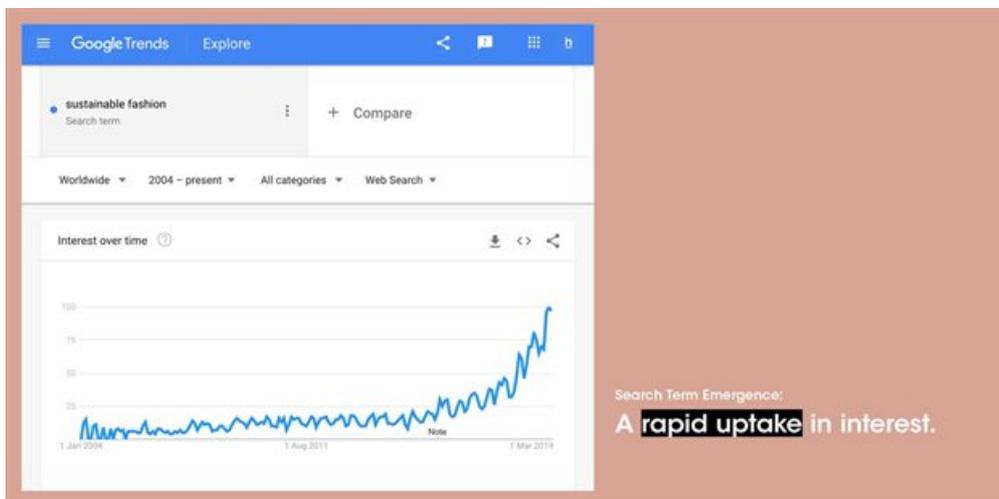


What is shaping culture? Sustainable fashion

By [Brett Rogers](#)

31 Aug 2020

The assertion that fashion is the world's second-worst polluter has been debunked, but that doesn't remove the moral responsibility for the industry to hold itself accountable, not only to save the planet but also itself. How are we handling this in South Africa, and what are some practices that can help the fashion manage going forward in a world that is far more cognisant of how it handles ethical responsibilities?



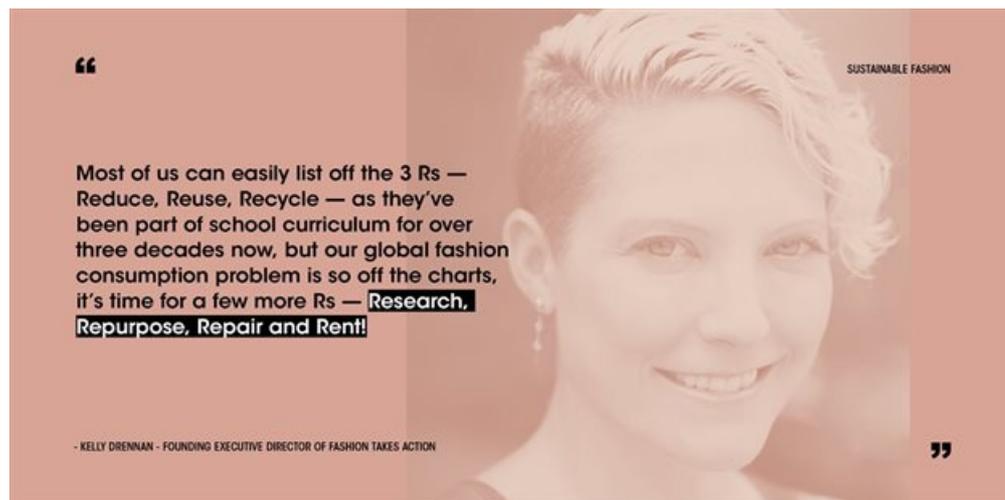
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We are more and more aware of what and how we purchase, making changes based on how brands and brand owner values align with our moral compasses. But it is easier to call out some industries than it is others. Think of the plastics industry, for example.

Fashion is one of those industries in which the issues are 'hidden' and, if we can't 'see' it, we don't object to it. This means the wrongs within the fashion industry could take far longer to be corrected than they should. Weekly we are told of the negative impact of fast fashion or how massive corporations undercut small vendors and abuse workers. Sustainable fashion has emerged as a cause and philosophy which is appealing to many of the conscious who are also fashion conscious.

Far from being a chore, part of what makes sustainable fashion exciting is the innovative ways in which we are going to need to start thinking. We can no longer look at fashion production as a linear action but rather as a circular economy

which can feed and sustain itself. Sustainability is a long game in which we might not see the results of in our lifetime. But it's our responsibility to think further ahead and actually consider the future of our progeny.



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One of the stand out fashion practitioners in South Africa, Lesiba Mabitsela, is a person who is acutely aware of the importance of sustainability. He thinks people are starting to be more aware of where their clothes come from and that pushes big brands to rethink how they produce clothes. It also allows the smaller brands to possibly become more coveted, or as coveted as the Nikes of today. It provides for clients and customers to be more educated in terms of clothes, fashion and value.



[click to enlarge](#)

Fashion buyer, Jamie Leigh Daniels, is under no illusions about the challenges that face the industry. According to her, the cost of labour and the cost of materials is the biggest hurdle we face. Fast fashion is cheap and we have become seduced by trendy clothing that is constantly available to us at ridiculously low prices. We want to buy everything for less, but somewhere in the process something must give. That usually comes at the cost of material and labour choices, using factories that aren't ethical or compliant. If we want to transform the local fashion industry, we will have to relook how much we're willing to spend on clothing. (Don't worry we won't leave you hanging, Daniels has some Do's and Don'ts for us to help plan an ethical wardrobe at the end of this article.)

#SustainableFashionGoals



There are a growing number of big brands doing something, not much, but something for sustainability. H+M has Garment Collection initiative, Adidas has a series of ocean plastic sourced products, Patagonia is known for its ethical approach to business. Local brands like Selfi, Superella and aMaxhosa are also doing their thing to keep sustainable, despite huge financial pressures.

Conclusion

Ignoring environmental and social rights and wrongs are now things of the past. Even if you have no desire from a 'right thing to d'" perspective, the detrimental effects of ignoring these changing norms will land you and your business on a heap of cancelled brands. You might very well find that, in the process of ensuring your products are created ethically, you have a far healthier relationship with the world, and your customers.



**Jamie's 8 Things
To Do & Not To Do
When Buying Clothes
With Sustainability
In Mind.**

[click to enlarge](#)

Do!

Buy Local. Look for Made in SA and Proudly SA. Locally & ethically sourced. Supporting our small local brands and designers will **uplift and help our local industry to flourish.**

Do!

Expect Transparency from retailers to empower yourself to make more responsible buying choices, know where the garment was made, by whom and what the footprint or impacts were on the environment.

[click to enlarge](#)

Do!

Consider the life cycle or longevity of a garment. How much wear would you get out of the item? Is it a good quality piece or disposable?

Do!

Know your yarns and their environmental impacts like organic cotton vs conventional cotton. To make one conventional T-shirt you need more than a handful of pesticides which affect the quality of our soil and freshwater. Hemp and linen vs cotton, **Fibres like hemp and linen improve over time becoming softer and last longer.**

[click to enlarge](#)

Do!

Pay a little more and invest in better quality pieces instead of buying many items of cheaper clothing. You get what you pay for, it is worth understanding that every added detail and trim on a garment came at a cost.

Don't

Buy cheap, always work it back to what the cost of the item must have been and if the person who made it was paid a fair wage, **usually with very cheap fashion the math doesn't add up** and usually it's at the cost of the hands that produced it.

[click to enlarge](#)

Do!

Care for the clothes you already have, **learn how to mend your clothes instead of discarding them into bins.** It can take up to 200 years for a T-shirt to degrade in a landfill.

Do!

Buy second hand/vintage and **start clothing swaps** with friends.

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ABOUT BRETT ROGERS

Brett Rogers, culture lead at Cape Town advertising agency HaveYouHeard and content curator for In_, a channel of content, which showcases cultural forces that are changing the world. It aims to inform, inspire and entertain the viewer and does so with multimedia posts, including podcasts, videos, google trends, mini Q+A's and more. In_ talks to those interested in in-depth cultural exploration and those curious about the world we live in.

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