# Retail sales staff emerge as key guides in the rise of sustainable fashion



As consumer interest in sustainable fashion continues to rise, retail sales staff are increasingly recognised as pivotal players in guiding shoppers through the often-complex landscape of eco-conscious apparel. According to recent analyses published in MR Magazine, personal interactions remain the most influential factor in shoppers’ purchasing decisions, positioning in-person salespeople as essential advocates for sustainable fashion.

The current scenario, however, presents a paradox. While customers seek sustainable products, there remains no universally accepted definition of what sustainable fashion entails. The term encompasses a broad range of categories including eco-friendly, organic, recycled, vegan, thrifted, and more. Dr Cindy J Lin, CEO and Co-Founder of sustainability audit firm Hey Social Good, explained during the Sourcing at MAGIC show interview, “Every single person has their own definition of sustainability, but now there is much more awareness of what the term encompasses… We understand that there are different decision points and practices throughout the supply chain.”

This ambiguity has been compounded by instances of mistrust towards brands that have made unsubstantiated sustainability claims—such as BooHoo’s attempt to appear energy conscious by dimming its website, or H&M’s use of polyester fabrics labelled as sustainable. These cases have contributed to scepticism among consumers who are increasingly aware that sustainability goes beyond single product attributes to include ethical supply chain practices, environmentally conscious manufacturing, and fair labour standards.

Research published in the Journal Nature highlights that consumers of sustainable fashion do so both to reflect their environmental values and to make a public statement through their clothing choices. The study by Sae Eun Lee and Kyu-Hye Lee found that “it is crucial for environmentally sustainable brands (ESBs) to understand that they possess both fashion and conspicuous attributes... their products should reflect not only the latest fashion trends but also align with consumers’ desire for self-image conspicuousness.”

Statistical data reiterates the growing importance of sustainable fashion in the market. Google searches for sustainable fashion have increased fivefold over the past decade, with peaks around key dates such as Earth Day and Christmas. A study by Ruiz found that within five years, approximately 30% of consumers increased their purchase of sustainable products, contributing to a 32% market share increase, despite sustainable fashion accounting for just 6% of total fashion sales currently.

Market forecasts by Meticulous Research suggest sustainable fashion will grow by more than 20% over the coming decade, reaching a market value nearing $50 billion. This growth is driven by a more informed consumer base less influenced by greenwashing and more reliant on peer recommendations. The Journal Nature confirms this trend, noting that consumers are educating themselves beyond typical marketing claims to consider fabric sourcing, labour conditions, and compliance with international climate regulations.

Several high-profile brands are recognised for leading in sustainability. Patagonia, for instance, utilises 98% recycled materials and sources 100% renewable energy for production. Gucci has reduced greenhouse gas emissions by half and fully traces its material supply chains. Chanel is targeting a fully renewable energy production pipeline by 2025, while Hermès aims to internalise all labour production to improve standards.

British brands such as Ettinger, Aramita Campbell, Sunspel, and Trickers are also examining supply chain efficiencies and focusing on product longevity. On the legislative front, both the US and Europe are advancing Expanded Producer Responsibility (EPR) laws. Notably, Vietnam implemented an EPR in 2021, and while Bangladesh’s similar proposed legislation in 2020 failed, it indicates a growing regional focus. Furthermore, New York State has proposed legislation requiring fashion companies with global revenues exceeding $100 million to transparently report on environmental and chemical management to the Attorney General.

The imposition of US tariffs, notably under previous administrations, adds uncertainty to global supply and consumption patterns. However, some experts from Trellis, a sustainable watchdog group, speculate that tariff-induced higher prices on imports from China may drive consumers towards more sustainably produced goods from other countries.

Retailers themselves now occupy a crucial trust position among consumers. Studies show that 68% of sustainable fashion shoppers trust word-of-mouth advice more than any other information source. While Europe remains a leader in sustainable fashion adoption, the US market is rapidly growing, with consumers increasingly interested in fabric origins and ethical labour practices.

This shift underscores the importance of well-trained retail sales staff who can confidently engage with consumers on sustainability issues. In an era where brand marketing is met with scepticism, knowledgeable salespeople are becoming key advisors to shoppers seeking transparency and authenticity in sustainable fashion choices.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://fashinnovation.nyc/sustainability-standards-certifications/> - This article highlights the importance of sustainability standards and certifications in fashion, which helps consumers trust brands that claim to be eco-conscious. It emphasizes the role of these standards in combating greenwashing.
* <https://www.futurelearn.com/info/courses/sustainable-fashion/0/steps/13562> - This resource introduces various social and environmental standards, certifications, and schemes relevant to the fashion industry, supporting the discussion on sustainable fashion practices.
* <https://online.lindenwood.edu/blog/sustainable-fashion-exploring-eco-friendly-practices-in-the-industry/> - The article explains the core principles of sustainable fashion, including supply chain transparency and ethical labor practices, which are essential in understanding the complexity of sustainable fashion.
* <https://www.thesustainablefashionforum.com/pages/why-is-there-still-no-industry-recognized-definition-or-benchmark-for-sustainable-fashion> - This piece discusses the lack of a universal definition for sustainable fashion and the challenges faced by the industry in establishing consistent benchmarks, which aligns with the article's mention of ambiguity in sustainability definitions.
* <https://www.tomjames.com/blog/what-is-sustainable-clothing/> - The blog post defines sustainable clothing as using eco-friendly materials and practices that prioritize social responsibility, echoing the article's themes of sustainable fashion involving environmentally friendly practices and materials.