challenges serve the purpose of curing boredom, but they also connected people who were separated due to the lockdown. In lockdown, the digital world became safer than the physical world as the risk of infection was zero.

The sustainable fashion community on Instagram also came up with its own challenges. One of my participants framed the challenges within Covid-19, remarking that

> "as the world changes, the internet quickly adapts. With no charity shops, clothes swaps or car boot sales in sight, much of the online second-hand community are seeking new ways to create content... the content [of the challenges] is varied but united with the same message, the promotion of sustainable fashion." - Lotte

Lotte clearly recognised that the joint enterprise of the community in partaking in these challenges was to promote sustainable fashion, further reinforcing the existence of a community of practice with a shared joint enterprise. Interestingly, she noted that the changing geographies of the world, as enforced by the Covid-19 lockdowns, have led to changes in the type of content present within the sustainable fashion community.



Figure 9: *Diagram to show the infographics for four different challenges over the course of lockdown. The top right image is of the Thrifted Wardrobe Challenge from 27th- 30th April, the bottom left is the #restylingtheritual challenge from 6th- 12th April, the bottom left was the #sustainableseclusion style challenge with a flexible five days, and the bottom left is #isolatedwardrobechallenge from 25th - 31st March.*

The first challenge I came across was the #IsolatedWardrobeChallenge, which was started by an individual that identifies themselves as a sustainable fashion blogger. In an Instagram caption describing the challenge, she said the challenge was designed to “bring people together in such a difficult time”, to “help us be creative, be social and build community spirit”, and to “help us love our wardrobes and come together in difficult times”. In outlining the aims of the challenge, it became evident that the challenge reflected the emotionally charged challenge of the pandemic and lockdown, that community spirit was strong especially in the lockdown, and that the community is inherently centred around fashion and sustainability.

Other rationales for participating in the challenge included:

> “giving me a reason to get up and get dressed in the morning, and a chance to test my creativity” - Penny

> “By the end of this challenge I was about fourteen days into thinking very differently about my wardrobe. Do I love print more than I realise? Do I ever wear this? Have I really owned this for thirteen years? Some days are easy and the output is limited, when faced with a rainbow challenge, I was dismayed to find how little bright clothes I own, but that is what a love of monochrome tees will do to you.” - Lotte

Documenting practice and problem solving are the two descriptors from category four of Wenger, White and Smith’s (2009) diagram that are relevant here. By participating in the challenge, each day individuals documented their practice of getting dressed according to the prompt of the day. This encourages a deeper engagement with the existing clothes in their wardrobes in a bid to reduce further consumption by re-wearing and getting creative with pairing together clothes already owned. The challenges also feed into problem solving, which is represented by category two of Wenger, White and Smith’s (2009) diagram – productive enquiry. This is because they encourage participants to think, or enquire about a problem we all frequently face- what should I wear today? Lotte and Penny reflected on their participation in the challenge, remarking that by the end of it they thought very differently about their wardrobes. This confirms that the challenges which take part within the community of practice, do in fact help to leverage sustainable fashion through reducing consumption, and are hence productive forms of enquiry towards achieving the mission of the community. In addition, the challenges also help to strengthen the community of practice. They represent a shift from simple exchanges of interests, to a more formalised infrastructure within the community, with which the community can reach more people and encourage more nuanced thinking around sustainable fashion with their developed repertoire of resources.

4.2.3 Learning and community

The literature review highlighted that online communities come together through a process of cognition, communication and collaboration (Fuchs and Sevignani, 2013). Ultimately, these processes allow communities to come together through feelings of togetherness and social relations between members. This is an experience central to the sustainable fashion community, where my interviewees recognised the community as particularly ‘friendly’ and

‘supportive’. A sense of community was also identified through the practices of sharing each other’s pages and providing positive feedback on posts and stories. When I (asynchronously) interviewed a participant of the Isolated Wardrobe Challenge, she said that:

> “it’s really nice to be able to regularly connect with people who have similar interests to you and interact on Instagram. I think challenges like the isolated wardrobe challenge also build this sense of community as you see the same people participating each day.” - Dani

It was interesting that for Dani, the thing that built community for her was connecting with people and seeing the same members, which demonstrates the importance of social relations in community building. Wenger, White and Smith (2009) pose the question of how it is possible for people from all over the world who communicate via the internet be called a community. The answer, in part, are the social relations contained within. Another perspective on this question is that learning is the foundation of online communities of practice, and is a foundation of community building (Wenger, White and Smith, 2009). One of my participants remarked that:

> “I just hope that through my Instagram I can help educate people to stay away from fast fashion and make the most of the clothes that have already been made.” - Ellen

The communities’ desire to educate others shows that the sustainable fashion community of practice align with category four of Wenger White and Smith’s (2009) diagram, within the learning projects category. Educating others is another way in which the community represent a tangible online community of practice, as “learning together depends on quality relationships of trust and mutual engagement that members develop with each other” (Wenger, White and Smith, 2009, p. 8). Furthermore, education is utilised as a form of fashion activism within the community, through practices like sharing Instagram posts and stories which enable them to further disseminate and share their sustainable fashion agenda. This desire to learn and educate is exemplar of a wider shift that occurred in 2020; the pandemic, the Black Lives Matter protests and the US presidential elections led many to question the current status quo and the challenge institutions and systems that perpetuate racism, exploitation and inequality. Fashion and activism became even further entwined over the course of 2020 (Diederich, 2020) and processes of learning and educating were visible embodiments of activism within the community of practice. Calls for individuals to change their fashion consumption behaviours, for example by supporting black-owned businesses,

or boycotting fast fashion brands such as Boohoo were heard within the community via Instagram posts and stories.

4.2.4 Events

The sustainable fashion community of practice are also beginning to organise formal events. For example, in my ethnographic studies I have noticed the creation of a 'Swap Family' Facebook group and a Sustainable Fashion Book Club. The Swap Family group is described as a 'little swap shop family', which is a 'safe and friendly place for everyone to swap or sell any of their unwanted clothes and give them a new lease of life with someone else'. The Swap Family and reading group are prime examples of category three, 'building shared understanding' of Wenger White and Smith's (2009) diagram, again demonstrating that the sustainable fashion community are a community of practice. These events allow for the exchange of knowledge and for practical action to occur. For example, clothes swapping offers opportunity for consumers to become suppliers and enact collaborative consumption. Collaborative consumption can be defined as "people coordinating the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation" (Belk, 2014, p. 1597), which includes the actions of swapping, renting, lending or trading (Henninger et al, 2018). Collaborative consumption is associated with an awareness of the impact that consumption has on the environment and on people (Henninger et al, 2018). Crucially, swapping garments provides consumers with an opportunity to become suppliers and "create a sense of responsibility and ownership of their fashion consumption, thereby creating a community that is inclusive and counteracting on the impact the fashion industry has on the natural environment" (Henninger et al, 2018, p.340). The fact that the Swap Family was established through and because of the sustainable fashion community of practice shows that the community of practice model positively reinforces the leveraging of the sustainable fashion agenda.

To summarise, the subsections presented have argued that through processes of exchange, productive enquiry, building shared understanding, the production of assets, events, documenting practice and problem solving the sustainable fashion community are representative of a community of practice. At each stage, how these processes contribute to leveraging sustainable fashion has also been addressed.

4.3 Meaning of the Challenge Prompts

This chapter will now turn to examine how the meanings of the prompts within the sustainable fashion Instagram challenges contributed to leveraging sustainability. The nature of the prompts within the Instagram challenges are an interesting point of analysis, as they portray what values the sustainable fashion community hold near. Some days the prompts were related to specific clothing choices, such as wearing denim, polka dots, band tees or monochrome. Other days, the prompts aligned with enacting fashion activism and leveraging themes associated with sustainable fashion. For example, wearing the oldest item from your wardrobe featured in two of the challenges, restyling or re-wearing was a common theme, as was second-hand shopping.

The argument I make here is that the sustainable fashion community straddle the ethical consumption movement and the anti-consumption movement. The ethical consumption movement is a broad discursive field which has gained popularity since the 80s. It can refer to fair trade, non-animal tested products, non-sweatshop brands and organic goods which avoid exploitation (Littler, 2009). Littler (2009) suggests that the ever-growing phenomenon of shopping for change is a form of 'radical consumption', and asks whether we can ever really buy our way to a more equitable or sustainable future. The sustainable fashion community align with the ethical consumption movement as they promote second-hand shopping and consuming from ethical brands. This was reflected in the challenges, where prompts such as 'your favourite second-hand item' (from the #sustainableseclusionchallenge) demonstrate that the notion of ethical consumption is deeply embedded and a social norm within this community. In my ethnographic research, I substantiated this conclusion with findings showing that second-hand shopping is deeply engrained and promoted within the community as a way of achieving fashion sustainability and to mitigate against the harmful impacts of buying first-hand from fast fashion brands.

Simultaneously, whilst promoting ethical consumption, notions of anti-consumption also exist within the sustainable fashion community. Lee et al. (2011) define anti-consumption as ''phenomena that are against the acquisition, use, and dispossession of certain goods'' (p. 1681). Lee and Chatzidakis (2012) contend that anti-consumption is distinct from consumer resistance or ethical consumption, as consumer resistance is expressed through consumption rather than against consumption. The way in which the sustainable fashion community present anti-consumption is through encouragement to reuse or restyle clothes, to encourage a deeper engagement with wardrobes (particularly through the challenges) to prevent any further consumption. It is about looking inwards at what they already own, and what could perhaps be repurposed through upcycling, rather than going out and buying

second- hand or new. Ethical consumption is leveraged through encouraging second-hand shopping and is also promoted as the alternative to buying first-hand.

The sustainable fashion community therefore encapsulate the paradox of ethical consumption; consumption of fast fashion is still promoted so long as it is second-hand, which is also managed by encouraging no new consumption to occur, through deeper engagement with the clothes we do have, in the form of re-wearing, restyling or upcycling. Despite being paradoxical, both types of consumption enable members to view their actions as positive and more sustainable ways to consume fashion, as opposed to buying first-hand from fast fashion brands.

4.4 Community, Social Media Activism and Sustainability

I want to take the time here to reflect on the symbiotic relationship between community, social media activism and sustainability. The relationship between community and sustainability is not new or novel. The scale of the community is frequently acknowledged as one at which sustainability can be enacted through grassroots innovation and fostering democratic engagement, co-operation and empowerment to benefit the communities involved (Davies, 2012). The inclusion of social media and activism into that mix, however, requires further exploration.

As well as being a community of practice, through their joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire of resources, the sustainable fashion community on Instagram enact social media activism within their community of practice to leverage their sustainable fashion agenda. Social media activism is the use of social network technology to organize and coordinate real-world action (Brown et al, 2017). Take the Swap Family and section 4.1.3 whereby calls were made for individuals to change their consumption practices to champion social justice as examples of this.

Gamson (1992) suggests that the following social phycological processes contribute to the leveraging of social activist movements:

> “consciousness refers to how individuals construct a shared definition for a social situation that implies collective action. Solidarity refers to how individuals develop and reinforce loyalty and commitment to the groups and organizations that act on behalf of the social movement. Lastly, collective identity involves connection between the self and cultural systems as individuals develop a sense of self relative to the

> definition of coparticipants in an effort toward social change" (Brown et al, 2017, p.1832).

There is overlap here between how social activist movements come to fruition and how communities of practices come to fruition. Firstly, this speaks to the construction of their joint enterprise and their sense of 'we', which I have established is around promoting sustainable fashion and denouncing fast fashion. Secondly, it speaks to how their acts of mutual engagement and their repertoire of resources produce loyalty and commitment to their cause, leading to efforts to enact change.

As social media platforms now play a central role in identity construction (Gerbaudo and Treré, 2015), it is important to consider how this contributes to the communities' sense of 'we' in conjunction with the central joint enterprise of sustainable fashion. Gerbaudo and Treré, (2015) suggest that collective names, iconography, slogans and a lexicon are created and contribute towards an identifiable, collective actor and sense of 'we'. Whilst the community don't have any shared iconography that I observed, they do have a distinct sense of 'we', as was established at the very start of this chapter. In addition, some of my findings, such as the use of highlights, sharing of resources and establishment of events, show how collective identity is reinforced by the community of practice, in which social relations are the glue that hold the community together (Frug, 1996). Ultimately, communities of practices lend themselves well to social media activism as they both require a collective identity. This is because collective identity is the operation by which social movements define who they are and what they stand for (Melucci, 1996).

Leaver et al (2020) argue that it is clear that many different cultural groups and practices exist on Instagram, all deploying different social and cultural norms, and thus different ways of expressing collective identity. They also argue that groups on Instagram often require a level of in-group knowledge in order to exist and proliferate and may be organised around hashtags and mutual followers.

The question arises here, however, of the scalability of the group and their contributions to the narratives and actions around sustainability in fashion. Whilst the work of the community is committed to activism in terms of exposing the issues associated with fast fashion, it is also committed to sharing ways in which to overcome those issues. Through strategies discussed above, such as exchanges of information, fashion and dress challenges, aiming to learn and educate, running clothes swap groups and events, and promoting ethical/ sustainable consumption and anti-consumption, the community are able to leverage their

sustainable fashion agenda. However, the nature of such social media communities is that they do require a level of in-group knowledge (Leaver et al, 2020), and so a critique of the work of the community is that due to the bounded nature of online communities of practice, the agenda they are leveraging is potentially not very far reaching. In order to truly leverage a sustainable fashion agenda, the behaviours and consumption practices of those who are unaware of sustainable fashion and are content with fast fashion consumption need to be challenged. These individuals may be difficult to reach as they are bound up in unique Instagram communities of their own. In short, the work the community do via practices like exchange, sharing resources, events and learning contributes to leveraging a sustainable fashion agenda within the community, but questions about the scalability and impact of this work remain.

4.5 Social Media Influencers and the Community of Practice

Following on from discussion of the activities of the community on social media in the first half of this chapter, I would now like to turn to examine social media influencers and bloggers within the community of practice. As I noted in the introduction, through my ethnographic work, I found that some (but not all) members of the sustainable fashion community of practice identify themselves as bloggers or influencers. I noted a preference towards the title of 'blogger' within the community, although the two terms are often used synonymously (McCall, 2019). The Literature Review traced the work of influencers on Instagram, and reviewed concepts such as presentation of self, garnering attention and authenticity in relation to the world of Instagram-influencing and the commercial sphere.

First, I argue that sustainability bloggers within the community of practice operate within a juxtaposed space of needing to enact authenticity labour and present a 'true version of oneself', which aligns with the ideals of the sustainable fashion community, whilst also commodifying oneself to be (rightly) renumerated for their labour. Secondly, I argue that an important way in which sustainable fashion bloggers leverage their agenda is by imitating the work of traditional fast fashion influencers and bloggers, and then putting a sustainable 'DIY' spin on it, which contributes to their relatability and authenticity within the sustainable fashion community of practice via a demonstration of actions and alternatives to consuming fast fashion.

4.5.1 Ads

One of the interview participants of this study, of whom identifies as a sustainable fashion blogger, often posts Instagram Ads and PR products on their Instagram feed. The products advertised by the individual include organic and biodegradable sanitary products, a sustainable shoe brand, a reusable razor brand and a small jewellery business. An interesting point of note in my ethnography were the stories posted by the individual around the time of posting an ad on their Instagram feed. The stories they posted were about 'having to choose carefully about which brands to collaborate with' and 'only collaborating with brands that align with their own ethics and morals', as well as the importance of 'supporting small businesses' despite her ads being with rather large fashion businesses.

Another sustainable fashion blogger who was not one of my direct participants wrote about their experience of this conundrum in a blogpost on their website:

> "I enjoy helping others make more sustainable choices and I provide a lot of free content to enable people to do that…In order for me to do this, like many other creators, I work with brands. I occasionally work on a paid basis but many brands can't (or don't want to) pay. So instead I accept gifted products and experiences… I was criticised by another blogger for doing "too many ads". I'm not going to lie, it struck a nerve… I'm very aware of how too many ads can make people feel because it makes me feel that way too. Too many or the wrong brands and you start to question someone's authenticity, and rightly so. Is it genuine enthusiasm or just a cash-grab?... Another valid reason for feeling uncomfortable about promotions is when we see too many from people talking about sustainability… If every week they're receiving new things, how is that sustainable?" (A Considered Life, 2020)

The conundrum illustrated above is emblematic of the juxtaposition of authenticity and commerciality, where the commercial sphere is associated with detrimental over-consumption, and the individual's sense of authenticity online is associated with denouncing fast fashion and excessive consumption, in order to leverage a sustainable fashion agenda.

The work of Wellman et al (2020) indicates that influencers rely on an ethics of authenticity to build credibility within their audience when making choices about whether to work with brands, which brands to work with, and what type of content is produced as part of the partnership. Wellman et al (2020) argue that this ethical framework of authenticity is "premised on being true to one's self (authenticity) and being true to one's audience (credibility)" (p.78), in order to put their brand identity and audience at the forefront whilst also profiting from commercial advertisements. It appears that influencers and bloggers that

aim to leverage sustainability face challenges when navigating the commercial/ authentic binary for this reason; they need (and deserve) to be renumerated when posting content, but the excessive consumption that comes along with it is ethically difficult for them to overcome and has to be justified to their audiences.

The Literature Review highlighted that the work of influencers on social media is an embodiment of the convergence of commerciality and authenticity. It also highlighted that despite this convergence, there remains a perceived distance between authenticity and commercialisation, perpetuating the idea that there exists a cultural space which has escaped capitalism's hold, in which authenticity can flourish (Banet-Weiser, 2011). I argue that this cultural space is carved out by sustainable fashion influencers when they justify their brand partnerships; within this space of justification, the influencers are (rightly) being renumerated for their content whilst also remaining authentic and credible to their audience. This is representative of how influencers consciously enact authenticity labour and presentations of their entrepreneurial self, to simultaneously present a 'true' version of oneself and one's beliefs, as well as commodifying oneself (Maares, Banjac and Hanusch, 2020).

4.5.2 Fashion, but Make it Sustainable

The final argument of this section is that a way in which the sustainable fashion community of practice leverage sustainability is by replicating or emulating fast fashion trends that conventional influencers peddle, but in a more sustainable manner. This also represents a careful management of practices associated with blogging and influencing. The act of replicating trends but making them more sustainable could include finding items second hand or making the garment themselves rather than buying it from a fast fashion brand.

Fast fashion is heavily trend based and now operates in the 'permanent present' (Rocamora, 2012), where trends come and go in just a few weeks as opposed to being oriented around seasons and fashion weeks, as was traditionally the case before the rise of social media in fashion. The short life span of clothing as trends come and go is associated with the environmental costs of fast fashion. Thus, a shift in consumer behaviour to reduce the amount of new clothing being purchased and an increase in garment lifetimes is commonly earmarked as one of the ways in which we can improve the long-term sustainability of fashion (Perry, 2020).

The sustainable fashion community show awareness of this dilemma, and post solutions to the paradox of fulfilling the desire to be ‘on trend’ and fashionable, whilst also avoiding fast fashion and shopping sustainably through ethical consumption and anti-consumption practices. For example, a member of the community often posts ‘how to’ videos showing how she upcycled or repurposed a garment which she would then style in a picture for her Instagram.

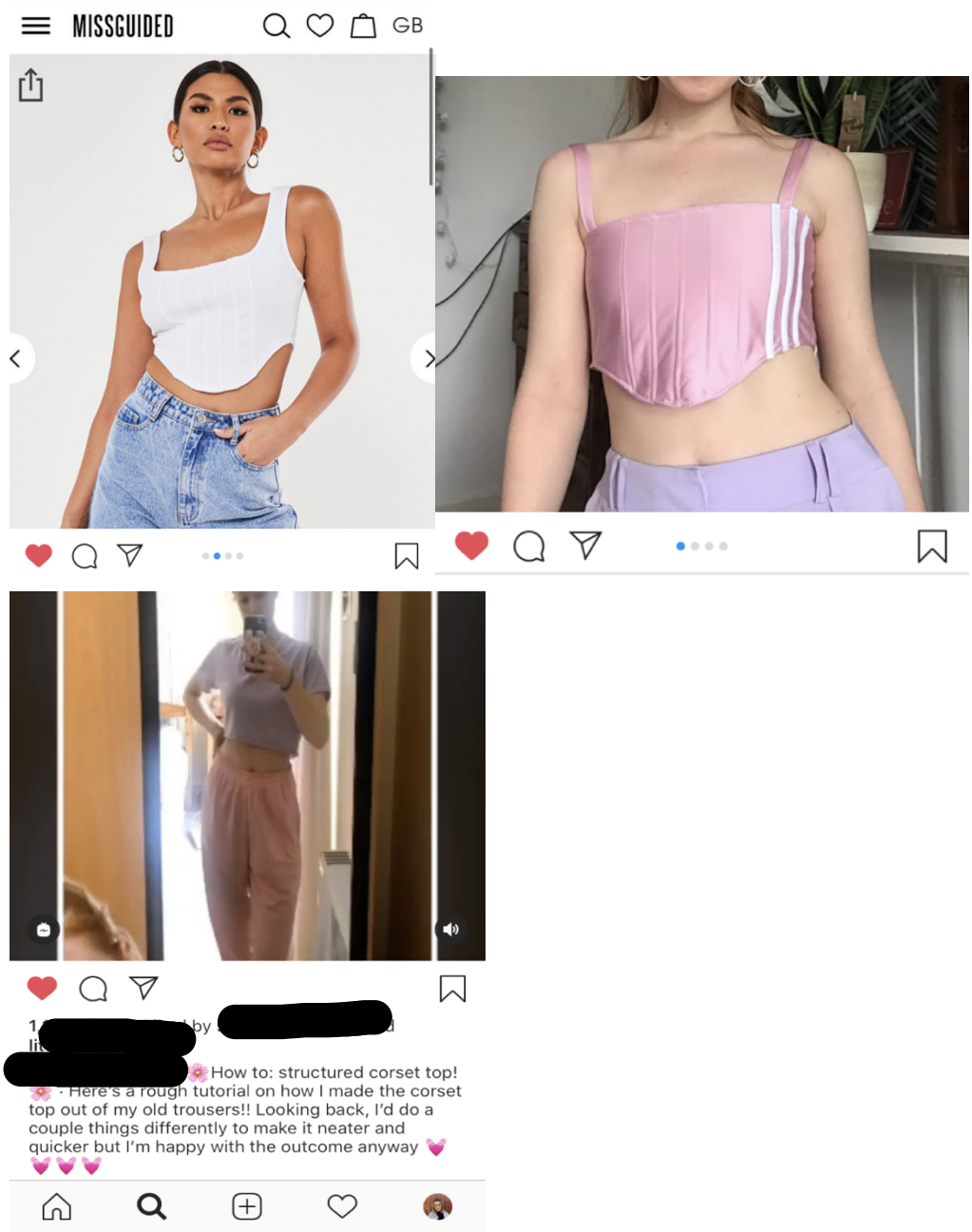


Figure 11: *Screenshots from a member of the sustainable fashion community's Instagram account, depicting a corset style garment she handmade, which replicates a common fast fashion trend. She included the top two of the above images in a ‘swipe’ feature on*

Instagram and followed with another post about how she made the corset style top. [Images shared with permission].

The posts in Figure 11 are examples of how members of the sustainable fashion community simultaneously replicate and then subvert fast fashion trends and the presentation-of-self involved in being a fashion influencer. First, as the Figure 11 caption suggested, the style of the garment which she replicated in a sustainable way was a corset-style crop top. These tops were a popular fast fashion trend in the summer of 2020. She referenced this with an example of the garment from popular fast fashion retailer, Missguided. In doing this, the member is clearly replicating trends established by fast fashion bloggers, emulating aspirational labour through posting a 'glam' outfit and fast fashion trend. However, they're also subverting the fast fashion aesthetic that she emulates. She has shared a guide on how individuals may make this garment for themselves, as a sustainable alternative to buying it from fast fashion companies. Her subversive practices here involve sharing what goes on behind the scenes of pictures to encourage ethical consumption by promoting making garments by hand instead of buying from fast fashion brands.

Duffy and Hund (2015) contend that influencers present the self under the ideal of 'having it all', through three tropes of passionate work, staging the glam life and carefully curated social sharing. In emulating the 'glam life' presented by traditional fast fashion influencers, the member is presenting herself in a similar way to traditional fast fashion influencers in order to garner attention from the attention economy (Marwick, 2013) that structure the Instagram experience. Simultaneously, her presentation of self is subversive as she provides sustainable alternatives to fast fashion consumption and highlights the injustices in wearing fast fashion trends that are part of presenting the 'glam life' on Instagram. Providing a step by step video enables her alternatives to fast fashion consumption to feel realistic, achievable and give her account authenticity, which further leverages the sustainable fashion agenda.

4.6 Summary

To summarise Chapter Four, the sustainable fashion community on Instagram are indeed a community of practice. I base this claim on their joint enterprise of promoting sustainable fashion, their acts of mutual engagement through exchange, productive enquiry and building shared understanding; all of which lead to a production of assets which represent a shared repertoire of resources. Furthermore, this chapter has detailed and exemplified how all of these features of the community lend themselves to leveraging sustainable fashion; through

learning, events, knowledge sharing and acts of ethical and anti- consumption. The chapter also concludes that the community of practice model lends itself well to fashion activism as they both require a collective sense of ‘we’, a desire to educate, and calls to action (mutual engagement) which show loyalty and action towards the cause. The data presented in this chapter shows engagement with ethical and anti-consumption, the circular economy via increasing the lifecycle of clothing and DIY alternatives to consuming fast fashion, which are all examples of how the community leverage their sustainable fashion agenda. However, I also question the scalability of this fashion activism due to the nature of online communities requiring a level of ‘in-group’ knowledge. Finally, the chapter concludes with an examination of how practices such as the presentation of authenticity and commodification of self, found within the work of bloggers and influencers, are managed and manipulated by the community of practice to leverage their sustainable fashion agenda. Ultimately, the work of the community operates under the same social and economic regimes that dominate online commercial culture, however the community find ways to circumvent that via justifying their authenticity and providing alternatives to fast fashion consumption.

5 Chapter Five –Clothing, Altered Meanings and the Covid-19 Pandemic

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to investigate how the community responded to the Covid-19 pandemic, and to tease out wider shifts in how relationships with clothing and sustainability changed. The chapter traces the multiple ways in which consumption of clothing changed over the course of the pandemic, including the change in economic circumstances which led to the quarantine of consumption, the nature of consumption, and presentation of self. It then considers how the meaning of clothing has too changed over the course of the pandemic, and how understanding meaning can leverage sustainability. Theoretically, the chapter engages with literatures on performativity, consumption, material culture and the biographies of things.

5.2 "No one will see me" and the Quarantine of Consumption

The previous chapter demonstrated how Instagram dress challenges encouraged a deeper engagement with clothing and the process of choosing what to wear every day for the community, the reality for many was that lockdown made the act of dress a much less significant and thought-provoking occasion in the day. The challenges were designed to remedy this feeling of unimportance around the act of getting dressed. Remarking upon the practice of getting dressed, some participants were more blasé about the act of getting dressed:

> "Celebrities have disappeared from our screens to be replaced by NHS staff and other staff from essential services. Who cares what any of us are wearing?" - Marianne

> "[I] feel with the pandemic it [getting dressed] is even less relevant. No one will see me (except my family, who don't really care about my clothes, as they love me anyway, warts and all and still say I'm beautiful). I don't need to make a statement about my looks. I just wear what I have and I'm ok with that." - Matilda

The reflections of Marianne and Matilda speak to a phenomenon that emerged from the pandemic called the quarantine of consumption. Discussed in the literature review, it refers to a dramatic pullback in discretionary spending to spending on basics such as groceries, household items and some personal care items (Mckinsey, 2020). A BBC article revealed

that “clothing sales plummeted by 34% in March as much of the world's population is currently unable to travel abroad or even socialise amid lockdown restrictions” (McIntosh, 2020). It was true that and how and what we consumed literally changed overnight, as we were forced out of public spaces and into our homes. The connection that my participants and the BBC article so casually made was one between the geographies of our consumption, and why we consume. The two are inherently connected. Therefore, the changing economic landscape due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the shift in the geographies of each of our individual world’s meant that initially, the consumption of clothing plummeted dramatically.

According to Mansvelt (2005), consumption can be defined as “the complex sphere of social relations and discourses which centre the sale, purchase and use of commodities” (p.22). The quarantine of consumption highlights the situatedness of our consumption, recognising that our consumption practices are fluid and contextual (Mansvelt, 2005). In the case of Covid-19 and the quarantine of consumption, our consumption practices changed dramatically as the context of the pandemic rendered frivolous consumption unnecessary. The idea that ‘no one will see me’ highlights the performative nature to getting dressed and fashion consumption. Whilst it is true that our everyday interactions with fashion and dress can be mundane, it is also a performative gamble (Von Busch and Hwang, 2018), where every day we play the game of getting dressed to perform our identities and sense of self (Crewe, 2017).

I argue here that this everyday performativity (I will come on to discuss performativity online shortly) is inherently connected to being able to access the public sphere. When we wear clothes, we are putting ourselves out there to be judged by others; it is an emotional gamble (Von Busch and Hwang, 2018). As our geographies changed and we were no longer able to access public spaces, we were not wearing clothes to be judged by others. For most, the space of the home is not a space in which you are judged. It can be (but sadly is sometimes not) a space of sanctuary and privacy. Therefore, as we were forced to the confines of our home, our need to dress performatively resided. ‘No one can see me’, and so what we decided to wear didn’t matter so much.

The ‘Zoom Suit’ is an example of how dressing changed according to reduced visibilities and performativities. As the pandemic forced many people to work from home, work attire relaxed and many people began dressing in work attire from the waist up (Elan, 2020), as this is all that is visible on video conferencing calls. Since no one could see the bottom half of our outfits, the Zoom Suit consisted of work wear on the top and loungewear on bottom,

which demonstrates the performativity in our dress and how being forced into the confines of our homes means our habits of dress changed according to changing geographies and visibilities. The change in work attire since working from home became a norm and was something that my asynchronous interviews confirmed. When I asked one of my participants if what she wears on a day to day basis has changed since lockdown, she responded:

> "It's pretty much only jeans, a t-shirt and sweater/cardigan over that… Normally, I would wear jeans maybe once a week at most. I normally mostly wear skirts and dresses, for work, to go out, etc and I feel they are much more a reflection of my style than 'just' jeans and a t-shirt. So my current clothes are very unlike my normal outfit." - Lucy

As Covid-19 and the lockdown quickly snatched venturing out into public spaces (for work or leisure purposes) away from us, it appears that the way we dress changed, as did the reason we dressed. It appears that there was a shift in priority. One participant commented on this:

> "I also borrow clothing weekly at a clothing library: these are always fairly unique items so the 'need' for these have also disappeared (which I'm unhappy about). I guess the 'need' for fashion is gone. Clothing are now only functional." - Matilda

Matilda demonstrates how the need for individual, distinct items has disappeared, replaced by more functional requirements of clothing. She suggests a now muted feeling towards fashion and dress, as opposed to the excitement she once felt before, as her personal geography changed from the public sphere being fully accessible, to suddenly being inaccessible.

Marianne, Lucy, Matilda and the Zoom Suit demonstrate that as our geographies shifted away from the public sphere to the personal and domestic spheres, the way that we dressed changed too. The Zoom Suit indicates tension between the social conventions of dressing for the workplace, and how this suddenly shifted when the geography of the workplace also changed. Matilda's comments on the 'need' for fashion disappearing, and Lucy's recount of her dress choices becoming more informal, indicate that as our geographies changed, aspects the performativity of our dress too changed.

All of the above speaks to the changing geographies of our ability to enact performativity, because we were actively barred from public spaces. However, social media still remained a

platform on which performativity could be enacted. Performativity and the presentation of self are key practices associated with the use of social media in digital environments (Marwick, 2015; Brydges and Sjoholm, 2019; Duffy and Hund, 2015; Curlew, 2019). Performative acts of identity on social media are shared practices which emerge through engaging in performative acts with others on the platform (Curlew, 2019). Curlew (2019) purports that "recent scholarship [on performativity] relies on Butler's (1990) theories of performativity, where digital social action constitutes a set of performative acts constantly in negotiation with fluid, dynamic, and multiple sets of selves" (p.2).

These sets of selves, I argue, were geographically split between being physically barred from public spaces, but also being able to access a sense of public space online. Marianne referred to the disappearance of celebrities from our screens as a rationale for not caring about what they wear. The Instagram challenges, as discussed in the previous chapter, mark an attempt to remedy this feeling of 'not caring'. The challenges represent a conscious effort to restore a reason to get dressed every day by getting dressed for online spaces, whilst simultaneously strengthening participants connections to their wardrobes to leverage an agenda of sustainability. The online challenges resembled an opportunity to enact performativity as this opportunity was no longer available in the outdoor, public sphere, which was closed down to all. In addition, the challenges represent further engagements with other members of the community, all engaging in performativity together with the shared goal of promoting sustainable fashion. In this case, the geographies of performativity have become further embedded in the digital realm; for example, Jess remarked that she 'just got dressed for the Instagram challenge'. The performativity of dress increased its presence in online spaces as physical public spaces became inaccessible, but also offered novel ways in which members of the community could connect through enacting performativity together online.

The quarantine of consumption and changing geographies of performativity have had *some* positive impacts on reduced consumption. In her diary, Natalia reflected on the feeling of not caring who sees her 'having a positive effect on not buying clothes', and that being in lockdown has made her think twice about 'do I need it?', 'what can I wear it with?', 'when would I wear it?'. The changing geographies of our lives because of the pandemic have hence resulted in altered performativities, which members of the sustainable fashion community related to even deeper engagement with sustainability. This connection was made because not buying clothes (due to the quarantine of consumption) led to inwards reflection on what was already owned, and thus deeper engagement with sustainability. The wider impact of this shift within the community, however, appears minimal. Whilst total

economic profit in the fashion industry was down a staggering 93% from 2019 to 2020 (McKinsey State of Fashion, 2021), the shift to digital has benefitted many online fast fashion retailers like Boohoo, where profits increased 41% to £1.7bn in 2020, despite widespread negative press about Boohoo's connections to human exploitation in garment factories in Leicester, UK (Partridge, 2021). The concern here is that those who already engage with sustainable fashion are the ones who are partaking in challenges and critically reflecting on their consumption habits, again leading to questions around the scalability of deeper engagements with sustainability as a result of the pandemic.

5.3 Objects, Meaning and Covid-19

For the community of practice however, changing geographies and performativity culminated in a feeling of deeper and more critical engagement with clothes and sustainability, also leading to altered meanings associated with clothing and dress because of the pandemic. This section will cover the theme of altered meanings in more depth. Fashion and dress play a role in the construction of meaning within cultures, where fashion is a vehicle through which cultural meanings are expressed (Barnard, 2007). I argue in this section that the meanings associated with dress have been through upheaval because of the Covid-19 pandemic, demonstrating that the relationships between people, objects and meaning is constantly shifting (Woodward, 2018)

In the following diary vignette, one of my participants made a particularly poignant analysis of how clothing and dress was making her feel in the pandemic:

> "Tonight however, I have a video call with some of my friends, and the theme tonight is 'cocktail night' so we are dressing up again and that is something to look forward to. However, it has started to feel strange dressing up every time we have a drink over a video chat. It feels like we're forcing the fun, as if it were prior to lockdown and we were going to the pub in person, we would very much be in jeans and jumpers and be a lot more casual. It feels almost sad to take an outfit pick for my Instagram story, and to end the night sat alone with a glass of gin in my kitchen, and having to take off my make-up and change out of pretty clothes when and go back to the seat I've been stuck at for well over a month." - Fatima

> "The days where I lacked motivation or felt a bit low, forcing myself to dress up when all I wanted to wear was jeans and a jumper felt forced, and I would think more about

> tracking my productivity and trying to put on a happy demeanour without it working. I think my main take-away from how I've been dressing is that in lockdown we will face tough emotions, and it's nice to know that there are things as small as putting on a dress or wearing some lipstick that can help me feel more normal and productive. But these things also don't feel normal. They feel like I'm trying to be normal in a time where maybe it's okay that things aren't as they usually are, and it has felt more important to recognise that. Clothes can reflect how you feel, but they shouldn't be a dictator of what you should feel. How often are we able to stay home for days on end? How often do I have the opportunity to wear all the pyjama trousers I've been gifted for the last five Christmases' or to wear pyjamas all day? I will still be dressing up, and I will still be having pyjama days. But I will be taking cues from my feelings, rather than expecting my feelings to take cues from what I am wearing." - Fatima

The diary entries from Fatima were certainly emotionally powerful. She reflected on feelings of inauthenticity, being forced to pretend and just taking pictures for Instagram, as well as a changing relationship to objects that, prior to the pandemic, would make her feel good. This is a poignant example of how the meanings attached to objects aren't static and can change (Woodward, 2018). The objects of a dress and lipstick have different meanings to her than they did before lockdown. This demonstrates that as the objects are moving through different contexts, and their biography has changed (Kopytoff, 1986), they have taken on different meanings. In this case, they have a more negative connotations for Fatima, as they cannot deliver the same feeling they once did, due to the changing spatialities of the world and confinements to our homes due to the pandemic. Woodward (2018) argues that consumption of objects is a medium through which social relations are performed and affirmed. I suggest that perhaps, in the context of these objects being used in the midst of a global pandemic, it is the lack of social relations associated with the objects that have resulted in their lesser meaning for Fatima, reminiscent of the social relations they once facilitated. It is true that people and things are coagents in producing meaning (Woodward, 2018), but so are the contexts in which they are used (Kopytoff, 1986). The sad and isolating reality of Covid-19 has altered the meaning of objects to Fatima.

The way in which Fatima remarked on actively changing her mindset around clothing to now take "cues from my feelings, rather than expecting my feelings to take cues from what I am wearing" demonstrates an interjection to the literature which places large emphasis on the affective power of material things (Crewe, 2017). Her autonomous act, resisting the emotional and affective power of her clothes and lipstick so that they are not the dictator of how she feels, demonstrates that the power dynamics between people and objects are

constantly shifting. There is no static ‘meaningful object’, rather that objects take on meanings through their relationships between people, relationships between different objects and in different contexts, so that meanings emerge and may change. People and things therefore act as coagents in producing meaning (Woodward, 2018), but this coagency and the power dynamics within it are in constant flux as things continually change. As Covid-19 collapsed the world as we knew it, new relations between people and their things were fostered. Fatima’s objects took on an altered meaning as the world around her changed.

5.4 Love and the Journey of the Garment

The ideas discussed above on the sociality of objects, recognising their value and the ability of objects to take on meaning are part of material culture scholarship. This scholarship and the recognition of how the biogeography, intimacy and journey of objects is where we derive their value (Crewe, 2017) fits within the wider context of the cultural turn and the resulting ‘empirical turn’ (Crewe, 2003) towards 'fine-grained studies of commodities and consumption in specific temporal and spatial settings’ (Goss, 2004, p.372).

With the argument from the last section in mind, it does not follow that the object or the garment are no longer affective or meaningful due to the circumstances of the pandemic. Rather, meaning and change are important features of sustainability in fashion and are concepts that the sustainable fashion community hold near. Particularly, I noticed in my ethnographic work that the community often spoke of their garments as ‘being on journeys’. Members of the community frequently share their recent clothes swaps, and when they swap with someone in the community, they remark on their happiness at seeing someone else ‘love’ their old clothes. The Swap Family group also remark on giving their clothes a new lease of life through ‘sending them on their way’ to ‘new homes’ (See Figure 10).

Within academic literature, research on the social and spatial lives of commodities across space has become more prominent (Goss, 2004). Take, for example, Cook et al’s (2004) seminal piece of work: ‘Follow the Thing’. It uses ethnographic research to follow a seemingly mundane object, a papaya, with the aim of reconnecting consumers with their distant commodities by understanding the story of the commodity. This notion is one at the very heart of the sustainable fashion community, particularly when viewing their clothes as objects that are on journeys. A similar approach was taken by Kopytoff (1986) in looking at ‘The Biographies of Things’, which as a method, encourages one to ask “where does the thing come from, and who made it? What has been its career so far?” (Kopytoff, 1986, p.66). Therefore, it is clear that the community see value in meaning and change of their garments,

through valuing the life, journeys and stories of their clothes. Looking to extend the future of their garments is part of how the community leverage their sustainable fashion agenda – how exactly will be discussed shortly.

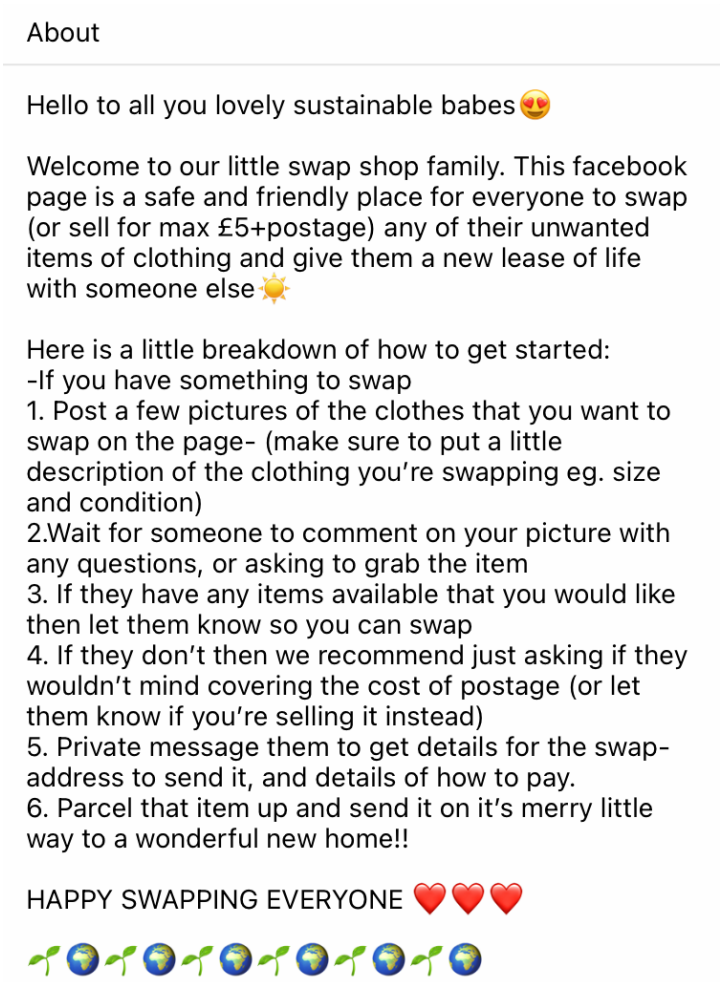


Figure 10: Facebook 'Swap Family' group 'About' section depicting how the main aim of their group is to give clothing 'a new lease of life with someone else' and 'send [clothes] on its merry little way to a wonderful new home'.

The notion of sending garments along on their journeys does not mean that individuals aren't emotionally attached to their garments and therefore don't want them anymore. In fact, I found quite the opposite. Although Covid threw up some challenges in terms of meaning and attachment to objects and clothing (as discussed in the last section), attachment and love for clothing (Miller, 2001) is emphasised by the community in terms of loving what you already own, and when it is time to depart with garments, being happy at seeing someone else 'love' your old clothes.

Reduced emotional attachment to clothing is attributed to the fast fashion paradigm which has dramatically shortened the life span of products (Birtwistle and Moore, 2006), and reduced the quality and price of garments. The throwaway and 'wear once' culture has meant that fast fashion has reduced our emotional attachment to clothing. Cooper (2005) contends that durability and long-term use are prerequisites for sustainable consumption, which directly contrasts to the current fast fashion consumption paradigm that prevails. As a concept, attachment has been suggested as a tool to extend the ownership and use time of garments (Niinimaki and Armstrong, 2013), which is representative of sustainable consumption and opposes the fast fashion consumption paradigm. Attachment speaks directly to emotion, where Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pilgrim (2008) define consumer-product attachment as the strength of emotionally- engaged experiences a user has with a product. They also explored seven axes of product attachment: memories, enjoyment, places and events, support of self-identity, life vision, utility, reliability and market value. Of these seven, the researchers found only memory and enjoyment to contribute positively to the degree of attachment.

My findings reinforce the conclusion made by Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pilgrim (2008), as discussions of memory attached to clothing were prevalent in my data analysis:

> "Today's outfit is quite sentimental. I struggle to wear clothes that I have bad memories with, and the last time I wore this playsuit my cat was in a tragic accident. It's been untouched in my wardrobe ever since but I decided today was the day to bring it back out to wear for my last day of training. I have had such a good week and I wanted it to end on a high, and I knew if I didn't wear this playsuit soon I probably never would. It was from Miss Selfridge from the RSPCA and cost me £3. I'm glad I'm wearing this during lockdown as it has given me the chance to have new memories." - Lauren

Here, Lauren reflects on the process of reinscribing new memories to a garment so that she can get enjoyment out of it and repair and strengthen her emotional attachment to the garment, which was previously tempered with sad memories. This conscious act shows dedication to fostering attachment to clothing in order to extend its use life.

Linking these notions of understanding the life, history, attachment and onwards journeys of garments helps to leverage sustainability in fashion, as instead of garments having short life cycles and being thrown away (commonly cited environmental issues of fast fashion), the life cycle of clothing is extended. Research has shown that direct, private reuse, followed by

reuse through organisations, gives five times higher C02 savings than material recycling (Farrant, 2008; Fisher et al, 2011, In: Fletcher and Tham, 2014). This is because an emotional connection is established which encourages us to engage with our clothes on a more-than-superficial level, where the process of finding the evocative power of objects (Turkle, 2007) means that we "think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with" (Turkle, 2007, p.5). Shopping is a central way in which love can be communicated (Miller, 2001), and the sustainable fashion community show love and care for their clothes and their onwards journeys to leverage sustainability.

This can perhaps best be summarised by the core argument that Gregson and Crewe (2003) present, where second-hand exchange is the attempt of both buyers and sellers to produce spatialised practices of exchange; on a superficial level this is about the spaces in which exchange occurs, but on a deeper level, refers to attempts to inscribe meaning in second hand exchange through practices that are situation specific. The meanings inscribed into exchange by the sustainable fashion community emphasise biographies of love, journeys, attachment and memories, which are woven into the fabrics and fibres of our clothes (Crewe, 2017).

5.4.1 Meaning and the Sustainable Fashion Community of Practice

The final argument I present in this chapter is that the act of ascribing meaning to garments and passing them along on journeys further reinforces the social aspect of the community of practice, as commodities have a significant role in mediating social life (Mansvelt, 2005), and communities of practice are built upon social relations (see Chapter Four). Holding clothes swapping activities not only represents a core activity of a community of practice (See Figure 10 and Chapter four) (Wenger, 2005), it also helps to foster a shared meaning within the garments that they swapped. The shared meaning of the group, to promote sustainable fashion, is manifested through (anti-) consumption, where both the act of swapping, the meaning associated with that act and the meaning of the garment engaged in the swap leverage sustainability. Finally, within the act of swapping garments and sending them off to their 'new homes', the commodity is helping to further connect members of the community of practice. This was evidenced in my ethnography when I noted people reposting pictures of the new owners wearing the swapped garment. The emotional and activist attachments made to the swapped garment reinforces the social connections within the wider community of practice.

5.5 Summary

This chapter first established that the pandemic caused a quarantine of consumption where there was a dramatic pullback in discretionary spending. This was because Covid-19 caused our personal geographies to fundamentally shift and confined us to the space of the home. In turn, this caused changes in the way we dressed, with the notion that 'no one will see me' meaning that we no longer felt the need to dress performatively in public spaces, simply because we couldn't. This had some positive impacts on sustainability within the sustainable fashion community, as participants reflected that they reduced their clothing consumption further, however the impacts of this further afield seem limited, as fast fashion companies have bounced back stronger than ever following the pandemic.

The second section of the chapter argued that our changing personal geographies, reduced need for performativity in dress and the emotional impact of the pandemic resulted in altered meanings of clothing. Ultimately, I demonstrated that the relationships between objects, people and meaning is in constant flux as objects that once made Fatima feel good (clothes, lipstick) now make her feel like she is 'faking' feeling good, as she is stuck at home. This notion of flux between objects and people was further demonstrated in an in-depth analysis of the journey of garments and how the sustainable fashion community of practice use this concept to leverage sustainability. Referring to Material Culture studies (Miller, 2001; Woodward, 2018) and the Biography of Things (Kopytoff, 1986), the chapter demonstrated that a deeper understanding of the history, journey, and meaning of garments leverages sustainability through increased lifecycle and care for clothes.

Finally, I demonstrated that the act of sending garments on their journeys through swap groups helps to further reinforce the community of practice, as commodities have a significant role in mediating social life (Mansvelt, 2005) and the garments swapped have the power connect people within the community. To conclude, chapter five spoke directly to the second research aim of this thesis; it showed that initial responses to the pandemic altered consumption patterns and that engagement with the meaning, life, journey and memories of our clothes contributes to leveraging sustainability.

6 Chapter Six - Conclusion

The ultimate aim of this thesis was to offer novel insights which are situated in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic about the future of sustainable fashion and how a sustainable fashion agenda may be further leveraged.

This thesis makes two key contributions to that cause. First, Chapter Four presented a case for viewing the sustainable fashion community as a community of practice. The theoretical frameworks used were Wenger's (1998) concepts of joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire of resources, as well as a diagram produced by Wenger, White and Smith (2009) depicting the range of activities in which communities of practice may engage. I argued that the joint enterprise of the community was to promote sustainable fashion. Their acts of mutual engagement included the exchange of information, news, pointers to resources and tips (category one). Their shared repertoire of resources is evidenced by the shareable, informative resources assets, which also represents category four of Wenger, White and Smith's (2009) diagram, 'producing assets'. The Instagram challenges which were documented in the thesis aligned with categories one, two and four; exchange, productive enquiries and producing assets. The swapping events held within the sustainable fashion community of practice represent category three; building shared understanding through joint events and responses. The alignment between the criteria of communities of practice according to Wenger, White and Smith (2009) and the sustainable fashion community allow me to conclude that it is in fact a community of practice. Throughout the chapter, explicit links between the community of practice model and how it leverages sustainability were made, including a focus on ethical and anti-consumption and producing DIY garments as alternatives to shopping fast fashion. Particularly, the focus on learning and sharing knowledge positively reinforces the dissemination of the sustainable fashion message, as well as the challenges and swapping events, which encourage physical action in the form of ethical and anti- consumption.

The second section of chapter four investigated the practices of influencers and bloggers within the sustainable fashion community of practice, arguing that the work of the community operates under the same social and economic regimes that dominate online commercial culture, however the community find ways to circumvent that via justifying their authenticity and providing alternatives to fast fashion consumption. Finally, I noted that the community of practice model lends itself well to fashion activism and the promotion of sustainable fashion because both require a collective identity or sense of 'we' and collective action, which the community of practice conduct through their acts of mutual engagement.

A second key contribution of this thesis is a recollection of the wider shifts in our relationships to clothing and sustainability during the pandemic. The data collection and writing of this thesis occurred in the height of the pandemic, and thus it was only fitting that the massive changes that the pandemic caused were accounted for. Chapter Five traced the changing geographies of our lives due to the pandemic and what this meant for consumption. The quarantine of consumption was presented as a concept which exemplified how consumption of clothing was scaled back due to changes in the priorities of the population (i.e. surviving a pandemic). We were no longer able to access public spaces and so performativity in dress became futile; demonstrated by the notion 'no one can see me' and the Zoom suit. Performativity was still enacted in digital spaces, although many participants felt lacklustre about this too. The Instagram challenges were designed to remedy the lacklustre feeling, with participants remarking that they only got dressed some days for the Instagram challenge. Ultimately, this exemplifies that as our geographies changed due to crisis, our attitudes to dress changed too.

The next section of this chapter questioned *how* the meanings of our objects changed, demonstrating through a particularly powerful vignette that objects that once meant a lot to my participant were now of little significance, highlighting the constantly shifting power relations between people and objects (Woodward, 2018). Despite the lacklustre approach to our things which was induced by lockdown and our restricted personal geographies, the sustainable fashion community of practice continued to demonstrate sustained dedication to understanding the meaning and lives of their clothes. I argued here with reference to Material Culture studies (Miller, 2001; Woodward, 2018) and the Biography of Things (Kopytoff, 1986) that this type of ownership of our things is paramount to leveraging sustainability. Furthermore, meaning is inscribed into objects when they are exchanged (Gregson and Crewe, 2003), and so the exchange of objects aids the community of practice in leveraging sustainability.

Overall, this thesis used the sustainable fashion community of practice on Instagram as a vessel through which to explore how the community have leveraged sustainability in this strange new world. The thesis has uncovered how the community drive education and learning to leverage sustainability, as well as how alternatives to fast fashion consumption can be achieved (e.g. second hand shopping/ swapping, DIY clothing), and finally how engagement with the meaning of our things, including the life and journey of garments and the memories inscribed in garments can leverage sustainability. Taken together, the community have an arsenal of tools with which sustainable fashion can be leveraged.

The ultimate aim of this thesis was to offer novel insights about the future of sustainable fashion. From conducting this research, it is clear to me that the scale of the community is of paramount importance in leveraging sustainability in fashion. The nature of the community, with its inherent focus on educating others, sharing knowledge, enacting sustainable forms of consumption (ethical consumption and anti-consumption) and showing love and care for garments means that the community are well equipped with an arsenal of tools with which to promote sustainable fashion. Fletcher and Tham (2019) note the importance of care within sustainable fashion, as enacting care is rooted in the local environment and community, and care implies practices of nurture, healing and growth; concepts all compatible with Ehrenfeld's (2008) 'sustainability as flourishing' definition.

The sustainable fashion community of practice's digital nature and widely dispersed geographies mean its boundaries are endless and far-reaching, however, this also means the geographies of the community are elusive and require a level of 'in-group' knowledge in order to be accessible (Leaver et al, 2020). This potentially means that the community has limited reach outside of its own geographies due to the requirement of 'in-group' knowledge. The extent to which those who support fast fashion can be converted by the sustainable fashion community of practice is a potential avenue for further research. Therefore, the question of how the scale of the community can be utilised to promote sustainable fashion remains. However, when communities of practice are *"given a name and brought into focus, it becomes a perspective that can help us understand our world better" (Wenger, 2005, p.2).* The sustainable fashion community has the capacity to unite people under the same mission, it has the capacity to share knowledge through learning and education around sustainable fashion, and it also has the capacity to reconnect people with the lives, journeys and meaning of clothes. The perspectives of the community could help us to further leverage sustainability in fashion.

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8 List of Figures

Figure 1 – Table to demonstrate how the use of each method correlated to research aims.
Figure 2 – An infographic made to recruit participants int a diary writing activity whilst in lockdown.
Figure 3 – Table to show list of participants and how they were recruited.
Figure 4 – Screenshot of my own Instagram profile showing adaptations made to establish common interest in fashion with participants.
Figure 5 – Image showing a conversation on Instagram asking for direct permission to use pictures.
Figure 6 – Diagram to show and categorise the range of activities in which communities in practice may engage (Wenger, White & Smith 2009).
Figure 7 – Screenshots of Instagram story highlights from community member, organised into different sections so that when viewing the profile, you may access different resources and threads.
Figure 8 – Images of popular informative posts shared amongst the sustainable fashion community found from a 'resources' story highlight.
Figure 9 – Diagram to show the infographics for four different challenges over the course of lockdown.
Figure 10 – Facebook 'Swap Family' group 'About' section depicting how the main aim of their group is to give clothing 'a new lease of life with someone else' and open 'send [clothes] on its merry little way to a wonderful new home.'
Figure 11 – Screenshots from a member of the sustainable fashion community's Instagram account, depicting a corset style garment she handmade which replicates a common fast fashion trend. She included the top two of the above images in a 'swipe' feature on Instagram and followed with another post about how she made the corset style top.
Figure 12 – Excerpt of a diary participant's diary, recounting her participation in a sustainable fashion Instagram challenge from May 14th – May 17th 2020.

9 Appendix

Appendix 1: Example participant information form



Participant Information Form
University of Nottingham
School of Geography
Researcher: Rianna Forskitt

Project title: Instagram, sustainability and clothes during a pandemic.

You are invited to participate in the above study. In order to make an informed decision as to whether to participate you should understand what the project is about, what your involvement would entail and how the findings will be used. Please read the following information to guide your decision. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask. Your decision to participate is entirely voluntary.

What is the purpose of the study?
The aim of this project is to investigate what is going on 'behind the scenes' of sustainable fashion influencers and bloggers on Instagram. The research looks at how use of Instagram has changed since being in lockdown, and how emotional attachments to clothing have changed since the pandemic.

Why have I been chosen to take part?
You have been chosen as you fit the participant criteria.
Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without explanation.

What will happen if I take part?
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to write a diary about what you wear each day in lockdown and why, and how this makes you feel.

Are there any risks of taking part?
There are no known risks in taking part. Any written responses you send back to me WILL be anonymised. If you would like to read the parts of my work which contain your screenshots before I submit the dissertation, this can be arranged. Every effort will be made to ensure safety and confidentiality for all participants.

Who is doing the research?
The researcher is Rianna Forskitt (@riannabibi on Instagram). I am a Masters researcher at the University of Nottingham. I am the sole researcher of the project which is for my MRes Geography qualification. Professors Louise Crewe and Sarah Hall are my supervisors. They

will have some access to the data in assisting me with her dissertation, but never the raw data to protect confidentiality.

Are there any benefits in taking part?
There is no payment or formal compensation for taking part.

Will I be recorded and what happens to the collected information?
Your responses to my questions will be recorded. They will be held on an encrypted, password protected device. The data will subsequently be anonymised should you wish, using a pseudonym if you are not happy for me to use your Instagram handle in my research. The analysis will feature in a dissertation to be submitted to the University of Nottingham in September 2020. All digital data will be destroyed after 12 months; however, the dissertation may still be used by the University.

Please note an ethical review process for this study has been completed. If you have any further questions, please contact:

Rianna Forskitt
rianna.forskitt@nottingham.ac.uk

or

Professor Louise Crewe
louise.crewe@nottingham.ac.uk

The Geography Ethics Officer, Sue Davis, can be contacted at:
sue.davis@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Example solicited diary prompt

Diary

Thank you for expressing interest in taking part in this research. I'd be really grateful if you could write a 'diary' about your experiences of clothing and getting dressed during the Covid-19 crisis.

Here are some prompts:

1) A little bit about you and why you are interested in sustainable fashion
2) What you've worn each day and why
3) How getting dressed makes you feel and how your outfits make you feel

With that being said, feel free to discuss *any* experiences and emotions relating to your clothes and getting dressed. Also feel free to write about your experiences from the last few weeks; it does not have to be from today onwards.

The length, level of detail and content in this diary is completely up to you. Please remember that what you write will be used in my research. As always, your name and any other names mentioned will be anonymised.

Thanks so much!
Rianna

Appendix 3: Example asynchronous questions distributed to participants

I now have some questions for you, which I would be really grateful if you could answer. Please do it in your own time, there is no rush. Feel free to message me if you need clarification, but the questions are purposely open ended so don't worry about being right or wrong.

1) First I'd like to ask a bit about you: what are your interests? Why did you start your Instagram page? Why do you support sustainable fashion?

2) Do you feel emotionally attached to your clothes?

3) Have you seen any changes to the sort of content on your Instagram feed since lockdown? If so, can you describe it?

4) Do you think the Covid-19 pandemic has changed your relationship to clothes? If so, how and why?

5) Why did you take part in the isolated wardrobe challenge?

6) How did you find taking part in the isolated wardrobe challenge?

7) What other commitments do you have? How do you balance running your Instagram account with other commitments? Has this changed since the lockdown started?

8) Does anyone help you behind the scenes with making content to post on Instagram? If so, how and why?

9) What other work goes on behind the scenes of making content?

10) Do you feel part of a community on Instagram?

11) Do you feel you are expected to present yourself in a certain way emotionally on Instagram? How does this compare to your genuine emotions?

12) Do you have any other comments?

Final Word Count: 29,998