

FAST FASHION, SUSTAINABILITY, AND COVID-19

H&M Clothing

H&M Resources

- [H&M Sustainability Web Site](#)
- [‘Post-Pandemic Fashion Will Be Sustainable And Affordable’: Interview With Anna Gedda, Head Of Sustainability @ H&M Group](#)
- [BBC: H&M to Close 250 shops](#)

Fast Fashion Background

- [COVID led to “brutal crackdown” on garment workers rights \(The Guardian\)](#)
- [Fast Fashion’s Detrimental Effect on the Environment.](#)
- [The Global Environmental Injustice of Fast Fashion](#)

OVERVIEW

Fast Fashion is defined as “an approach to the design, creation, and marketing of clothing fashions that emphasizes making fashion trends quickly and cheaply available to consumers.”¹ Fast Fashion has come under fire in recent years due to the significant environmental and labor issues inherent in providing consumers with inexpensive and mass-produced clothing. As a leader in the Fast Fashion sphere, with nearly 5,000 stores worldwide, H&M (Hennes & Mauritz) has made a public commitment to moving towards more sustainable clothing manufacturing lifecycles, including protections for garment workers, use of sustainable fabrics, and using renewable energy sources. This commitment, already questioned by critics, has been tested in light of COVID-19 impacts on the fashion industry which have affected supply chain, manufacturing and sales throughout the industry.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

In recent years, H&M has begun marketing company-wide initiatives to become more sustainable, seeking to be a leader in this realm. For example, H&M’s Conscious initiative features clothing made from sustainably sourced materials, brands all sustainably sourced H&M products with a Conscious tag, and implements in-store clothing recycling. H&M’s stated goals for this initiative are to educate consumers, promote clothing recycling, and increase the use of sustainable materials.

H&M’s critics have concerns about the true sustainability of the Conscious line, citing vague language about H&M’s sustainability initiatives, massive waste across the fast fashion industry, and greenwashing efforts to increase sales. In addition, critics argue that H&M has not met stated goals regarding working safety and compensation, a stated component of their sustainability plan.

Against this backdrop, and with a goal to have all H&M group’s brands use only recycled or sustainably sourced materials in their collections by 2030, the fashion giant faced COVID-19. “According to the Sustainable Apparel Coalition’s recent report, with foot traffic in retail and recreation shrinking by 44% in the US and more than 50 percent in many countries around the world, fashion and luxury segments have been hit harder than many other consumer goods and services.”² H&M (along with other Fast Fashion retailers) find themselves increasingly facing critique for not supporting garment workers impacted by the global slow down, and the company ends 2020 with the announcement that they will be closing 250 stores in the coming year.

¹ Merriam-Webster Dictionary

² Forbes, July 20, 2020, ‘Post-Pandemic Fashion Will Be Sustainable and Affordable’: Interview with Anna Gedda, Head of Sustainability At H&M Group

YOUR CHALLENGE

By 2020, H&M's stated goal was to use 100% sustainable cotton in their clothing. By 2030, H&M's goal is to have all of their products produced with more sustainable or recycled sources. By 2040, H&M's goal is to have a climate positive business across its entire value chain.

Can these goals be met (or exceeded) given the impact of COVID-19 on the fast fashion industry? Can these goals be met (or exceeded) while providing a safe job and fair wage for workers across the supply chain? Please provide 3-5 initiatives that H&M should implement in order to meet the environmental and sustainability goals listed on their web site, within the context of our current global financial and public health crisis. Be prepared to explain the recommendation/initiative, how H&M can move forward with your recommendations, and potential impacts for H&M's shareholders and stakeholders.

You have the next 7 days to research the issues faced by H&M, the Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives that may help H&M meet their stated sustainability goals, and the impact of these initiatives on the company and the fast fashion industry. You will develop a PPT slide deck to support your presentation (including any links to supporting materials), and video tape your presentation to be shared with the judges in advance of our synchronous Q&A and Feedback sessions on January 29th.

A few notes as you embark on preparing your case.

- Submit your team's recorded presentation and PPT slides to the assigned Google Drive folder no later than 9:00 am on Wednesday, January 20. You should upload your video to a private YouTube channel and include the link on the first slide of your presentation (instructions available at <https://www.tacoma.uw.edu/node/37079>).
- Late submissions WILL NOT be accepted.
- While you may (and should) practice your presentation between Wednesday, January 20 and Friday, January 29, you may not make any changes to the content of your PPT nor add any research or conclusions after 9 am on January 20.
- Your video presentation should be no longer than 15 minutes. During our synchronous preliminary round on January 29, the judges will have 10 minutes for Q&A and 10 minutes to provide you feedback.
- If your team is selected for the final session, you will present LIVE (via Zoom/YouTube). All team members should plan to be present for this presentation.
- Be prepared to defend your position in a professional manner that is grounded in your own research about the company, the market, and its competitors.

You may use any publicly available information about H&M, the fast-fashion industry, and trends in corporate social responsibility (particularly those focused on sustainability, supply chains, global worker safety, and worker wages). You may not contact any other organizations for information nor consult anyone outside of your team. This case provides the opportunity for you to use your knowledge, research, and analytic skills to explore the issues related to corporate social responsibility, social impact, environmental and social sustainability, and other related topics.
