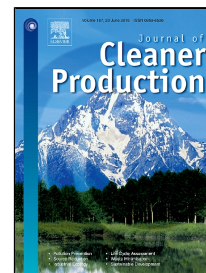


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Designing a roadmap towards a sustainable supply chain: a focus on the fashion industry



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# Designing a roadmap towards a sustainable supply chain: a focus on the fashion industry

## Abstract

Fashion companies are extremely sensitive to the new challenge emerging from recent sustainability scandals. Existing literature has debated sustainability extensively by considering practices of sustainability that companies should apply. However, little research has focused on the design of a proper sustainability roadmap from a supply chain (SC) perspective to address the steps involved in implementing sustainability practices. The objective of this study is to design a sustainability roadmap for fashion companies. Based on case studies of three tiers of three fashion SCs as an empirical basis, social and environmental sustainability practices were grouped into a five-step roadmap. The main result of the paper is a five-step roadmap, characterized in terms of practices and main goal. The roadmap is then discussed in terms of possible paths of developing, in terms of evolution within a step and among different steps.

**Keywords:** Sustainability, Supply Chain, Roadmap; Fashion; Luxury; CSR

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, environmental and social sustainability has become a key managerial issue (e.g. Bocken et al., 2014). With their increased sensitivity to the sustainability challenge, companies have started working on the internal processes and products they deliver (Choi et al., 2015; Formentini and Taticchi, 2016). However, as managing environmental and social issues are not confined to the boundaries of focal companies, organisations must extend their focus to the supply chain (SC) network (Zhu et al., 2005; Krause et al., 2009). Firms must be held responsible not only for their own actions but also for those of their suppliers (Laari et al., 2017). Many companies have thus started to address the emerging issue related to the challenge of sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) (Seuring and Müller, 2008). The extension of these virtuous sustainability behaviours from focal companies through their supply networks represents one of the most complex business challenges at present because globalisation has created a fragmented scenario in which suppliers are dispersed across the world, and thus follow different environmental and social regulations (Sarkis, 2012).

Sustainability has become crucial to the SC's strategy, especially in sensitive sectors such as the fashion industry (Smith, 2003; Li et al., 2016). The recent worldwide environmental and social scandals of the fashion industry, accused of mistreating animals, applying unequal working and payment conditions to their employees, and creating eco-unfriendly collections based on heavy, polluting industry, have brought sustainability of the fashion sector into the public spotlight as an urgent issue that needs to be addressed (Turker and Altuntas, 2014; Winter and Lasch, 2016).

The fashion industry, with a turnover of €171 billion among 180,000 companies in the EU-28 area (EURATEX, 2017), has attracted the attention of several NGOs, which have started numerous initiatives (such as the well-known Detox Campaign by Greenpeace in 2011) to inform the public about the unpleasant aspects behind this industry. Many activities related to the production of fashion products are affected by critical environmental and social issues. Tanning activities, for example, have high environmental impacts in terms of water consumption (Masilamani et al., 2017); the cotton collecting for yarn production exploits local populations in plantations (Pedersen, 2016); and approximately 8,000 synthetic chemicals are used to turn raw materials into textiles, thus requiring stringent controls to safeguard the health of consumers and the environment (Karaosman et al., 2016). Therefore, fast-fashion giants (Turker and Altuntas, 2014; Shen, 2014) - such as H&M and Zara - have enlarged their sustainable collections, combining the style factor with the need for sustainable concepts. In the same way, luxury conglomerates such as LVMH and the Kering group, have

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