

One World Living!

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Podcast Script Transcript

Welcome back to another episode of ‘**One World Living!**’. I am Briony, I am Rhona, and I am Harvey, your hosts as always.

In this podcast, we delve into everything climate action and environmental responsibility, as we continue our mission for ‘**One World Living!**’

Before we start the episode, I have to ask... Harvey, is that another new jacket I see? We’re meant to be the example here. Come on.

But it's leopard print guys. I couldn't not.

Just like Harvey, we’re all guilty of buying things we really don’t need. And with us constantly satisfying our unnecessary needs, we have come to live in a society which admires a ‘more is better’ attitude.

That’s what we call the ‘Dominant Social Paradigm (Kotler, 2011).

Go on Briony, why don’t you explain that for our listeners.

It’s this idea that as a society we have collective beliefs and a worldwide view. This currently includes the idea that economic growth and wealth are strongly correlated with quality of life. We live in a society with a pre-set mindset, which encourages us to keep consuming (Kotler, 2011). We only live once after all!

But so does our planet.

In 2019, 62 million metric tons of clothing were consumed worldwide (Bansode and Goyal, 2024). Over consumption of our resources and the consequential waste means that we require 2-3 planets worth of resources to sustain our habits (Footprint Network, 2024). And so today’s question now becomes more apparent than ever: **Who has greater power to positively impact on climate change by tackling overconsumption: marketers or consumers?**

So I guess we should start with, why are consumers overconsuming?

We’ve already established this idea of a ‘preset mindset’. Thanks to the DSP we’re programmed to consume. But ok, Harvey tell us why you’ve bought yet another jacket, and don’t tell us it’s because you needed it!

I saw someone on Instagram wearing it and found a good deal. I just needed to get it.

So, what you’ve just described here is a ‘need’, yes?

Yeh!

What you've actually described here is an irrational want not a need. This want is created by a market that dictates over consumption and feeds on vices of greed (Stiles, 2006). And just like you, more and more consumers are being encouraged by the market to be psychologically dissatisfied with what they have (Stiles, 2006). We always feel we need more, when in reality we have everything we need. Some might even self-diagnose it as a shopping addiction.

But it's not your fault! There are so many factors in place which encourage you to spend on irrational things.

I'm going to point out that you've used the phrase "it's not your fault" here Rhona, implying that marketers are the problem with over consumption. Is this the case you are arguing?

Yes, they are the problem! It is only because of marketers that consumers feel a need to buy so many products in the first place. From marketers triggering the release of dopamine; hitching themselves to the latest feel-good trend; using celebrities to endorse their products; triggering nostalgia; peddling panic and paranoia, it is becoming frankly impossible to resist all the temptations that marketers throw at us (Lindstrom, 2012).

And don't get me started on how they track every click we make online. Marketing is becoming more and more personalised through the use of data collection and organisation. Marketers are using this myriad of data to prey on people's insecurities and encourage them to buy something new (Lindstrom, 2012).

Take for example companies who are on the fast fashion wave, like Zara, who adopt personalised marketing strategies, by using email and social media to send customers specialised offers, and alert them of suggested products based on their preferences. This has created a large consumer demand for their products. And to meet this demand, Zara is producing large quantities of garments, which are made from cheap and environmentally harmful materials (Jordan, 2022).

In fact, the brand releases an incredible 24 collections a year, 500 designs per week and nearly 20,000 per year (Jordan, 2022).

The company's profit margins are huge, but this profit comes at the cost of collateral damage to the environment (Jha & Veeramani, 2021).

With consumers constantly seeking the newest Zara top, dress, trousers, what happens to the top, dress or trousers they don't use anymore?

Most people throw them out and they end up in landfill. Garments that end up here can take over 200 years to decompose (Brown, 2021). And during decomposition, these textiles generate methane and leach toxic chemicals and dyes into the groundwater and our soil (Omondi, 2024).

With fast fashion encouraging unsustainable consumption patterns and adding to the ongoing climate crisis, is there a way marketers can offer a solution or have a positive impact on climate change?

Unfortunately, marketers cannot reverse all of the current environmental damage caused through clothing wastage, but they do hold the power to prevent and reverse further damage. Consumers are no longer looking for products purely based on their functionality and emotional appeal, they are now considering a third dimension, the company's social responsibility (Kotler, 2011). The solution lies in shifting marketing practices. By this I mean shifting companies away from commercial marketing practices (where businesses exploit consumer culture to gain a profit) and move toward sustainability marketing practices.

Kemper and Ballantine have presented three conceptualisations of sustainability marketing practices (auxiliary, reformative and transformative), which promote this transition to a sustainable society (Kemper and Ballantine, 2019). To help explain how these practices can tackle our overconsumption problem, I will adopt the use of a brand that is avid about protecting our environment: Patagonia.

The first concept is auxiliary sustainability marketing. This is focused on the environmental, social and economic dimensions of production and consumption. By considering the socioecological product lifecycle and promoting the transparency of business, consumers are more willing to pay price premiums for greener products (Kemper & Ballantine, 2019). Creating transparency proved a big success for Patagonia in 2011, through the “Don’t buy this jacket” campaign. The advertisement described the environmental cost of one of the brand’s best-selling fleece jackets and encouraged consumers to reconsider and instead opt for a used Patagonia product – ultimately with the aim of promoting smarter consumption (Patagonia, 2023).

The second concept is reformative sustainability marketing. This form of marketing extends on the aspirations of ASM that consumption levels are currently unsustainable and makes a focus on real needs rather than frivolous wants (Kemper & Ballantine, 2019). Patagonia made a plea for thoughtful consumption in their 2024 campaign titled ‘unfashionable’.

Oh I remember a quote from that campaign. I’ve got it here look. “Fashion is none of our business. We make gear that is multifunctional, repairable and timeless – because the longer it stays in play, the better it is for the earth” (Patagonia, 2024).

Their attack on fast fashion brands is attempting to pull customers away from brands like Zara that are damaging our environment and in doing so forces consumers to think more consciously about what they are consuming.

The final concept is transformative sustainability marketing, which extends the first two approaches and embraces the need to transform current institutions and norms. This concept goes beyond reducing the harms of current consumption and exploitive production practices and goes one step further by introducing and encouraging positive lifestyles and behaviours (Kemper & Ballantine, 2019).

Take Patagonia’s 2020 ‘Buy Less Demand More’ campaign for example. The campaign encourages consumers to demand better practices from companies with exploitive production processes. Patagonia believes that educated consumers will force companies like Zara to drop their harmful practices, they quote “what you buy is what the industry will become” (Patagonia, n.d.).

So how does shifting to these practices tackle our overconsumption problem?

Through decoding the case of Patagonia, it is clear that by shifting marketing practices to those which educate and encourage sustainable consumption, marketers hold a constructive influence over consumer behaviour. Thus, marketers hold the power to shift current consumption patterns and reduce the industry's impact on the climate crisis. But ultimately one company cannot make this change on its own.

I totally see where you are coming from. But, what I've recognised here is that ultimately consumer culture forms the core of the DSP (Kemper and Ballantine, 2019), and because of this I believe consumers hold the greater power to create environmental change. I'll tell you why...

Consumers hold the power to challenge the ethos and actions of businesses (our lovely marketers) by holding firm their values and acting accordingly (Stiles, 2006). If done effectively, they hold the ultimate bargaining power to shape our society into a less predatory space, alter the DSP to a more green position and therefore positively impact on climate change (Stiles, 2006). In theory it seems so simple, however altering an entire society's mindset and actions from the existing DSP, as you've probably guessed, isn't an easy task!

But many consumers already consider the environment with almost 9/10 UK consumers saying that they experience the disruptive impacts of climate change in their lives and many now shop more considerately (PwC, 2024).

Yes! However, I'm sure our listeners will agree, that as regular media digesters ourselves we're not naive to the secrets hidden in how data is presented to us. For example: A 2023 McKinsey survey showed that 78 percent of US consumers say that a sustainable lifestyle is important to them (McKinsey & Company, 2023). The use of the words 'important to them' here suggests awareness and intent, however the stats from this same survey linked to converting these intentions into actions are hardly convincing.

The gap identified here is the attitude-intention-behaviour gap in which consumers' ecological values and attitudes often fail to materialise in actual purchases of sustainable products (Emery, 2020, Shaw et al. 2016.).

Harvey, you're a great example of that, you cycle into the studio every day with your reusable coffee cup, we literally run a sustainability podcast, no one knows better than you... yet you still bought another new jacket which you didn't need.

Whatever you say Rhona. But I guess good intentions can't create a positive impact unless they become actions. So the challenge here is how do we get consumers like me to act in accordance with their values?

I'm going to touch on a framework very quickly called the Behavioural Reasoning Theory. Put simply, this theory helps us understand that values are only the first step in developing attitudes which then inform our intentions and behaviours by highlighting that people create reasons to justify their choices, both for and against a behaviour (Westaby, 2005). For example, the physical cost of a product can demotivate consumers from making a sustainable choice as they are often pitched at a higher price point (a reason against adopting the behaviour) (Emery, 2012) going back to McKinsey, 60% of US consumers said they were willing to pay more for more sustainable products (McKinsey, 2023) - a great reflection of our gap between having

sustainable values, 78% said it was important, only 60% said they'd be willing to pay more for a sustainable product, and according to our framework it would be safe to assume that there will be another existing gap between those willing to and those who actually do pay more for sustainable products.

Even when someone supports sustainability, there are always strong negative reasons, like high cost or inconvenience and these can prevent action (Westaby, 2005). This is particularly prevalent in the case of the fashion industry where sustainable options are more expensive than mass-produced (Khandual and Pradhan, 2019).

Everyone has their own personal threshold for how sustainable they're willing or able to be in their daily life before the effort or sacrifices start to feel overwhelming, a lifestyle sacrifice threshold (Emery 2012). Research shows that we all have conflicting values when accounting both our altruistic values which consider others, and our biospheric values which consider the environment but also of course our egoistic values which determine the real benefit appeal to us ourselves as a consumer (Emery, 2012). This conflict results in trade-offs, often at the expense of the environment.

I will admit that marketers therefore play a significant role in making sustainable options more accessible for example, with effective use of pricing strategies (Khandual and Pradhan, 2019) The Social Learning Theory, however, offers a promising way to bridge this gap by emphasising the role of social influence and peer behavior (Bandura, 1977). When individuals see sustainable choices modeled and positively reinforced by their peers, they are more likely to adopt similar behaviors (Bandura, 1977). This collective influence suggests that everyone, in essence, becomes a marketer of sustainable choices, fostering a culture where responsible consumption is the norm. By addressing perceived barriers, aligning sustainability with personal values, and leveraging social influence, marketers and individuals alike can help transform pro-environmental attitudes into concrete, impactful actions – a gateway to tackling overconsumption.

Basically, If we can reduce this gap, there will be a great positive influence on climate change?

For sure! We can speak about bridging this gap as a future actor in the role of combating climate change but whilst we wait for consumers to convert, and marketers to adapt, the consumers can make a positive impact imminently and already have (Dunn and Harness, 2019). We've already touched on the idea of the social learning theory but this really means too that consumers can act as their very own touchpoint online offering authenticity, visibility and advocacy through organic User Generated Content to hold a great power of influence (Dunn and Harness, 2019).

I like this particular quote from Philip Kotler: companies are increasingly swimming in a highly transparent fishbowl'. (Kotler, 2011) Brands today are no longer the only author of their brand. With the rise of cancel culture and constant UGC, companies will be consistently scrutinised and held accountable by all of their stakeholders (Dunn and Harness, 2019).

Coming back to Zara again, who are no stranger toward cancel culture. Take their Join Life Initiative in 2022, which faced scrutiny from all forms of media for greenwashing. The company launched a limited line of clothing made from carbon captured polyester. While commendable, this process is highly expensive and energy intensive that does not come anywhere near reducing their over consumptive business model. Consumers took to the media

to call out Zara for the insignificance of the campaign since the majority of their inventory is built on unsustainable products (Palone, 2024).

Exactly. What I am trying to say here is that if consumers can continue to hold brands accountable and call out practices which fall short of the bar, they can continue to be influencers for positive change and challenge marketers to make better, more sustainable choices whilst encouraging consumers to also align their values with their wallets. Ultimately, combining these actions will give consumers a hugely greater power to have a positive impact on climate change by holding firm a 'less is more' attitude to consumption. After all, isn't marketing largely based on developing insights from consumer behaviour and data?

Yes! If we as consumers change our behaviours for the better then marketers will have no choice but to follow if they want to appeal to their target audiences. On the other side, it has been identified through research that any commitments from businesses and governments will only be successful if they come hand in hand with behavioural change from consumers themselves (Habib et al., 2021).

That consumers hold the ultimate power to change the DSP and therefore have a very positive impact on climate change.

Whew. I think that's enough analysis don't you think?

I'll say so!

So guys, 'who really has greater power to positively impact on climate change by tackling overconsumption, is it marketers or consumers?'

Well, the fact is, there is no singular answer to the question. It's clear through our analysis that both parties hold the power to create change by tackling overconsumption.

Whether its marketers shifting towards more sustainable marketing practices, and strategically influencing others to reduce consumption.

Or consumers aligning their values with their actions and exploiting social learning to positively influence others.

It's very clear that the parties are interdependent on one another to make this change happen.

Therefore, to tackle the problem of overconsumption, marketers and consumers must unite to transform the DSP as we know it and create the most positive impact on climate change.

Doing so would be a huge leap in the direction of **'One World Living!'**

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Music / Sound Effect sources:

Music sourced from Microsoft Clipchamp. Track: "Yes we can (intro)" (author unknown)