

Adapting and Aligning with Sustainability for Crafting a Transformative Fashion Business in a VUCA World

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Abstract:

In the current fashion landscape brands are being crafted with focus on 'life' and 'love' with sustainability becoming a central business premise putting people and planet as the basic tenets of strategy formulation and operations. The dramatic change in the business world fuelled by fast paced technological advances, social media revolutionizing communication, digital transformations, focus on greater supply chain visibility and control, necessitated by the volatile economic landscape due to global events like the Israel-Palestine crisis, Russia-Ukraine war, pandemic etc; have shaken the human existence and deprived the world of the sense of stability, safety and familiarity. This has led to the creation of a global environment characterized by 'volatility', 'uncertainty', 'complexity', and 'ambiguity'; namely "VUCA", an acronym for the same. This shined the torchlight on the true scope of sustainability and the underrepresentation of sustainability strategies in contemporary businesses. The research aims at understanding the circumstances and ground reality faced by the fashion businesses in terms of both consumer dynamics and back-end operations that pose as challenges in adoption of sustainable approaches, how these impediments impact the formulation of strategies and suggest measures of how can apparel firms navigate through these challenges to create sustainably viable and economically thriving business. Qualitative research was carried out through in-depth interviews with 10 fashion business professionals to understand their challenges, opinions and motivations. In-depth interviews were used to gather information about the underlying factors from the business perspective. Since the attitude and perception towards sustainability and fashion is context and individual specific, it was essential to use qualitative research to holistically understand the participants' feelings, opinions and experiences. The findings were used to suggest practical strategies based on a sustainable approach that can positively impact organizational competitiveness and counter the threats of VUCA to turn them to competitive advantage thereby crafting a transformative fashion business.

Keywords:

Sustainability, fashion business, complexity, VUCA, qualitative research.