

Conclusion and the promise of hope

Canning, Catherine; Ritch, Elaine L.; McColl, Julie

Published in:

Pioneering New Perspectives in the Fashion Industry: Disruption, Diversity and Sustainable Innovation

DOI:

[10.1108/978-1-80382-345-420231024](https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80382-345-420231024)

Publication date:

2023

Document Version

Author accepted manuscript

[Link to publication in ResearchOnline](#)

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Canning, C, Ritch, EL & McColl, J 2023, Conclusion and the promise of hope. in EL Ritch, C Canning & J McColl (eds), *Pioneering New Perspectives in the Fashion Industry: Disruption, Diversity and Sustainable Innovation*. Emerald Group Publishing Ltd., pp. 291-299. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80382-345-420231024>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please view our takedown policy at <https://edshare.gcu.ac.uk/id/eprint/5179> for details of how to contact us.

Pioneering New Perspectives in the Fashion Industry: Disruption, Diversity and Sustainable Innovation

Chapter 24: Conclusion and the Promise of Hope

Catherine Canning: Glasgow Caledonian University

Elaine L Ritch: Glasgow Caledonian University

Julie McColl: Heriot Watt University

Our house is on fire (Grete Thunberg)

In examining pioneering perspectives of fashion and the fashion industry, this book has illustrated evolving ideas of the current zeitgeist. We find ourselves in increasingly pressing times, emerging from COVID and reflecting on the change that has brought an increase in the number of people working from home, displacing commerce in the inner cities, the move to online shopping and the demise of the high street (Marketline, 2021). Following from COVID-19, the global economy is experiencing additional pressure, from the invasion of Ukraine impacting on food and energy shortages, and increasing the price of consumer goods and services (Giles, 2022). Our aim should be to build back better, however, we are seeing more of the same and neglecting sustainability in the name of economic advancement (Lucas, 2022). There are crises of inflation and the cost of living, high energy costs and global instability (Giles, 2022; Lucas, 2022). In 2019 we had no idea what the world would experience in 2020 when the coronavirus appeared, and indeed no idea of how long the pandemic would last and how it would impact on markets, society and sustainability. A quote from Grete Thunberg illustrates the scale of the problem back then:

“Adults keep saying: “We owe it to the young people to give them hope.” But I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house is on fire. Because it is”. (Greta Thunberg, 2019).

Greta Thunberg expresses uncomfortable words that call for action, from individuals and businesses but mainly from government. Much has changed since those words were spoken in 2019 but there has not been significant progress with regards to climate change and social injustice. What does it mean to be a citizen in the twenty first century? Are we citizens first, or consumers? Does that impact on our values and level of responsibility? At the time of writing (2022), the UK has experienced the hottest temperatures on record (Met Office, 2022) there are clear signs of climate warming all around the world, and we (humanity) are running

out of time to reverse the impact (IPCC, 2022). Greta is right to be angry, and also represents a generation who have grown up in a world imbued with threats of terrorism, financial insecurity and austerity, inequality and the demise of bio-systems that have led to the climate emergency. Recent research by Ritch (2022) has found that Generation-Z have been educated in sustainability from a young age and feel compelled to act on their knowledge, often taking a critical lens towards those who are not contributing to preventative solutions. The fashion industry is going through a period of change, and that change is much needed. As Mahatma Gahndi said, "*There is no beauty in the finest cloth if it makes hunger and unhappiness*" (Stambler, 2019). There is a sense of urgency in terms of sustainability and the impact the fashion industry has on global warming (United Nations, 2020), however, as highlighted above, there is little change in terms of levels of consumption and environmental damage. As we conclude our findings of this book, we also believe it *is* time to act. What difference can we, as individuals make? We believe there are things we can do, from a business perspective and from an individual citizen perspective, and therefore that brings us some hope. The purpose of this book was to highlight those issues, pose questions and explore disruption, the challenge around diversity and equality in the fashion world and address sustainable innovation. The first section on **Disruption** addresses transformational solutions rooted in communities. Consumers can make positive changes however collective action is necessary to mobilise for the collective good.

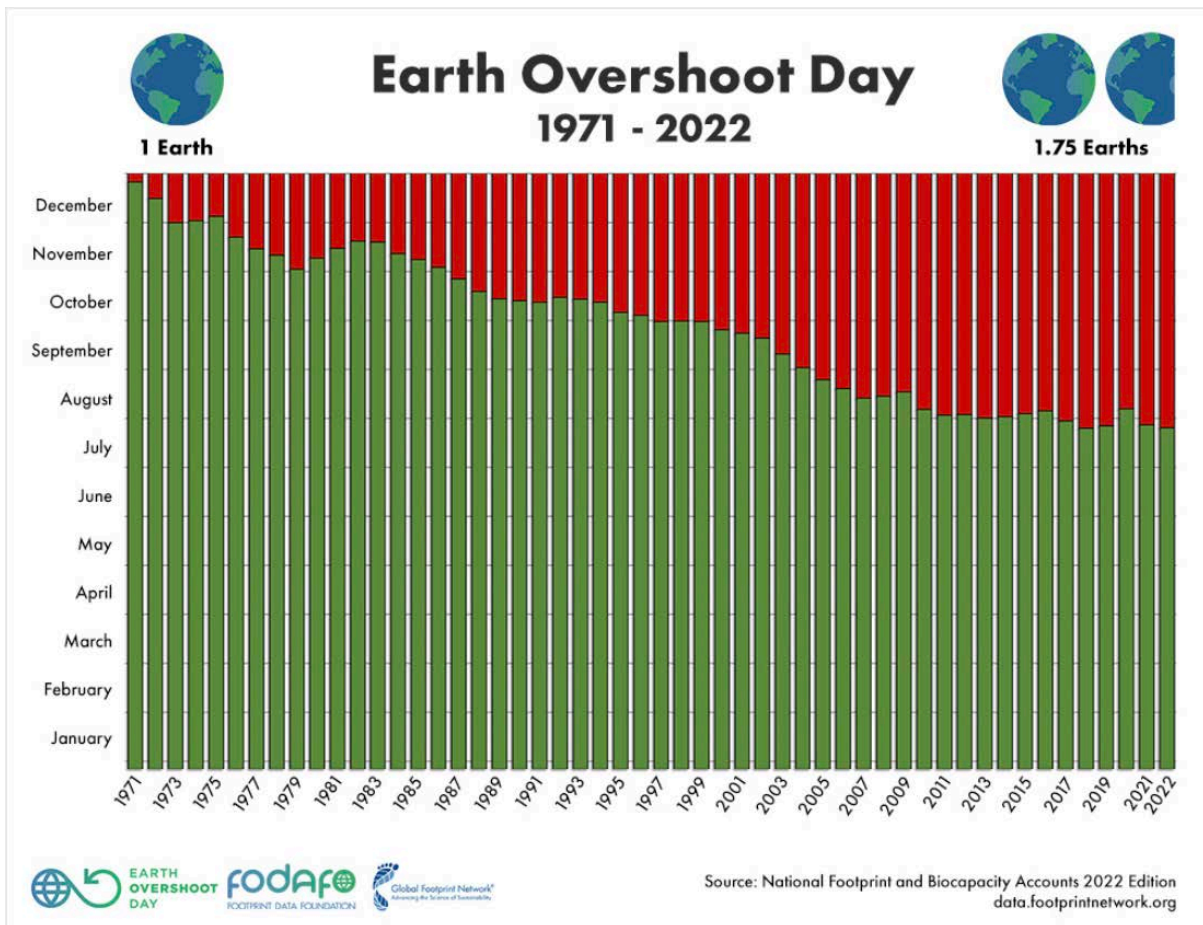
[Buy less, choose well, make it last \(Vivienne Westwood\)](#)

The truth is that we are all consuming way beyond our needs particularly in terms of fashion. Earth overshoot day – the day which "*marks the date when humanity's demand for ecological resources and services in a given year exceeds what Earth can regenerate in that year*" fell on 28 July in 2022 (Earth overshoot day, 2022). That means that after 28 July 2022, everything we buy - we cannot afford in resources, and we are stripping our planet of natural resources. We are living beyond our means and Figure 24.1 below illustrates the trajectory of overconsumption over the last fifty decades. The figure also illustrates a slowdown of overconsumption during 2020, a direct consequence of global pandemic restrictions, but growth follows in 2021 and 2022. Figure 24.2 also shows that some countries are overconsuming more quickly than others, and yet the effects of climate crisis do not discriminate on particular perpetrators – rather the effects are experienced globally. The pandemic may have disrupted fashion retailing on high streets, but this moved online and increased as online fashion retailers tempted consumption with tactics to stimulate demand (Econsultancy, 2021). The lack of social occasions reduced the need for some consumers to purchase fashion, rather they reoriented towards other pursuits, such as nature leisure activities and arts and crafts (Wood, 2020; Brayshaw, 2020), but some younger consumers continued to purchase to get a dopamine hedonic buzz from the excitement of delivery and unboxing (Ritch, Canning & Siddiqui, 2021). Often those garments languish in wardrobes (Kidd, Ritch & Carey, 2020), but sometimes are sent back to the retailer for a refund. Garment

returns are becoming a big problem for fashion retailers (Rafi-Ul-Shan, Grant & Perry, 2022) while at the same time the sale of second hand and vintage clothing is increasing (thredUp, 2022). Indeed, resale fashion is predicted to take over fast fashion sales by the end of the decade (Business of Fashion & McKinsey, 2022) which will potentially contribute to a more circular model however, will this simply reinforce the need for more consumption? Ultimately, we do agree we need to consume less to extend overshoot day; however, even sustainable ranges and recycling opportunities by the big fashion retailers encourage us to keep consuming (Ritch, 2023).

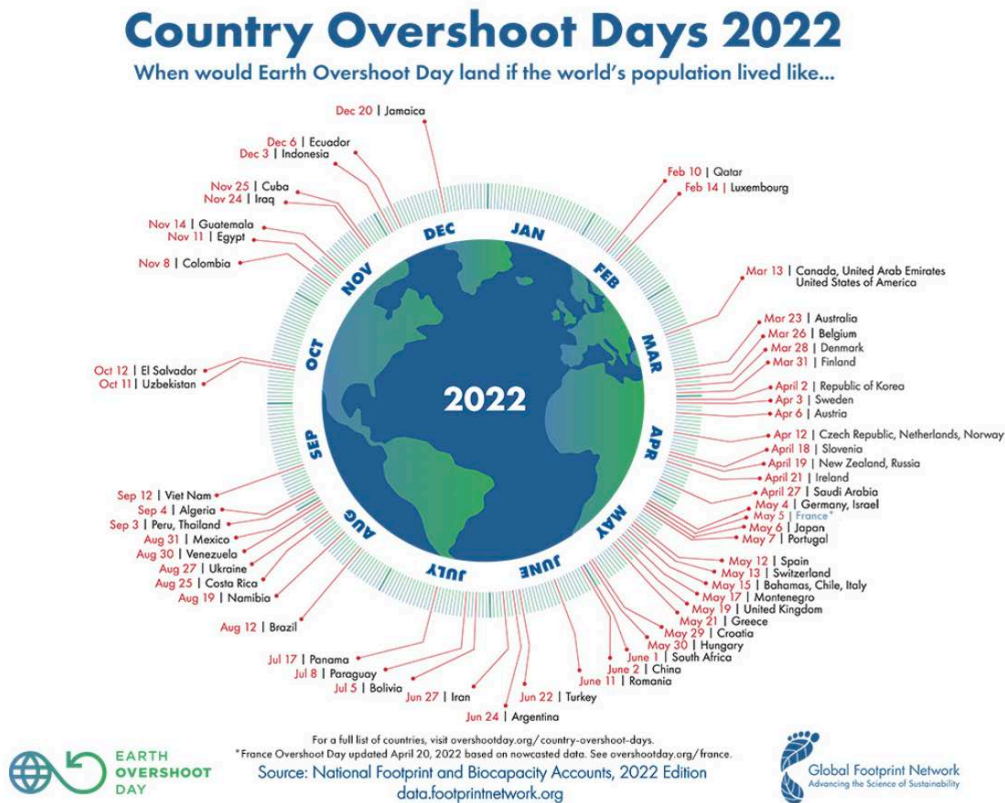
There are more questions than answers in terms of sustainability, and while that does not mean that there are no solutions, the questions open possibilities. What if the government did prioritise sustainability? What if government and local councils encouraged high street stores to sell second hand, upcycled and vintage clothing with reduced rates? What if people were paid a living wage for manufacturing and clothing became more realistically expensive? What if we support more local fashion businesses rather than only the large multinational fast-fashion retailers whose very business model is criticised to be unsustainable? How do we reconcile the challenges of the modern world and thrive in it? Can the fashion process still be enjoyed and offer value, pleasure and fun, not to mention the importance of the industry for the economy and culture? Would we gain more pleasure from fashion if we were more involved in the creation of fashionable aesthetics? While the answer to those questions may be elusive, what we do know is that the issues have to be taken seriously. The purpose of this book has been to offer some potential solutions to these problems and in educating the marketers and citizens of the future we can hope that they will take this message into the workplace and will have an impact on future business practices and government policies.

Figure 24.1: the trajectory of Earth overshoot day over the last fifty years



(Earth overshoot day, 2022)

Figure 24.2: country overshoot days



(Earth overshoot day, 2022)

“We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their colour”.
 (Maya Angelou)

The second section in our book offers reflections on **‘Diversity’**. Some great strides have been made in the past few years in the area of diversity and inclusivity where, although not perfect, the current generation have great hope and are advocates of change. Led by Generation-Z, and the underpinning ideology of fairness and justice shared with other Generations, these young people began the work of challenging equality and equity in society. This section addressed exclusionary practices in the fashion industry, the extended and deep-rooted nature of inequality, inclusive retail environments, gendered expectations of childrenswear, modest fashion and inclusivity and diversity in the African fashion industry. Things are improving but more is needed.

Promise of Hope

We have presented some the challenges of the fashion industry in this book and yet, we believe there *is* hope for the fashion industry. Yes, we agree with Greta –there is reason to panic, however we can offer suggestions for further research, change and suggestions for action. The third section in the book, ***'Sustainability: circular fashion'*** offered alternative models from fast fashion. We see in chapter 15 a case study of ACS which provides a convincing case study that sustainability can be embedded within an organisation's DNA, and in September 2022, Patagonia create a vision beyond a clothing brand. The brand declared ***'We're in business to save our home planet'*** (Patagonia, 2022) with business owner Mr. Chouinard, his wife and two adult children giving the company (worth \$3 billion) to a specifically designed trust and non-profit organisation with the intention to fight climate change (Gelles, 2022). The fourth section in the book ***'Sustainability in retail and marketing'*** presents ways in which retailers, brands and marketers can implement sustainability, diversity and inclusivity. We believe these examples provide the promise of hope in the future.

Fashion has always been an important part in how we humans express ourselves (Veblen, 1899/1984; McCracken, 1986). In creating our book, we sought to understand some of the problems that the fashion industry contributes to, with the appreciation that we are part of this important international education arena and we therefore wanted to collaborate with our colleagues in our industry of fashion education and practitioners. We hoped to shine a light on research and create a collection of articles that offer up to date insight as the industry recovers from the pandemic, and to add to the proposals of previous work (Ritch & McColl, 2021; Henninger, Brydges, Iran & Vladimirova, 2021; Fletcher & Tham, 2019) that offer disruptive ideas and suggest positive change. We offer hope in the form of a rising collective awareness of younger people who are demanding change in the fashion industry, we offer hope in the shape of more sustainable approaches already happening, hope in the form of education, and hope in the strength and creativity of the human spirit who seek to come together in communities to take action for meaningful change.

In examining pioneering perspectives of fashion and the fashion industry, this book has illustrated current and evolving ideas and introduced more questions worthy of further investigation. While we address the issues of the fast-fashion model we also know that there is hope in the circular movement and creating and designing better systems. The industry will continue to offer hope in the form of creatives designing sustainability into the supply chain. New sustainable strategies from the fabrics and materials to the supply chain are evolving, new technology, relationship building, activism (quiet and loud) are all examples we have explored that offer promise of a new, greener, horizon and that disrupt the status quo. According to the 2022 State of Fashion Report (The Business of Fashion & McKinsey, 2022, p. 11) the discount and luxury sectors will 'continue to outperform' the middle market segments, as consumers choose to 'refresh their pandemic era wardrobes'. This report suggests that growth is still the main business model although it does predict that the

complexities from the pandemic are still problematic for many and that those companies with superior omnichannel digital presence have bounced back more easily from the major disruption of the pandemic. However, it could also mean that luxury fashion will maintain value for the collaborative and circular economies. Also predicted is that environmental and social trends in the industry will become increasingly important, with industry leaders stating they will be taking action on environmental and social priorities and focusing more on diversity, equity and inclusion (The Business of Fashion & McKinsey, 2022). Examples provided are circular models, many of whom are consumer driven, such as Depop and Vinted (Ritch, 2021), as well as product passports that encourage transparency and sustainability and accreditation systems. Examples of accreditation systems are B Corp, ISO 9001, ISO 14001 (Fonseca et al. 2021) and Fair Trade (www.fairtrade.org). Similarly, there are ongoing opportunities in digital innovation such as nonfungible tokens (NFTs), virtual fashion, Artificial Intelligence (AI) which provide new creative approaches to building community and alternative forms of commerce (The Business of Fashion & McKinsey, 2022).

Returning to the question ‘what can be done?’ as the fashion industry and global commerce in general will continue to be motivated by growth, profit and competition. The economic situation of soaring energy and cost of living prices unfortunately indicate that consumers will continue to look for value through cheap fashionable throwaway clothes, tempted by the highly powerful media and enduring celebrity culture, so fashion may not always feel accessible to the majority in the middle markets such as what Westwood’s mantra above suggests. The dominant social paradigm of inexpensive fashion purchased frequently has shaped our ideologies of what constitutes the good life (Ritch, 2023; Ritch & McCoill, 2021, Mitcheletti, 2003; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) and has become a hard habit to break – but it is possible as Lauren Bravo explores in her book *‘How to Break Up with Fast Fashion : A guilt-free guide to changing the way you shop - for good’* (2020). Although the fashion industry continues to be criticised for lack of diversity and inclusivity, this is changing, led by Generation-Z, and more needs to be done. So, what does hope look like? Figure 24.3 below represents areas that have been developed within this book that help to suggest a model for change in fashion consumption. First and foremost, the future depends on harnessing the appetite for change amongst Generation-Z as the future leaders, consumers and agents for change. We need to consume less, particularly in terms of “new” fashion, which seems to show no decline in consumption levels. We need to make the most of resources already in circulation and innovate with new business models that provide consumers with dopamine pleasure that falls within sustainable models. While there is a need for economic growth to sustain economic wellbeing, over consumption has to become an issue addressed by governments and policymakers, and needs the input of prominent economists and influential minds. In her book *“Doughnut economics: Seven ways to think like a 21st Century economist”* Oxford economist Kate Raworth explores how an economy can function to provide a social foundation that sustains humanity and eco-life within an ecological ceiling that operates within Earth Overshoot Day. Raworth provides arguments as to why notions of growth are

outdated – no longer fit for purpose - and calls for new ways to design the economy. We can look to digital innovation to improve the sustainability of supply chains and allow for the development of virtual, visual and more fun portrayals of fashion and we can look towards fashion brands to build more inclusive and diverse communities in terms of both product and visuals and to lead the way as influential front-runners in terms of supporting activist causes and providing subliminal and overt education to their target market.

Figure 24.3: Honeycomb of Hope



Marketing has been blamed for encouraging unsustainable fashion practice (Ritch, 2023), encouraging production that exploits people and the environment and encouraging consumers to buy more frequently, be focused on lower pricing and to promote this as a dominate social norm – often advocating excessive consumption hauls on social media. Environmental campaigner Alistair McIntosh states in his book about climate change:

“The cut-off point when healthy *consumption* tips over into *consumerism* is when we start to grasp at things with such addictive avidity that we no longer care about the social and environmental relationships embedded in them” (McIntosh, 2020, p. 181).

But what if marketing could be part of the solution? What if, as advocated by Lowe & Ritch in chapter 4, the fashion industry could be redesigned to support the global economy through a more equal division of wealth? Could this help to lift people of poverty? What if the fashion

industry acknowledged the diversity of human beings, in terms of size, colour and gender and moved away from stereotypical tropes to be more inclusive? Why do we allow fashion to be dictated by algorithms that are profit orientated? Finally, what of the fashion malaise? The psychology of identity and fashion of representing belonging and self-worth, perpetrated by hedonism and social norms, ensures that being considered as 'fashionable' is important to self-esteem and wellbeing. We hope that this book has triggered some thoughts in how we can challenge this dominant social paradigm of fashion discourse to redesign a fashion industry that works for all. As the framework above suggests there are many sections of the honeycomb that bring us back to the central concern for nature, the Earth and her inhabitants, and using the metaphor of honeycomb pieces that fit together with equal importance that suggest possible hopeful suggestions for positive transformational change.

References

BoF and McKinsey, 2022. *The State of Fashion (2022)* <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/industries/retail/our%20insights/state%20of%20fashion/2022/the-state-of-fashion-2022.pdf>. Accessed 16th August 2022

Bravo, L. 2020. *How to Break Up with Fast Fashion : A guilt-free guide to changing the way you shop - for good*. Headline Publishing Group, London.

Brayshaw, E. 2020. Great time to try: knitting your first woolly scarf, *The Conversation*. 3 May 2020. <https://theconversation.com/great-time-to-try-knitting-your-first-woolly-scarf-136618>

British Council, 2022. <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/insight-articles/power-fashion>. Accessed 16th August 2022

Henninger, C.E., Brydges, T., Iran, S. and Vladimirova, K., 2021. Collaborative fashion consumption—A synthesis and future research agenda. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 319, p.128648.

Earth overshoot day. 2022. *This year, Earth Overshoot Day fell on July 28*. <https://www.overshootday.org/about/>

Econsultancy, 2021. *Stats: How fashion ecommerce has changed since Covid-19*. 3 December 2021. <https://econsultancy.com/stats-how-fashion-ecommerce-has-changed-post-covid-19/>

Fletcher, K. & Tham, M. 2019. *Earth Logic Fashion Action Research Plan*. London: The J J Charitable Trust.

Fonseca, L. José, V., Vanda, C. Gilberto Santos, L., Silva, R. 2021. B Corp versus ISO 9001 and 14001 certifications: Aligned, or alternative paths, towards sustainable development and sustainability? *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*. First published: 01 November 2021 <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.2214>

Giles, C. 2022. Confidence slumps around the globe as cost of living crisis bites. Financial Times. 8 October 2022. <https://www.ft.com/content/c5bdba5-b5ea-4eed-a5f4-de8e84e7cce5>

Hirschman, Elizabeth C. & Morris B. Holbrook, 1982. Hedonic consumption: Emerging concepts, methods and propositions, *Journal of Marketing*, 46, 92-101.

Kidd, E. Ritch, E.L., & Carey, L. 2020. The fashion detox challenge: Accelerating Scotland's transition to a circular economy. *Sustainable Apparel & Textiles in the Circular Economy*. University of Huddersfield. Wednesday 2nd September 2020.

Lucas, C. 2022. Energy crisis? It isn't that we have too little oil and gas. It's that we have too much. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/oct/07/energy-crisis-it-isnt-that-we-have-too-little-oil-and-gas-we-have-too-much-lucas>

Marketline, 2021. The pandemic has sped up the demise of the UK high street as vacancy rates increase. <https://www.retail-insight-network.com/comment/pandemic-uk-high-street/>

McCracken, G. 1986. Culture and consumption: A theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13(June), 71-84.

McIntosh, A. *Riders of the Storm, The Climate Crisis and the Survival of Being*, 2020, Berlinn Limited, Edinburgh.

Met Office, 2022. *Record breaking temperatures for the UK*. 19th July 2022. <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2022/red-extreme-heat-warning-ud>

Micheletti, M. 2003. *Political Virtue and Shopping: Individuals, Consumerism and Collective Action*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Patagonia, 2022. Vision. <https://eu.patagonia.com/gb/en/activism/>

Rafi-Ul-Shan, P.M., Grant, D.B. and Perry, P., 2022. Are fashion supply chains capable of coopetition? An exploratory study in the UK. *International Journal of Logistics Research and Applications*, 25(3), pp.278-295.

Raworth, K. 2017. *Doughnut economics: Seven ways to think like a 21st Century economist*. Penguin: London.

Ritch, E.L., 2023. Sustainable fashion marketing: Green or Greenwash? In (Ed) Ekström, K.M., *Marketing Fashion: Critical Perspectives on the Power of Fashion in Contemporary Culture*. Routledge.

Ritch, E.L. 2022. Hero's and Villain's: Children's Stories of Eco-school Learning as a Scaler Social Site for Sustainability Practice. *Journal of Marketing Management*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2022.2120060>

Ritch, E.L. 2021. *Depop sale: fashion retailers must move faster on sustainability – or they will be replaced by Gen Z app*. <https://theconversation.com/depop-sale-fashion-retailers-must-move-faster-on-sustainability-or-they-will-be-replaced-by-gen-z-apps-162198>
Published 8 June 2021.

Ritch, E.L., Canning, C., Siddiqui, N.Q. and Gunn, C. 2021. Re-sell-Rewear: Exploring consumer engagement and involvement with redistribution fashion-markets and collaborative-consumption. *Challenges for Fashion, Global Fashion Conference*, 21-22 October 2021.

Ritch, E.L. and McColl, J. eds., 2021. *New Perspectives on Critical Marketing and Consumer Society*. Emerald Publishing.

Stambler, M. 2019. "There is no beauty in the finest cloth if it makes hunger and unhappiness" Euro News 17 April 2019. <https://www.euronews.com/green/2019/04/17/there-is-no-beauty-in-the-finest-cloth-if-it-makes-hunger-and-unhappiness>

thredUP, 2022. Resale Report. Available from <https://www.thredup.com/resale/static/2022-resaleReport-full-92a77020598ceca50f43227326100cc2.pdf>

Thunberg, G. 2019 *Address at World Economic Forum: Our House Is On Fire* - Jan 25, 2019. <https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2019/12/02/address-at-davos-our-house-is-on-fire-jan-25-2019/>. Accessed 16th August 2022

United Nations. 2020. *ReFashion Week NYC Promotes Sustainability by Celebrating Secondhand and Sustainable Fashion*. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/refashion-week-nyc-promotes-sustainability-celebrating-secondhand-and-sustainable>

Veblen, T. 1899/1994, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Penguin Classics, London.

Wood, Z. 2020. A good yarn: UK coronavirus lockdown spawns arts and craft renaissance, *The Guardian*. 4 May 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/may/04/a-good-yarn-uk-coronavirus-lockdown-spawns-arts-and-craft-renaissance>