

UN Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook launches for communicators

The Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook has been launched by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Fashion Charter for Climate Change (UNFCCC).



Source: © Freestocks www.UhSplash.com UhSplash The UN Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook for fashion marketers and communicators

Co-published by UNEP and UN Climate Change, the Playbook provides a shared vision, principles and guidance on how to align consumer-facing communication across the global fashion industry with sustainability targets.

Rather than focus on the impacts of production, the Playbook focuses on how to move from overconsumption by diverting narratives on newness, immediacy and disposability.

The biggest way to do this is by shifting marketing – and, therefore, communication – strategies in favour of planet-friendly messaging.

Unsustainable patterns of consumption

Unsustainable patterns of consumption and production (particularly within the fashion industry) are a big factor in the planetary crisis.

In numbers, the fashion industry is considered to be responsible for two to eight percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, while consuming 215 trillion litres of water each year and significantly polluting oceans (around nine percent of annual microplastic losses to the ocean come from clothes and other textiles), states [Country & Town House](#).

The Paybook is the how and comes after the why, that is the UNFCCC that updated at the climate conference COP26 in November 2021, and a clause added committing signatories to shift communications in line with climate goals.

It applies to more than 100 signatories and 41 supporting organisations, including Kering, LVMH, Chanel, H&M Group and Puma, but the playbook is hoping for a much broader reach.

Aimed at consumer-facing communicators

The guide is aimed at consumer-facing communicators, covering a wide range of job roles, including marketing, branding and advertising; public relations, creative direction and visual media; event production, content or social media at brands and retailers; and those involved in the wider communication ecosystem.

This spans agencies, fashion and news media, image makers, digital platforms; entertainment properties, influencers, advocacy groups and educators.

Intended as an actionable guide, the playbook walks communicators through the process of narrative change, shifting from communications that promote a linear, take-make-waste model, towards a sustainable and circular system in line with the Paris Climate Agreement, something the UN is calling “1.5 °C lifestyle.

It shows communicators how to take action through:

1. Countering misinformation
2. Reducing messages perpetuating overconsumption
3. Redirecting aspiration to more sustainable lifestyles
4. Empowering consumers to demand greater action from businesses and policymakers.

Shifting consumption patterns

It recognises the fashion sector as one of global importance, but one struggling to address its wide-reaching impacts, with unsustainable patterns of consumption and production contributing directly and significantly to the triple planetary crisis as

well as the interlinked issue of social injustice.

While addressing production impacts is essential, doing so alone will not be sufficient to transform the industry in time.

Shifting consumption patterns must be a core priority, which means confronting the dominant linear economic model and its accompanying narrative of newness, immediacy and disposability.

The Playbook invites all fashion communicators to the table, emphasising for the first time in the sector the importance of the role of storytellers as enablers and drivers of systemic change.

The Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook presents eight principles for communication change, detailed with practical guidance throughout, including lists of dos and don'ts for consideration, a short series of questions to use as a checklist against all work and case studies providing examples of best practice.

8 principles

1. Lead with science

Ensure relevant information is clearly and transparently shared, providing an evidence-base that is verifiable and comparable while adhering to relevant regulatory policies.

- Principle 1: Commit to evidence-based and transparent communication efforts
- Principle 2: Ensure information is shared in a clear and accessible manner

2. Change behaviours and practices

Show how consumers can enjoy fashion while living within the limitations of the planet and respecting human rights and dignity. Encourage lower impact options and circular solutions that normalise more sustainable behaviours.

- Principle 3: Eradicate all messages encouraging overconsumption
- Principle 4: Champion positive changes and demonstrate accessible circular solutions to help individuals live more sustainable lifestyles

3. Reimagine values

Actively seek to separate the belief that consumption and ownership lead to happiness and success. Paint a picture of how positive new values can look when considering wellbeing, equity and community.

- Principle 5: Spotlight new role models and notions of aspiration or success.
- Principle 6: Focus on inclusive marketing and storytelling that celebrates the positive ecological, cultural and social values of fashion.

4. Drive advocacy

Use your platform and influence to empower consumers in their role as citizens. Educate internally and externally on the level of change required, supporting dialogue with policymakers on a just transition towards a sustainable and circular global value chain.

- Principle 7: Motivate and mobilise the public to advocate for broader change.
- Principle 8: Support dialogue with leadership and policymakers to enable wider industry sustainability.

"Stories inform the way we understand ourselves, each other, and our place in the world," says playbook author Rachel Arthur, advocacy lead for sustainable fashion at UNEP, as quoted in [Vogue Business](#)

"Fashion's stories are currently directed towards a linear model of production and consumption. The industry's dominant narratives will not allow us to reach our sustainability targets," adds Arthur.



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According to *Vogue Business* over 160 of these communicators took part in a year-long consultation process, highlighting challenges, case studies and solutions, which formed the basis of the Playbook.

For a long time, fashion communicators have managed to escape criticism for their role in supporting overproduction and promoting overconsumption.

Vogue Business also says that this is a timely response to industry-wide caution as international greenwashing investigations gain pace, and regulations around green claims are tightening up, from the US to the European Union, forcing brands to backtrack on their previous strategies and rethink communications.

UNEP will launch a masterclass series later in the year, to make the principles of the playbook more accessible to different groups of communicators.

Download the Playbook [here](#)

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