Journal of Business Ethics

Call for papers for the Special Issue on:

Fashionable ethics?
Exploring the ethics of production, marketing and consumption in fashion

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2022

Guest Editors

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Introduction to the Special Issue

Fashion is simultaneously enthralling yet exploitative, replete with a multitude of ethical issues along the entire value chain from production and marketing to consumption, incorporating labour exploitation, animal cruelty, environmental degradation, consumerism, cultural appropriation, counterfeiting, objectification, underrepresentation and discrimination. Growth and globalisation have brought into question consequence-focused morality of ‘greatest good for the greatest number’ as the unequal distribution of gains, massive input resource demands (e.g. cotton usually requires much water and pesticides) and labour exploitation (child labour, low wages and health and safety hazards) have become critical global issues. If the fashion business is to meet societal expectations and operate as more than a ruthless struggle for profit maximisation, then utilitarian considerations for the greater good must be tempered by deontological principles of respect for persons and intrinsic human rights. However, despite calls for substantive change, current ethical initiatives are insufficiently radical or transformative to mitigate against the dominant growth paradigm of increasing production and consumption driven by marketing tactics and an obsessive focus on change and planned obsolescence of products (Niinimäki et al. 2020). Digital transformation and the COVID-19 pandemic have reshaped the industry and led to new challenges, requiring a reassessment of fashion ethics through different ethical lenses.

Fashion companies are criticised for paying no more than lip service to sustainability (‘fashionable ethics’). In the production stage, pressure to lower costs and lax regulations in developing countries have led to unethical business practices with cases of poor factory conditions, abuse of labour rights and modern slavery endemic in the fashion industry (Huq and Stevenson, 2020) and firms must deal with the paradox of ethical obligations towards victim, media and activists, and the legal responsibility towards shareholders. Adding further complexity, formal institutions (law and regulations) and informal ones (locally institutionalized practices) in developing countries are sometimes in contradiction. Therefore, it is imperative to use ethical lenses to not only evaluate the role of business in society (Islam and Greenwood, 2021), but also to inform more empirical work.
to understand the role played by other key traditional (tier two suppliers, subcontractors, intermediaries, and third-party auditors) and non-traditional (NGOs, consultants and donor agencies) supply chain actors. There is a need to understand how stakeholders attribute responsibility to focal firms for unethical practices in their supply chains based on contextual factors and its impact on firm behaviour. The advent of Industry 4.0 with innovations in interconnectivity, automation, machine learning and real-time data such as AI, blockchain, IoT etc. present opportunities for sustainable social value creation through improved transparency and traceability. Nonetheless, these need to be examined through an ethical lens to assess whether they enable substantive change for players along the value chain or merely perpetuate existing inequalities and exploitation.

Several questions about marketing ethics arise as newer forms of greenwashing have emerged (Sterbenk et al. 2021) and fashion brands engage in social media-based virtue-signalling around topical causes such as diversity, equality and inclusivity but without the required internal transformation. As more fashion brands engage with sustainability storytelling, greenwash accusations have been exposed, such as ill-defined sustainability criteria and unsubstantiated green claims (Changing Markets Foundation, 2021). The emergence of social movements such as minimalism represent a sustainable alternative to fast fashion but also a conundrum for how brands might engage with or sell to such people (Pangarkar et al. 2021), raising the question of whether there is an economic advantage to producing or marketing unethically and how this influences managerial decision-making. Marketing optimisation technologies enable greater personalisation and precision of targeting, particularly valuable in highly competitive markets such as fashion, but have the potential for algorithmic bias, and discrimination. All technology originates with humans and therefore incorporates human shortcomings, prompting the need for critical debate through the lens of business ethics around the ‘greater good’ in the AI and algorithmic march towards greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Consumers have ethical responsibilities too and there are multiple ways of engaging or withdrawing from a market, spanning various modes such as boycotting and buycotting, activism and anti-consumption (Carrington et al. 2021). However, the nature of fashion is complex with multiple competing attributes, resulting in contradictory behaviours as trade-offs must inevitably be made. Consumers are simultaneously supported and inhibited in their attempts to consume more ethically by fashion brands, stakeholders and institutions, but moral decisions and judgments are also influenced by cultural realms, religious norms, customs and rituals. As fashion consumptionscapes reflect the needs and preferences of a broader range of cultures (Slater and Demangeot, 2021), implications for social inclusion or marginalization emerge (Lewis, 2015). The context of emerging markets is especially interesting to consider as more citizens join the middle class and lead to significant rises in clothing sales. The interplay between fashion, institutions and traditions needs to be addressed, and how institutions shape ethical perceptions and practices in emerging markets needs fuller consideration from scholars, especially given the growth of the modest fashion trend that integrates the attributes of modesty, rooted in ethical and religious principles, within mainstream Western styles. Ethical lenses should also inform critical debate around the complex role of fashion as a positive driver of employment and rise in salaries but simultaneous destroyer of local practices and creator of acculturation in developing countries.

This special issue seeks to consolidate and extend theoretical perspectives on fashion ethics along the entire value chain from production to marketing and consumption at individual, organizational and institutional levels through the lens of business ethics. It aims to set a theoretical foundation for further research into fashion ethics and expand empirical knowledge to inform and shape ethical business practices. We encourage authors to challenge existing theories and approaches and identify new or alternative perspectives for a better understanding of fashion ethics that exposes critical debates and contradictions, anticipates future developments and furthers critical understanding of pressing phenomena. Conceptual and empirical submissions are welcomed from a variety of theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary perspectives, as long as they are anchored in a business ethics lens. Submissions that give greater voice to under-represented communities, such as farmers, garment workers and minority groups are particularly welcomed.

Potential Themes
Research questions and themes related to this Special Issue include, but are not limited to:

- How well do ethical theories and philosophies guide decision-making for individuals/organizations/institutional actors in the global fashion industry?
- Which ethical beliefs drive individuals/organizations/institutional actors to be ‘good citizens’ despite political, economic and market forces to the contrary?
- Which new ethical quandaries emerge as a result of advances in digital technologies (e.g. digital marketing, AI, IoT) in fashion and how should they be managed?
- How do non-Western traditions, religions and cultural practices inform moral decisions and ethical approaches in fashion production, marketing and consumption?
- How do Western conceptualisations of ethics differ from non-Western ones and how can these be applied to inform responses to ethical issues in a multicultural industry?
- Is there an economic advantage to producing or marketing unethically and if so, how could business ethics temper this?

Submission Instructions

Author guidelines are provided on the website of the *Journal of Business Ethics*. All manuscripts need to be submitted through the Editorial Manager (http://www.editorialmanager.com/busi/default.aspx) by **31st October 2022**, indicating that it is a submission to this Special Issue. A paper rejected from this Special Issue cannot be resubmitted to a regular issue of the *Journal of Business Ethics*. A virtual paper development workshop will be held. Submitting a paper to this paper development workshop is not a requirement for submitting or publishing a paper in this special issue. If you have any questions about the special issue, please contact the guest editors through the contact details provided above.

References


