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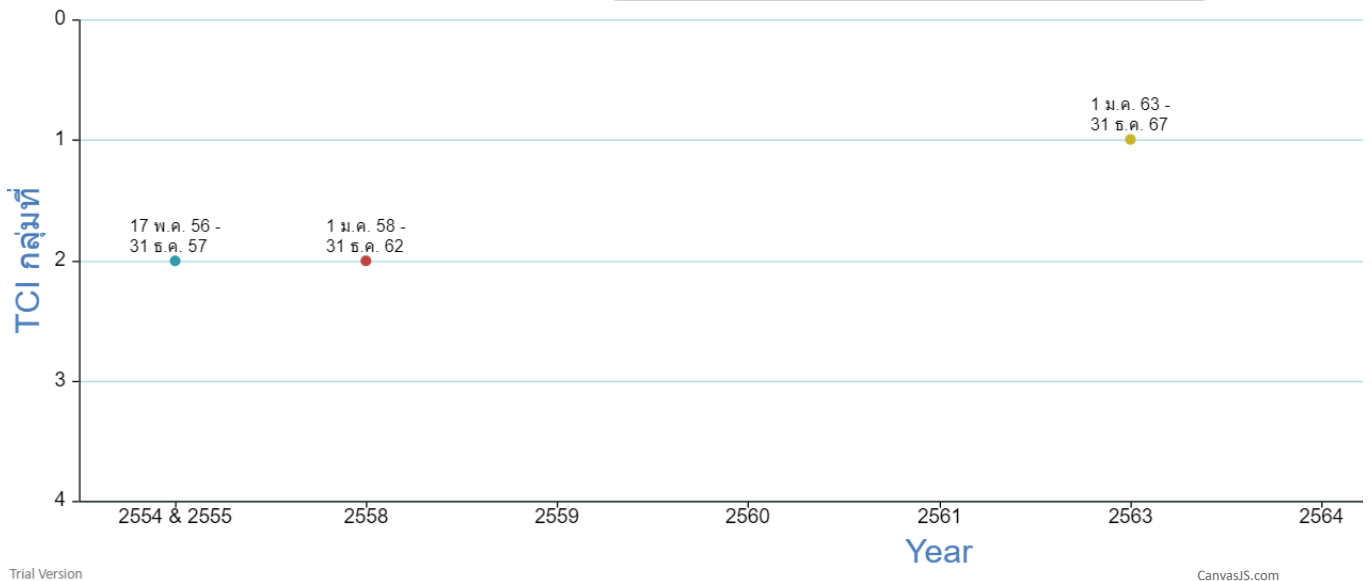
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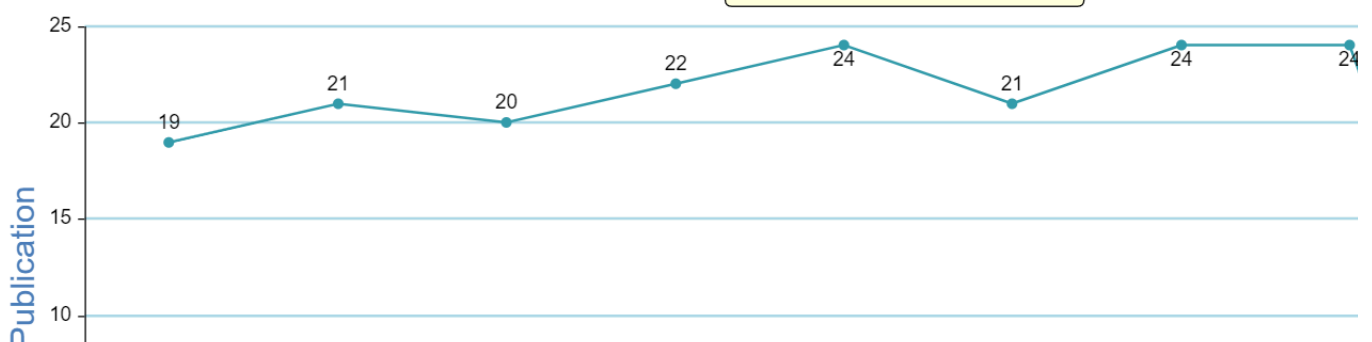
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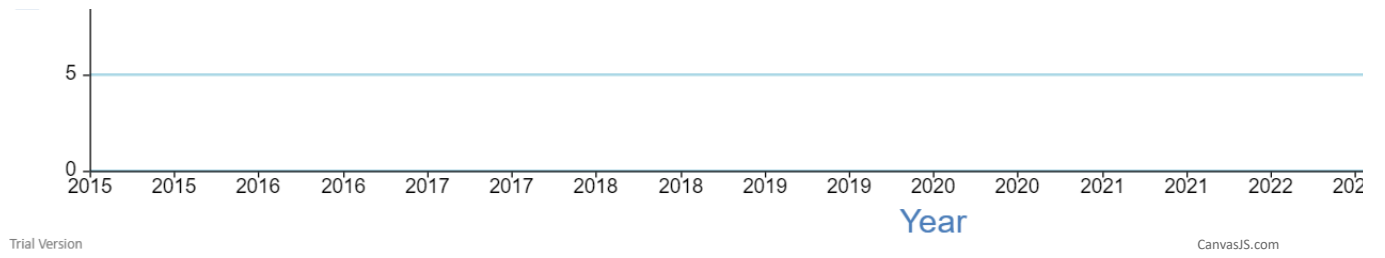
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# Communication Roles and Implementation for Sustainable Fashion Ecosystem in Thailand: Empirical Evidence from Stakeholder

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## Abstract

In recent years, sustainable fashion is considered as the world phenomenon shifting fashion landscape across the globe. The fashion system comprises of complex processes and multiple stakeholders so as Thailand's fashion ecosystem. This paper aims to investigate the communication roles and implementation for sustainable fashion in Thai context through an empirical evidence from the stakeholder. Thus, in this study, the mixed methodology is employed together with the design thinking procedures to explore the roles and implementation of sustainable fashion concept from the perspective of Thai fashion industry's key person(s). The findings indicate the subjectiveness and inadequateness understanding of the term sustainable fashion. Also, the finding points out the limitations of sustainable fashion products clothes in Thai fashion market due to the cost of production and the lack of economic values. Moreover, the results demonstrate the implementation of sustainable practices for Thai fashion ecosystem utilizing the communication prototype as the guideline for future implementation to drive Thailand's fashion industry toward sustainability.

**Keywords:** Communication, Design Thinking, Sustainable Fashion

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## Introduction

Fashion industry is responsible for the global environmental issues due to the complicated manufacturing process that affects ecosystem from upstream to downstream (Srisuwan, 2019), and there is no exception for the fashion industry in Thailand. Since the term fashion implies the ongoing process and highly related to capitalism (Hur, 2016), fashion consumption grows exponentially and inevitably creates impact on the socio-economic level. It is considered as the second top industry in the world that generates pollution and utilizes over 93 million cubic meters of water in a year (UNCTAD, 2019). These data indicate the essentiality of transforming fashion industry toward sustainable outcomes.

Rana Plaza (2013) incident marks a significant turning point of fashion history. The tragedy causes a death toll of over thousands garment labors. Sustainability and transparency have been discussed throughout the world and interest in ethical fashion rises accordingly (Hendriksz, 2018). Sustainable fashion is now becoming a mainstream phenomenon as a result of the world's emerging trend (Claudia, Panayiota, & Caroline, 2016). The industry shifts dramatically in every aspect to preserve national resources and reduce environmental so as social impact. However, the industry also relies on the economic growth which is the building block of sustainability and a significant indicator of the industry's achievement and wellbeing of multiple stakeholders. Holistic view of fashion landscape is a fundamental approach to understand the term "sustainable fashion" and its crucial attributes that encompass fashion ecosystem. Correspondingly, the holistic approach requires understanding of stakeholder's conceptual

foundation toward sustainability in the fashion industry.

Extant research predominantly focused on sustainable fashion in various aspects. The researcher therefore explored 32 research studies from the total of 243 studies found between 2013 to 2019 on NIDA One Search database and utilized searching method and classification criteria through three keywords; "sustainable fashion," "practice," and "consumption." then analyzed and categorized into six major attributes; (1) definition and attributes of sustainable fashion (Khurana & Ricchetti, 2016), (2) sustainable fashion development and reservation (Pedersen & Andersen, 2015) (3) sustainable fashion practices (Williams, 2019), (4) sustainable fashion design and communication (Kaikobad, Zafar, Bhuiyan, Zobaida, & Daizy, 2015), and (5) sustainable fashion consumption and consumer attitude (Han, Seo, & Ko, 2017).

The systematic literature review implies the research gap and raise a significant question of the communication roles and implementation of sustainable fashion ecosystem in Thai context. The researcher therefore aiming to examine three critical research questions; (1) what are the attributes of Thailand's fashion ecosystem (2) what are the communication roles and implementation for sustainable fashion in Thailand. (3) What are the communication practices for sustainable fashion in Thailand. The research objective is therefore aiming to fulfill the gap and examine the communication roles and implementation for sustainable fashion ecosystem in Thailand through design thinking framework.

Communication for sustainable fashion ecosystem is a vital step to establish a fundamental of an ethical fashion industry together with the implementation of design thinking for a holistic

understanding of the term sustainable fashion and practices in Thailand. Thus, this paper investigates the roles, opinions, and practices among multiple Thai stakeholders through communication point of view and also delivers the guideline for implementation in Thai sustainable fashion environment. This study executes the investigation in accordance with design thinking procedures.

## Literature Review

### Sustainable fashion definition and attributes

Sustainable fashion is contextual. The definition of the term sustainable lies on the subjective interpretation of an individual. The concept of sustainable fashion comprises of fashion life cycle thinking combining all related processes from upstream to downstream which are all interconnected (Niinimäki, 2013). Moreover, the term sustainable in the fashion industry also associated with slow fashion implying the shift from quantity to quality (Fletcher, 2012). Also, it implies the ongoing processes from the slow production to slow consumption which requires the holistic interpretation and understanding (Jung & Jin, 2014). Several definitions have been discussed through various dimensions from stakeholder's perspective in the fashion industry, Claudia et al. (2016) suggested that from the aspect of consumer and entrepreneur, sustainable fashion is highly related to environmental aspect through the use of eco-friendly material in accordance with Iran and Schrader (2017) pointing out the key attribute of sustainable fashion as the process to reduce natural resources consumption. Moreover, the previous studies also indicate social dimension of sustainable fashion. Since fashion industry and its manufacturing process is complicated due to globalization and a complex supply chain, the

industry itself is related to multiple stakeholders, especially labor and their working condition. Khurana and Ricchetti (2016) stated that transparency in the fashion manufacturing process is one of the crucial attributes since the study pointed out that over 70 percent of the garment labors are women and there is no promise for the fair trade or ethical working condition. Nevertheless, economic dimension is considered as one of the most significant attributes reflecting the growth of the industry and the major indicator of sustainability. The economic dimension can be considered as two major aspects; firstly, sustainability in the fashion industry is associated with externalities which means the businesses are accounted for additional cost which impact the corporate financial bottom (Khurana & Ricchetti, 2016). Secondly, the economic dimension can be viewed as an approach to increase product values and market shares through innovation and value generation and therefore creating a positive financial impact toward fashion businesses. (Khurana & Ricchetti, 2016)

### Sustainable Fashion Development and Reservation

The concept of sustainability in the fashion industry evolves overtime and shifts according to the social interest as the awareness toward green information and green attitude raise significantly during 2000 (Shen, Zheng, Chow, & Chow, 2014). However, recent studies also pointed out the major reservation of sustainable fashion due to the industry's process; upstream and downstream. Pedersen and Andersen (2015) mentioned fast fashion business structure as a major cause for natural resources deconstruction since fast fashion businesses mainly focus on the product quantity over quality leading to overconsumption. At the same time, the green washing from big corporate is

considered as another standing dilemma toward sustainability in the fashion industry. For the downstream process, Pedersen and Andersen (2015) explained that consumption behavior can create negative impact toward the sustainable fashion system. Overconsumption of fashion product is the reflection of traditional business structure valuing quantity over quality. Moreover, the limited choices of sustainable fashion product in the fashion market is another reason behind the reservation of the world current sustainable fashion situation (Pedersen & Andersen, 2015).

### **Sustainable Fashion Practices**

Sustainable Fashion Practices require holistic perspective of the fashion industry and the holistic approach to drive the concept throughout the system. The practices comprise of the critical approach from social and environmental dimension aiming to sustain and preserve natural resources and wellbeing of the people at the same time, an economic aspect ensures the profit and growth of the fashion businesses (Williams, 2019). Moreover, the practices for sustainability in the fashion industry can be viewed in two different angles, the practices from the producer and the roles of the consumer themselves. From the producer's perspective, the fashion business structure sets the sustainable standards throughout the industry (Thorisdottir & Johannsdottir, 2019). The internal policy from the business owner or the fashion designer can reflect the sustainable fundament of the company. Hu, Li, Chen, and Wang (2014) explained the roles and responsibilities of the producers including the designer and the brand owner as the major drive of sustainable fashion through the development of the supply chain, the management process and the business operation toward sustainable outcomes. At

the same time, the consumer has an active role in the circular economy through the alternative consumption including the secondhand clothes, vintage goods or donation (Machado, Almeida, Bollick, & Braganolo, 2019). The conscious consumption reduces the fashion production, at the same time generates a positive impact toward the environmental dimension (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2014).

### **Sustainable fashion design and communication**

Fashion industry thrives from the initiation of creativity, design and the communication from the brand to the target consumer. Design is the fundament of the fashion industry which requires particular skills (Perez, Fornasier, & Martins, 2016), together with the design tool combining both the design thinking and system thinking in order to create unique brand identity. Furthermore, sustainable fashion design also requires the application of design principle to the sustainability concept including, reduce, reuse and recycle (Srisuwan, 2019). The purpose of the design process for sustainable fashion clothes is to create brand identity with less impact on the world and the people. Moorhouse and Moorhouse (2018) also pointed out the market opportunities and the generation of economic growth through brand storytelling and value creation of sustainable fashion product in relation with global awareness among green issues. Communication is considered a critical approach in transmitting the sustainable concept throughout the fashion system (Kaikobad et al., 2015). The previous study also indicated that fashion influencers or key opinion leader has a significant impact toward customer's attitudes (Kaikobad et al., 2015). Moreover, transparency and natural resources usage and consumption are the major concerns of the society and reflect the organization internal policies toward

sustainable fashion system. The communication of green label and green information will enhance the consumer's acknowledgement and could lead to buying decision (Shen et al., 2014).

### **Sustainable fashion consumption and consumer attitude**

The consumer attitudes toward sustainable fashion can reflect the buying decision and the consumption of the sustainable fashion goods. The previous study from McNeill and Moore (2015) had categorized the fashion consumer into three segments; 1) the self consumer which mainly focuses on the convenience and personal emotion, 2) social consumer are those who concern on their social image and 3) Sacrifice consumer who consume to reduce the negative impact on the planet. At the same time, Kong, Ko, Chae, and Mattila (2016) explained that consumer has positive impact from the green marketing. Vehmas, Raudaskoski, Heikkila, Harlin, and Mensonen (2018) study also indicated the consumer's interest toward sustainable fashion especially on recycle process and practices for sustainability in the fashion industry. Moreover, the consumer seeks more information about sustainable fashion or circular fashion so as how fashion industry creates impact on the environment. Also, the consumer's attitude toward sustainable fashion has relation with post consumption process. Although the rise of the sustainable fashion concerns, there is only small group of consumers with sufficient understanding toward sustainable fashion. In accordance with previous study suggesting that the consumer has different level of understanding on upcycling process (Shim, Jason, & Youngjoo, 2018). Han et al. (2017) explained the attitude-behavior gap of the fashion consumer, suggesting that the awareness and acknowledgement toward sustainability did not lead

to actual sustainable fashion consumption. Also, only small group of consumers are willing to pay more for sustainable fashion product since they emphasis on the hedonic values over the sustainable values (Geiger & Keller, 2017).

### **Communication for Sustainable Fashion**

#### **Theory of Practice**

The term sustainable fashion is conceptual dependance, therefore the implementation of sustainable practice requires a deep understanding toward human practice, especially from the consumer's perspective. Theory of practice from Pierre Bourdieu is a critical thinking tool that can explain a complex social structures and social relationship that reflect the individual practice. Hence, Bourdieu's thinking encompasses a key insight of consumer's actions and behavior toward fashion consumption in Thailand. Bourdieu explains that the relations between habitus, capital and field consecutively reflect individual practice. Habitus refers to the disposition that influence individual's self and hence reflect the individual of how to act and respond. Habitus is structured by both the past and present experiences and at the same time it leads to a construction of individual's present and future. Bourdieu also points out that the habitus is related to field(s). Fields convey the network of social relation while capital is the currency of field, the mediator of the society comprising of economic capital, social capital and culture capital. The connection between these three significant attributes is ongoing, dynamic and partial and consequently affect the practice of the society. (Tiffani L. Apps, 2019)

## Methodology

Mixed method is employed combining both quantitative and qualitative approach. The design thinking procedures (Institute of Design at Stanford, n.d.) are also implemented throughout the study to explain the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholder and suggest the communication practices and implementation in Thai context. The results from both quantitative and qualitative approach are presented in accordance with design thinking steps from empathize to problem define, ideation, prototype and suggest the test method.

The quantitative method utilize survey research through an online questionnaire, distributes among 200 fashion clothes consumers. The samples were asked their understanding on the term sustainable fashion and their attitudes toward clothes buying decision. Also, they were asked to rank their familiarity of sustainable practices from upstream to downstream which indicate the consumer's insight toward sustainable fashion according to the human-centric approach which starts from consumer empathy and lead to define process. The datasets were statistical analyzed through SPSS program as percentage, means, Pearson's correlation coefficient and multiple regression.

For the qualitative approach, the data have been gathered through an in-depth interview among 9 participants representing the key person(s) in Thai fashion industry including 1) fashion brand owner and designer, 2) sustainable fashion activist and 3) fashion and communication experts in Thailand as an idea ideation in order to gain perspective toward sustainability possibilities and reservations in Thai fashion industry. Also, the communication prototype

is designed and suggested as a future model for Thailand's context.

## Results and discussion

### Thailand's fashion ecosystem; from the perspective of Communication

Stakeholders from Thai fashion industry play various role in establishing a sustainable fashion ecosystem at different level. In the quantitative questionnaire, consumers were asked to rank "who is responsible for creating a sustainable fashion system in Thailand?" The results indicate that consumer, producer and media are ranked as the top three key person driving the concept of sustainability in Thai fashion industry consequentially. From the communication perspective, these three stakeholders can be perceived as sender, receiver and the gatekeeper that have a critical role in transmitting the sustainable practice throughout the ecosystem. Moreover, the previous research pointed out that consumer has an active role in circular economy and play a crucial role in furthering a sustainable fashion system (Machado et al., 2019).

Communication for sustainable fashion ecosystem in Thailand requires an investigation through the relation among industry's stakeholder and their role in transmitting "sustainable fashion practices" throughout Thai fashion system. According to the Systems Model of Creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), it insists that there is always at least one person behind a creation within a field. In Thai fashion industry, the particular role is divided into two major segments, (1) Person or an individual who initiates sustainable fashion to the system that can be considered as a "sender" from the aspect of the SMCR model and (2) Field or an authority can also be perceived as a "gatekeeper" who is responsible for



the judgement of the domain or body of knowledge whether to be accepted or rejected. Therefore, the researcher categorizes Thailand's key stakeholder into these two major segments by their role of communication in order to transmit the key message or the concept of sustainable fashion to the "receiver" which are the mass audience throughout the fashion system.

#### *Person (Sender)*

**Original creator**, an individual who initiates the idea of sustainability to the fashion system, including both fashion brand owner and designer has a remarkable role in establishing a sustainable standard within the organization and creates perceived values for sustainable fashion clothes through brand design and communication. The participants from all groups agreed that the original creator is a fundament for sustainability and ignites the idea throughout the whole system by 1) imposing an internal policy related to sustainability and implementing the design method for product lifecycle. The previous study indicated that design process is a significant approach for empowering sustainable fashion ecosystem (Kozlowski, Searcy, & Bardecki, 2018), 2) by offering the sustainable fashion clothes to the market as one of the participants points out an insufficient choice of sustainable clothes in Thai market and 3) by encouraging an innovative manufacturing process for sustainable purpose. Consistent with prior research from Fitzpatrick and Williams (2018), explained the importance of innovation oriented for sustainability outcomes so as an accelerator of an economic growth throughout the fashion industry. The original creator is the sender of the sustainable concept and practice throughout Thailand's fashion system since the original creator is responsible for creating a

sustainable fashion clothes and communicate the substantial values to the receiver which are the consumer of fashion product.

**Activist** is considered as an individual who plays a crucial role in introducing the term sustainable fashion to the fashion system and can be perceived as a sender in the communication process as well. Fitzpatrick and Williams (2018) pointed out the remarkable movement driven by non-profit organization throughout the globe aiming to shift fashion industry sustainably. Fashion Revolution Thailand is one of the non-profit organizations channeling the network throughout the world and gathering activists from various background in order to raise awareness and communicate the idea of sustainable fashion (Fashion Revolution, n.d.). The goal of the organization is to drive the concept of sustainable fashion as the new normal in Thailand's fashion practice. The activist works simultaneously with other stakeholders to drive sustainability further. Collaboration among government sector and private sector is also a remarkable outcome from the effort of Thai activist. One of the participants who is a member of Fashion Revolution Thailand, Nattakritta (Interviewee, 2020) pointed out the importance of the collaboration among stakeholders and those who hold the industry's resources, explaining that the role of the activist and the non-profit organization is to unite the people, ideas and resources.

#### *Field (Gatekeeper and Receiver)*

**Consumer's** opinion and decision toward sustainable fashion create a major impact on the entire fashion system. Consumer does not reflect the role as a receiver alone but also act as a judge toward sustainable fashion practice either the specific domain is accepted or rejected. Demand is created through the consumer's choice of buying and thus,

the supply is generated according to the market's need. The participants also agreed that consumer has a significant role in reflecting their interest toward sustainable clothes and thus, fashion business relies on this specific demand. Consumer behavior which includes buying decision, fashion clothes consumption and post consumption are another approach of sustainable fashion. According to recent study, sustainable fashion is known as slow fashion where the main focus put on slow consumption practice, valuing quality over quantity (Fletcher, 2010). Product life cycle is designed thoroughly to slow down the consumption rate, aiming for natural resources preservation and reduce excessive waste (Jung & Jin, 2014). The role of consumer both in creating fashion market demand and consuming fashion clothes sustainably set a ground standard for sustainable fashion system in Thailand and act as a field or the gatekeeper granting approval or rejection of the new body of knowledge, sustainability in fashion industry.

**Government sector** or policy maker has an authorization in establishing law and regulations associated with sustainability in the industry. The acceptance of the sustainable concept from the government sector can lead to a tangible practice within the society, hence the government sector can be viewed as a "gatekeeper" in the communication process. The law and regulation play a critical part in encouraging other sectors to work accordingly. The government sector is also considered as a center of collaboration. The participants mention that government are responsible for controlling the industry's manufacturing cost that will be reflected on the fashion product price and therefore impact the consumer's buying decision. Moreover, the government establishes a standard for the fashion

industry so as the whole social system through their role as a policy maker, including education and research encouragement toward sustainability and innovation. One of the interviewees, Nattikritta (Interviewee, 2020), the member of Fashion Revolution Thailand pointed out that the government sector plays a part as a sender as well. She explained the importance of government role as a facilitator and educator, responsible for sustainable fashion promotion and awareness creation within the society. In accordance with Pedersen and Andersen (2015), explained that taxation policy from the government sector is the code of conduct that encourage fashion manufacturing sector to proceed more sustainably. However, there is no taxation policy associated with sustainability in Thailand. But one of the interviewees, Patcha (Interviewee, 2020) an expert in fashion has explained current government's movement that enables sustainable practice in the fashion industry through research fund granted for various sectors to work accordingly toward more sustainable outcomes throughout the industries

**Media sector** act as a gatekeeper or a communication mediator. Their roles include filtering the "domain" or "messages" and make a judgement of approval or rejection and transmitting the sustainable fashion practices throughout the entire fashion system. Previous study also indicated that media play a critical part in communicating sustainable fashion concepts that greatly impact the consumer's perception toward sustainability in the fashion industry (Haug & Busch, 2016). Moreover, Gurova and Morozova (2016) pointed out the role of mainstream media in communicating the sustainable idea from fashion brand to consumer. However, the media role shifts due to the digital disruption as one

of the interviewees described that the internet grants media accessibility to all users, including the consumer themselves. Their ability to communicate equally through digital tool changes the media authority from the original establishment as such mainstream media to the actual online media user. The consumer oneself can communicate directly to the brand about their needs or perception toward sustainable fashion through online channel. The participant, Kam (Interviewee, 2020), the fashion brand owner and designer also explain the role of key opinion leader who acts as mediator and has significant influences on the fashion system. Their opinions toward sustainable fashion impact other stakeholders especially the consumer. Furthermore, the prevalent research described that sustainable fashion evolution from 2009-2013 mainly focused on key opinion leaders to communicate the idea of ethical fashion through social practices (Jones & Hawley, 2016).

**Department store** and retail store are also considered as field or the gatekeeper since their role in filtering sustainable fashion practice. They also act as a mediator in communicating and creating the physical experiences for consumer. One of the participants, Amom (Interviewee, 2020), the fashion expert explains that the retail store in Thailand plays a significant role in collaborating the stakeholders and processes from upstream to downstream. The retail store also acts as a mediator and match potential Thai designers with the local suppliers who provide alternative materials for environmental and social purpose. Furthermore, the department store establishes a sustainable standard for Thai fashion brand to comply. He explains further that the department store is in charge of monitoring the fashion brand practices and their manufacturing

processes both on social and environmental aspects; at the same time, communicates the brand values to strengthen the economical dimension. According to the emerging trend, the retail store in Thailand works under the organizational policy toward more sustainable outcomes by communicating the sustainable fashion brand and fostering transparency throughout the fashion system.

### **Communication practices through design thinking**

The holistic view of Thailand's fashion ecosystem is a prior step to establish an effective communication practice through the understanding of stakeholder's roles and practices in Thailand. It is therefore critical to have fundamental understanding toward the current situation in order to provide an appropriate solution in Thai context. Thus, design thinking process is implemented to generate solution as a communication practices and guidelines for Thailand's fashion industry.

### **Empathize**

The importance of this process is to understand consumer insight since empathy is a fundament of human-centered design approach (Institute of Design at Stanford, n.d.). In order to have a holistic understanding of sustainable fashion situation in Thailand, the study employed both quantitative and qualitative method. The results convey that the term "sustainable fashion" for Thai consumer is subjective and the interpretation is context and person dependent. The participants explained the term sustainability in the fashion industry differently. Moreover, the results as shown in table 1 implies that samples mostly consume sustainable fashion clothes manufactured from natural materials or eco-friendly materials with the percentage of 52.5, followed by secondhand clothes

with the percentage of 49.2 and fashion clothes with transparency with the percentage of 32.2 consecutively.

**Table 1** Types of Sustainable Fashion Clothes

Types of Sustainable Fashion Clothes	Count	Percentage
Fashion clothes with natural or eco-friendly materials	127	52.5
Fashion clothes with green/ sustainable label	57	23.6
Fashion clothes with transparency	78	32.2
Fashion clothes with green/ eco innovation	70	28.9
Fashion clothes from sustainable/green fashion brand	41	16.9
Secondhand fashion	119	49.2
Never	28	11.6

*\*answer more than one choice*

The results also indicate that more than half of the sample group consume sustainable fashion clothes related to environmental aspect in accordance with Carey and Cervellon (2014) study explaining that sustainable fashion as an ethical fashion which emphasis on the impact toward the environment and people.

In addition, the exploration of factors affecting fashion clothes buying decision shows that sample prioritize design the most with an average of 4.48, followed by quality with an average number of 4.25 and price with an average of 3.95 as shown in table 2. However, the results point out that the last three factors affecting sample buying decision are the utility of eco-friendly material, eco-friendly manufacturing process and fair labor working condition which are all associated with sustainable

attributes. The results also reflect a standing dilemma of sustainability in Thai fashion industry; the attitude-behavioral gap. It explains the inconsistency between sample's understanding toward sustainable fashion and their actual consumption behavior. Although samples understand the term sustainable fashion in various dimensions, the understanding do not lead to sustainable fashion consumption. Consistent with previous study, the results also indicate the attitude-behavioral gap among participants from South Korea. The concern among sustainable issues is raised, in contrary, consumer avoid purchasing sustainable fashion product due to the negative perception toward quality, design, price and social value (Han et al., 2017).

Table 2 Buying Decision Factors

Buying Decision Factors						Average
Price	2	13	56	95	76	3.95
	(0.8)	(5.4)	(23.1)	(39.3)	(31.4)	(high)
Design	-	1	22	80	139	4.48
		(0.4)	(9.1)	(33.1)	(57.4)	(highest)
Quality	-	4	27	115	96	4.25
		(1.7)	(11.2)	(47.5)	(39.7)	(highest)
Brand	18	20	103	68	33	3.32
	(7.4)	(8.3)	(42.6)	(28.1)	(13.6)	(medium)
Promotion	8	14	65	80	75	3.83
	(3.3)	(5.8)	(26.9)	(33.1)	(31.0)	(high)
Sustainable Material	18	47	105	52	20	3.04
	(7.4)	(19.4)	(43.4)	(21.5)	(8.3)	(medium)
Eco-friendly Manufacturing Process	19	51	90	56	26	3.08
	(7.9)	(21.1)	(37.2)	(23.1)	(10.7)	(medium)
Fair working condition	28	36	87	57	34	3.14
	(11.6)	(14.9)	(36.0)	(23.6)	(14.0)	(medium)
Key opinion leader	23	41	77	73	28	3.17
	(9.5)	(16.9)	(31.8)	(30.2)	(11.6)	(medium)

## Define

The subjective interpretation of sustainable fashion so as the inconsistency between attitude and behavior are the major reservation of transforming Thai fashion industry toward sustainable ecosystem according to the prior results discussed. The results from an in-depth interview also demonstrate that participants from various background have opinions toward sustainable fashion subjectively. One of the participants mentioned that the holistic view of sustainable fashion is missing from Thai context. Also, the results show that participants from various background perceived sustainable fashion differently.

## Subjective interpretation and inadequate understanding

Due to the subjectiveness of the term sustainable fashion, interpretation of the concept and actual practices are individual dependent. It therefore reflects disposition of self, habitus, which eventually lead to a sustainable fashion practice in the system. This implies that various people perceive sustainability differently and have multiple level of understanding of how to play a part in creating a sustainable fashion ecosystem. The postulate suggested by the participants is that an inadequate knowledge and understanding toward sustainable fashion are major cause of an unsuccessful practices in Thai fashion industry. The participant, Janejira (Interviewee, 2020), the member of Fashion

Revolution Thailand also explains that sustainable fashion practice does not only refer to buying behavior, but also includes the way of living and the entire purpose is to reduce negative impact on the people, the society and the world. This implies the importance of holistic perspective of sustainable fashion. Furthermore, sustainable fashion related to the process and stakeholders from the entire ecosystem as one of the participants from fashion revolution member states that sustainable fashion is the collaboration from every stakeholder in the fashion system working together to drive this concept into reality.

#### **Small range of product variety**

Moreover, an insufficient choice of sustainable clothes in Thai's fashion market is a consequence of the subjectiveness of the term sustainable fashion. The participant from Fashion Revolution Thailand, Janejira (Interviewee, 2020) explained how fashion is subjective by pointing out that fashion is inevitably related to personal style; however, the choice of sustainable clothes in current Thai market has small range of variety that is inadequate to fulfill the personal style of each and single consumer. Likewise, Patcha (Interviewee, 2020), Thai fashion expert stated that sustainable fashion clothes in the market is limited and cannot fulfill the young generation's requirement that aiming for uniqueness and the desire for the clothes that serve their personal lifestyle. It is not that the sustainable clothes have no aesthetic value; nonetheless, the design has no variety. Thus, this is another reservation toward sustainable fashion practice in Thailand.

Since fashion is much more than just human requisite, it is a reflection of collective identity, the collection of symbolic elements as Bourdieu

explained capital as the foundation of social life that can dictate a social order. (*Social Theory Re-Wired, New Connections to Classical and Contemporary Perspectives*, 2016) In order to drive a sustainable fashion consumption, the sustainable fashion clothes should be able to answer the variety of each and single individual's identity and serve one's purpose as a reflection of self.

#### **Cost of production**

Slow fashion manufacturing process from raw material to finished product is tremendously complicated compared to fast fashion; in accordingly, the cost of production is significantly higher. The cost also reflects through the price structure of sustainable fashion product. As a result, sustainable fashion is considered as luxury fashion or high-end fashion. Consistent with prior study, Claudia et al. (2016) explains that the vital attribute of sustainable fashion is luxury due to the high price materials and the scarcity of the product itself.

One of the participants, Kam (Interviewee, 2020), Thai fashion designer and brand owner explains the negative aspect of producing sustainable clothes mentioning the potential risk that the producer might face from the high manufacturing cost. He explains that besides the cost from sustainable material and transparent manufacturing process, the brand must afford to pay for a "sustainable certification" certified by a private company annually which cost over hundred thousand per year.

He also suggests that government sector should play a part in monitoring the brand or the factory and must be responsible for the certification of sustainability in order to reduce the overall production cost and hence lead to more affordable sustainable clothes and other fashion products.

In addition, the participant notes that the higher manufacturing cost reflect back to the cost structure of the product and thus consumer cannot afford to buy sustainable clothes that are much more expensive than usual fashion clothes. Sustainable fashion is perceived as unaffordable fashion. The recent study explains the incident of sustainability in the fashion industry that it is highly related to economical aspect in two major dimensions; firstly, the producer is responsible for the increased manufacturing cost in order to reinforce positive environmental and social impacts. Secondly, the producer must emphasize on creating economical values in the sustainable fashion product through innovation and perceived values creation so as communication (Khurana & Ricchetti, 2016). Since the economic values can be perceived as economic capital that one aiming to collect as the more capital one earned, the more powerful a position one occupied in social life. (*Social Theory Re-Wired, New Connections to Classical and Contemporary Perspectives*, 2016)

### **Economic Values**

Due to the high manufacturing cost, designer or fashion brand owner rarely include sustainable clothes in the collection. At the same time, the consumer is not willing to pay more for sustainable fashion clothes. In contrary with the recent study, suggesting that sustainable fashion is perceived as luxury or hi-end fashion (Claudia et al., 2016), Thai consumer has negative sentiment toward sustainable fashion. Another significant point is made by Janejira (Interviewee, 2020), the fashion activist from Fashion Revolution Thailand arguing that consumer is not willing to pay more for sustainable clothes since they do not value sustainability as the new luxury. This is because the created values

cannot fulfill consumer's requirement. This incident leads to the limited demand for sustainable clothes in the fashion market and hence reflecting the fashion brand to avoid launching sustainable clothes. To conclude, the sustainable fashion product in today's market is not able to generate economical values for the producer.

### **Ideate**

The prior results and discussions convey the major reservation of the sustainable fashion from the aspect of Thai stakeholders. In order to create an ethical fashion industry, an effective communication process must be employed accordingly. The ideation is a significant process in searching for a possible solution (Institute of Design at Stanford, n.d.). The goal is to gather all the feasibilities from multiple fashion stakeholders including the consumer themselves and other key persons from Thai fashion industry. The perspective on various angles gained from both qualitative and quantitative approaches are a significant communication guideline of how to shift Thailand's fashion industry toward sustainable outcomes. Hence, the solution can be made through three major contributions related to communication as followed.

### **Communication for Holistic Understanding and Positive Attitude Toward Sustainable Fashion**

Due to the subjective and contextual understanding toward the term sustainable fashion discussed earlier, the consumer requires an effective communication process that provide adequate news and information related to sustainability in the fashion industry together with a positive communication to enhance a positive attitude among fashion consumer.

The results from the survey also indicate that consumers are more likely related to post consumption practices than production processes which are typically related to the producer or brand. The results also pointed out that donation and garment care are the top sustainable fashion practices with the highest average which are consistent with Pedersen and Andersen (2015) study explaining the connectivity of upstream and

downstream approach to establish sustainable fashion ecosystem. Moreover, the results from the survey also pointed out that the understanding toward sustainable fashion from social, environmental and economic dimension has positive relation to the perception toward upstream and downstream practices with statistical significant at .001 as shown in table 3

**Table 3** Understanding toward Sustainable Fashion

Understanding toward Sustainable Fashion	Attitude toward Upstream practices			Attitude toward Downstream practices		
	R	P-value	Meaning	R	P-value	Meaning
Social Dimension	.448***	.000	Moderate correlation	.415***	.000	Moderate correlation
Environmental Dimension	.485***	.000	Moderate correlation	.456***	.000	Moderate correlation
Economy Dimension	.467***	.000	Moderate correlation	.406***	.000	Moderate correlation

Communication for holistic understanding that combine both upstream and downstream perspective is therefore a significant step to initiate a sustainable fashion ecosystem and push the boundary of the term sustainable fashion practice from pre consumption to post consumption process and related to all stakeholders from the system. In accordance with Yang, Han, and Lee (2017) study that suggested a shared platform to provide information and educate people toward sustainability in the fashion industry which includes sustainable product information and garment after care.

The in-depth interview also indicates the importance of communication to encourage positive attitude toward sustainable fashion. Nattakritta (Interviewee, 2020) suggests that the key

communication objective is to create awareness among the consumer which will eventually lead to the shift in mindset toward sustainability in the fashion system. In addition, another participant from Thailand's fashion Revolution team, Janejira (Interviewee, 2020) also pointed out the key communication strategy through firsthand experience creation. The experiences and involvement created through an activity will encourage the consumer to be aware and understand more about the sustainable fashion agendas and feel more engaged with the issues. The experience creation also includes sustainable fashion clothes buying experiences and the implementation of creativity to drive sustainable practices (Vehmas et al., 2018).



### Communication for Economical Values

Fashion industry is highly related to economic dimension since the industry requires financial growth as a statistical indicator of how the business thrives. Communication for economical values is therefore a critical approach to distinguish sustainable fashion clothes from fast fashion products. Jung and Jin (2014) stated the importance of delivering distinguished values of the sustainable product to create a perceived value which can impact buying decision and lead to fashion brand's economic growth.

The value communication includes both aesthetical and functional aspect aiming to create impacts toward consumer's attitude and buying decision. Rungnapar (Interviewee, 2021), public relations expert explains that communication campaign toward targeted consumer can be done through creative product design and communication. The design must be able to communicate directly to the consumer at the same time the product function should be simple and implies ease of use. Also, the Thai fashion expert, Amorn (Interviewee, 2020) also mentioned that communication for economical values has two main strategies: (1) sustainable or eco value communication and (2) aesthetical value communication. At the same time, the consumer can also be divided in to two main categories which are those who has buying decision based on aesthetical value and those who consider eco information as their key buying condition. However, he suggested that the most effective communication approach emphasis on the aesthetical value, since fashion is highly related to style and personal preference. He explains that the design should be able to create first impression and then eventually leads to green label information provision either by storytelling or through

a technology-oriented tool such as QR code label. In accordance with the previous study from Kong et al. (2016) pointing out that the fashion consumer is positively impacted by the green marketing information.

### Communication for Sustainable Fashion Branding and Marketing Aspect

Sustainable fashion branding and marketing are a crucial step to embed sustainability in the fashion industry. The main objective is to establish sustainable fashion brand in order to serve the market demand. Delivering variety of the sustainable fashion clothes will be an effective solution to the limited choices of sustainable in Thailand's fashion market. Thus, this can be considered as a business opportunity by offering the product from the market gap.

The global emerging trend of sustainability significantly impact fashion brand across the world including Thailand. One of the participants, Thippapa (Interviewee, 2020), fashion brand owner mentions the key opportunity for the industry, explaining that green or eco trend is coming and shifting people mindset toward sustainability. Today's consumer is more aware of social and environmental issues and expect fashion house to offer fashion clothes with sustainable attributes. The trend inevitably affects the market demand toward sustainable clothes and hence the producer or manufacturing sector should response accordingly.

The communication from the brand or producer must be able to deliver the demand of the market which includes communicating the perceived values of the sustainable clothes and be able to offer the design and function that match individual lifestyle and preference. Since individual habitus implies the taste for cultural object therefore, brand

communication toward the variety of product that can match consumer’s distinct lifestyle will be a significant solution for the growth in sustainable fashion market. At the same time, the communication must include the delivering of green information to the consumer. In accordance with the opinion from the owner of the sustainable fashion house in Thailand, Karn (Interviewee, 2020) suggesting that sustainable fashion is a mega trend and will diffuse to the majority of consumer. He also stated that this would be a feasible opportunity for Thai SME to thrive and gain competitive advantages toward large scale fashion business. Moreover, the manufacturing model will shift dramatically from a fast fashion model emphasizing on large quantity and lower pricing to a slow fashion or made to order model which mainly focus on small quantity with higher quality and higher pricing.

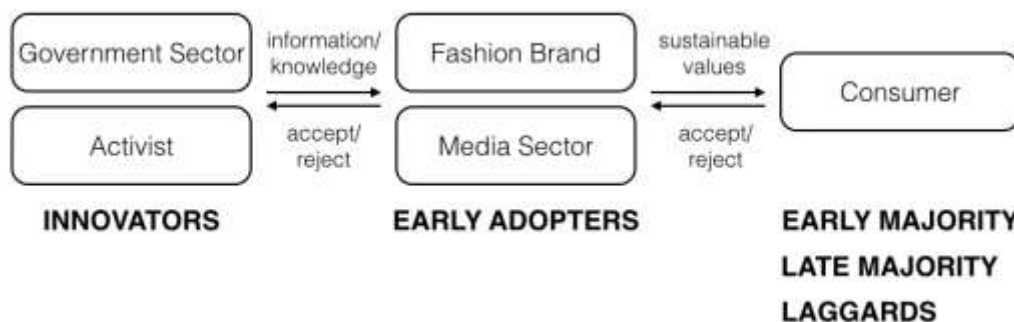
### Prototype

Prototype is a significant stage to elicit tangible communication practices for sustainable

fashion and to acquire feedback from various stakeholders in Thai fashion system. In accordance with the results discussed, the solutions concluded in the ideate process required effective communication strategies together with the key persons in the fashion industry with specific role to drive sustainable fashion practices throughout the system. The communication prototype in this stage is applied from the diffusion of innovation principle (Rogers, 2003) to explain how the sustainable fashion concept is diffused and accepted in the fashion system in Thailand.

The communication prototype is designed to identify the key persons in the fashion system according to their specific role in communicating from innovators to early adopters and the majority collective, then classified into two major categories: (1) sustainable fashion supply creator and (2) sustainable fashion demand creator as shown in figure 1

Figure 1



*Sustainable Fashion Supply Creator(s)* is the key persons who have specific role in offering the concept of sustainable fashion to the entire fashion system by delivering news and information, implementing policies and communicating the

values of sustainable fashion brand and product. The supply creator comprises of two subcategories, as followed

1. Innovator is the first group who accepted the idea of sustainable fashion or known as

an individual or person who initiates this new concept in Thai fashion system. The innovator plays a significant role in communicating the news and information related to fashion and sustainability to create awareness toward this phenomenon. At the same time, providing an adequate knowledge to shift people's mindset and drive the idea of sustainability throughout Thai fashion industry.

2. Early adopter is the group of people who has an authority to accept the concept of sustainable fashion and pass on the new practices throughout the system. This group of people is the gatekeeper or the field which significantly impact other stakeholder's attitudes. As sustainable fashion is considered as an innovative concept or the new idea to the usual fashion industry, it requires an approval from the gatekeeper in order to reach the majority of people. The communication process in this stage is delivering the economic values and propose sustainable fashion as an alternative choice in the fashion market.

*Sustainable Fashion Demand Creator(s)* is the group that create sustainable fashion demand to the fashion market and deliver the feedback back to the supply side. The demand creator is the group of majorities who have an authority to accept the concept of sustainability and at the same time this group of people are an indicator of how the new concept is being diffused throughout the entire fashion system. The sustainable fashion practices cannot be considered as entirely accepted unless it passed through this stage from the early majority to the late majority and eventually to the laggards.

The relation between these the supply and demand creator is two-way communication and inevitably impact one another. This means that in order to transmit the concept of sustainable fashion

in Thai fashion industry required both role from the demand and supply creators.

## Test

This final stage of design thinking is an integral part to make a final conclusion of how to conduct a successful communication strategy in order to shift sustainable fashion as a new normal in Thailand. Earlier in the ideation process and prototype creation, the major communication includes communication for positive attitude and holistic understanding toward sustainable fashion, economic values communication and sustainable fashion brand communication comprising with the key persons and play a crucial role in transmitting this new concept to the fashion system. In order to explore the effectiveness of the communication strategy, the prototype has to be proceeded through testing process of the communication effectiveness between (1) innovators and early adopters and between (2) early adopters and the majorities. The testing process is a key evaluation of the communication prototype. Hence, the test process can be expanded as a future research and can be applied to other related industries and in different context.

## Conclusion

Thailand fashion industry comprises of multiple stakeholders working simultaneously to drive the concept of sustainability into reality. The classification of the stakeholder's roles and responsibilities according to the Systems Model of Creativity is a prior approach to have a holistic view of Thailand's fashion ecosystem, consisting of person or the sender, an individual who has an active role in initiating the innovative concept of sustainability to the entire fashion system and field or the gatekeeper

which is a group of people who is responsible for the judgmental of sustainable fashion as the new body of knowledge.

Besides a holistic perspective of fashion ecosystem, design thinking process is implemented as a guideline solution to the complexity of sustainability in Thai's fashion industry. The results from quantitative and qualitative research are employed to explore the stakeholder's attitude toward sustainable fashion. The study starts from empathize to define in order to identify the causes and problems in Thai context, which are comprising of (1) a subjective interpretation and inadequate acknowledgment of the term sustainable fashion, (2) lack of product choices and variety, (3) High production cost and (4) economic values. During the ideation process, the researcher gathers all the

possibilities from the key stakeholders in the fashion industry. The results convey crucial communication strategies as a solution together with the communication prototype designed accordingly to solve the problem from Thai aspect.

Despite the communication prototype, this work has limitations. The future study could conduct an entire test process between multiple senders and receivers to explore alternative communication strategies or/and apply to other related industries. Researcher can also deepen the investigation on communication or sustainable fashion on other aspects. Finally, this paper emphasizes on the holistic view of fashion ecosystem and execute the communication solution to drive the concept of sustainable fashion as the new normal in Thailand.

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