

Slow fashion communication on social media: Educating consumers through rational content in Indonesia and Malaysia

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Abstract

Amid the inadequate communication studies on slow fashion, this study examines slow fashion communication on social media, with a focus on a content analysis of two slow fashion Instagram accounts in Indonesia and Malaysia, namely @setali.indonesia and @klothcircularity. The data was collected from 1,029 posts containing slow fashion content from January 2020 to December 2022. The study found that communicating slow fashion on social media is predominantly through rational content conveying consumer education issues. The two accounts' main objective is disseminating information and raising awareness about slow fashion lifestyles. The affordance of Instagram in connecting people through shared content in real-time can be a remarkable educational tool for sharing knowledge about slow fashion. The study's results will contribute to media and sustainability communication studies, highlighting the role of social media content in communicating about sustainability.

Keywords: Slow Fashion, Sustainability Communication, Social Media, Social Enterprise, Southeast Asia

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How to cite this article in APA

Ariestya, A., Koudelkova, P., Stephani, N., Elmada, M.A.G., & Dube, B. (2024). Slow fashion communication on social media: Educating consumers through rational content in Indonesia and Malaysia. *Plaridel*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.52518/2024-02arsty>

Introduction

The Southeast Asian community, with the growth of the middle class in the region, is a potential market for fast fashion (McKinsey & Company, 2020). However, in Indonesia and Malaysia, the rapid growth of fashion production and consumption has triggered environmental problems (Hassan et al., 2022; Muazimah, 2020), to which the slow fashion movement has emerged in both countries as a response (Hasbullah et al., 2022; Hassan et al., 2022; Suhud et al., 2020). In the slow fashion movement, knowledge and information influence consumers' demand for slow fashion (Ariestya et al., 2021; Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). The creative economy, including the apparel industry, has the potential to benefit from the digitization process and the advanced dissemination of information through technology. A prior survey showed that 76% of Instagram users purchased after exploring a product on Instagram (Ipsos, 2018). Indonesia ranks among the nations with the highest number of social media users globally (Kemp, 2022). Likewise, social media is essential networked information and communication technology in the everyday lives of Malaysian users (Hanchard, 2016).

Instagram serves as a platform for the power struggle between fast fashion and slow fashion information in Indonesia and Malaysia, as they propagate their respective concerns online. According to Digital Report 2023, 64.5% of Indonesians and 51.3% of Malaysians tend to use social media to find information about brands and products, and #fashion is the most used Instagram hashtags (Kemp, 2023). The same report showed that, on the other hand, Instagram ads potentially reach 50.7% of Malaysian people and 41.2% of Indonesian people. Thus, using Instagram as the study unit of analysis for slow fashion will reveal essential findings.

The notion of slow fashion is still vague (Jung & Jin, 2014) and studies on it are still limited. In some studies, slow fashion is a concept that is hardly distinguished from sustainable fashion and is inconsistently defined (Carey & Cervellon, 2014; Henninger et al., 2016; Mukendi et al., 2020; Orminski et al., 2020). In the study by Jeanette Orminski et al. (2020), slow fashion was considered a subtype of sustainable fashion based on some literature. Slow fashion was deemed a related practice of sustainable, ethical, and eco-fashion (Mukendi et al., 2020). On the other hand, sustainable fashion was also considered part of the slow fashion movement, which was used interchangeably with eco-fashion, green fashion, and ethical fashion (Carey & Cervellon, 2014; Henninger et al., 2016).

The term "sustainable fashion" was adopted by the United Nations in 1972 to describe the long lifespan of clothing that is produced in ethical production systems using materials and processes that are environmentally

friendly with fair trade principles for workers (Saricam & Okur, 2019). Meanwhile, slow fashion represents a vision of sustainability in the fashion sector based on different values. It requires a change in the business-as-usual attitude of the apparel industry, and better consumption practices considering social and environmental sustainability (Fletcher, 2010, 2014; Shephard & Pookulangara, 2014). Here, we notice that slow fashion focuses on both production and consumption.

While communication about sustainability is essential to encourage people to take societal and environmental responsibility (Kolandai-Matchett, 2009), to date, communication studies about slow fashion are inadequate. Most were conducted from a fashion design or business management perspective (Solino et al., 2020). A prior study related to communication was Orminski et al.'s (2020) study, which discussed sustainable fashion discourse on social media. However, they did not specifically examine slow fashion. Only Ellen Lee and Franzisca Weder's (2021) study explicitly discussed slow fashion from the perspective of communication by exploring frames of slow fashion on social media in Australia. Through content analysis, this study interrogated the proliferation of slow fashion by examining how the concept is communicated on social media.

The study is limited to two Instagram accounts, namely @setali.indonesia owned by Setali Indonesia, and @klothcircularity owned by Kloth Circularity Malaysia, both of which practice and promote slow fashion. They were chosen due to their consistent practice and influence in promoting slow fashion on the said platform for over three years. They are comprised of micro-influencers in slow fashion who are people, organizations, or accounts with enormous followers (1,000 to 100,000); thus, they can influence or persuade broadly (Ariestya et al., 2020; Kirwan, 2018). The present study is crucial in addressing the dearth of literature on slow fashion studies in the context of Indonesian and Malaysian communities, particularly in communication, as it intends to find the predominant issues when communicating slow fashion on Instagram.

Conceptualizing slow fashion

Professor Kate Fletcher's concept of slow fashion is most often used in academic writings (Solino et al., 2020). Primarily, slow fashion has been defined as better design, production, consumption, and life, considering environmental and social sustainability while still producing beautiful and high-quality clothes at a slower speed (Fletcher, 2010, 2014; Jung & Jin, 2014; Solino et al., 2020). Slow fashion refers to both slowing down the cycle, and the different approaches in which designers, buyers, retailers, and consumers are more aware of the impact of products on workers,

communities, and ecosystems (Fletcher, 2007). This description denotes that slow fashion can emphasize production and consumption facets (Jung & Jin, 2014).

Slow fashion supposedly suggests a slow production process so that the fashion industry can improve the quality of life of all workers. Moreover, it also requires a consumption perspective to be taken into account. Slow fashion encourages a shifting of consumers' mindset from quantity to quality, to buy high-quality clothes less often (Fletcher, 2007; Jung & Jin, 2014). According to Sanjukta Pookulangara & Alesa Shephard (2013), the notion can be seen as a business model that balances social, environmental, and economic systems. They proposed a framework for the slow fashion process, embedding the three balanced systems into the business model.

The slow fashion process is a sustainable business process of fashion, from design to production and consumption. It is a holistic perspective that plans the circularity of product mindset, produces clothes with socially and economically responsible sourcing, and educates the consumer to increase awareness and responsibility of the product circularity after purchase (Clark, 2008; Fletcher, 2010; Shephard & Pookulangara, 2014). Meanwhile, in Sojin Jung and ByoungHo Jin's (2014) study, five principles were identified to guide slow fashion: equity, authenticity, functionality, localism, and exclusivity, all of which can be embodied in the slow fashion process.

Sustainable design and production are two essential sustainable processes (outside of a sustainable consumption process) of slow fashion. Sustainable design emphasizes sustainable practices such as ecological, green, and ethical practices. As a result, green, organic, environmental, sustainable, and socially responsible concepts have been extensively used in the last decade to indicate a desired change in the fashion industry. In such matters, fashion designers are now encouraged to be concerned with the ecological life cycle process of clothes in all stages until they are discarded (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013).

In relation to ethical practices, slow fashion challenges fast fashion to change its system, especially after the tragic Rana Plaza collapse, which killed thousands of garment workers (Henninger et al., 2016; Perry, 2012; Shephard & Pookulangara, 2014; Solino et al., 2020). The slow fashion process fosters better working conditions for workers to maintain long-term relationships. It is the opposite condition of the fast fashion industry, which focuses on production cost while often neglecting labor issue (Fletcher, 2007; Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). Slow fashion is oriented toward respecting and fairly compensating labor (Jung & Jin, 2014).

In terms of production, quality is the essence of the sustainable process of slow fashion. The production commodity should maximize a craft-based

product made by highly skilled workers concerned with local design and manufacturing, involving local businesses and sources (Jung & Jin, 2014; Preuit & Yan, 2017). Meanwhile, in the sustainable consumption process, slow fashion educates consumers through sustainability communication to increase awareness regarding the sustainable process and consumption aspects of fashion (such as investment and longevity) (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013).

Sustainability communication on social media

Sustainability communication is a process of information exchange to attain an understanding of dealing with the future development of society, at the core of which is a sustainability vision. A relationship between humans and their environment is built through social discourses related to social values and norms (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011). Sustainability communication is also closely related to symbolic communication of the environmental problem (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011; Pezzullo & Cox, 2017). According to Manuel Castells (2011), symbolic communication in the digital age depends on the created, formatted, and diffused content in communication networks.

Comprehensively defined, social media is networked database platforms that combine public and personal communication, allowing user-generated content creation and exchange (Meikle, 2016). New media, like social media, is characteristically digital, networked, and interactive. In the context of sustainability, these characteristics facilitate creative content development, combining text, image, video, and sound to make the idea of sustainability more lively, vivid, and compelling. As a tool to promote sustainable fashion, social media efficiently delivers a sustainability agenda through textual and visual information with discrete symbols or hidden meanings (Zhao et al., 2022). When people's communication is mediated by digital media, they construct dialogue and make sense of meaning because technological mediation is a form of meaning-giving (Bendor, 2018).

Lee and Weder (2021), who explored the framing of slow fashion on social media through a content analysis of #slowfashionaustralia on Instagram, found that slow fashion was portrayed as an individual process of designing or constructing fashion and communicating that experience (what they called the experience of self-expression). The study also indicated that the slow fashion concept is communicated on social media as an emblem of sustainability, emphasizing sustainable practices embedded in both fashion production and consumption. Sustainable fashion practices are conveyed through the messaging that secondhand, recycled, and vintage fashion retains value within the community.

Three main categories of social media content—rational, interactional, and transactional—are conceptualized from examining prior studies (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Coelho et al., 2016; Dolan et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2015; Tafesse, 2015). Rational or informational content contains information, current events, or education (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). It provides users with resourceful and helpful information such as the functionality of the products, product specifications, product reviews, and product recommendations (Dolan et al., 2019; Tafesse, 2015). It also contains news or stories about the firm and its products, events, programs, and campaigns, in picture or video format (Kim et al., 2015).

Interactional content contains experiential, personal, brand, and consumer-related issues. According to Rebecca Dolan et al. (2019), it can be anything entertaining or fun to users, or relational that meets the consumer's need for integration, interaction, and social benefits. On the other hand, it can also be a personal statement or opinion on a particular social issue or topic (Kim et al., 2015). This content type aims to attract the attention and engagement of users, expressed in terms of likes, comments, and shares (Coelho et al., 2016; Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Kim et al., 2015).

Transactional content refers to remuneration, brand resonance, and sales promotion (Dolan et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2015; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). It focuses on promotional approaches and the call to purchase (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021; Swani et al., 2013). Posts can comprise quizzes and rewards that attract users' participation (Coelho et al., 2016).

In prior research, slow fashion content on social media was said to emphasize the message that (1) slow-fashion practices are positive for environmental sustainability compared to fast fashion; (2) slow fashion is the polar opposite of everything “bad” in fashion; (3) sustainability is the core principle of slow-fashion practices; and (4) slow fashion is a form of “practicing” fashion that emphasizes consumption—consuming sustainable fashion, secondhand clothes, and *do-it-yourself* fashion (Lee & Weder, 2021).

Because of its ability to facilitate user-generated content creation and information exchange, social media can be a channel to educate people and persuade sustainability attitudes and behavior through content. Individuals learn habits continuously and gain knowledge from social media (Al-Mulla et al., 2022; Fardouly et al., 2015). One way to make content persuasive and educative is by developing posts to have long-term goals, creative skills development, feedback, the new norms promotion, expert opinion presentation, reward, and peer pressure through sharing the works of others. Social media content with persuasive design can encourage individuals to

adopt the refuse, reduce, and reuse attitude related to sustainability (Al-Mulla et al., 2022).

The advantage of Instagram is its “sharing-as-phatic communication” (Meikle, 2016, p. 40). Instagram videos and photos reach a vast audience in real time. And it proposes a more connected society through post sharing (Meikle, 2016). We limited our study of social media to Instagram because, based on studies, we deemed it essential in promoting sustainable fashion consumption and business practices. In Australia, Instagram enabled fashion brands to sell, promote, and connect with their consumers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Brydges et al., 2021; Lee & Weder, 2021), while in Indonesia, Instagram is used to acquire knowledge of a brand or product (Greenhouse, 2019).

Method

To answer the proposed research questions, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of posts from two slow fashion Instagram accounts, @setali.indonesia from Indonesia and @klothcircularity from Malaysia. The two Instagram accounts were chosen due to their same macro-level influence with different entities (Setali Indonesia is a product or service provider, and Kloth Circularity is an environmental consultant). Observing the two Instagram accounts from January 2020 to December 2022, we identified 1,036 posts containing slow fashion issues and recorded them manually by copying the links to Microsoft Excel. After being appropriately coded, only 1,029 posts could be analyzed: 286 posts of Setali Indonesia, and 743 posts of Kloth Circularity. Content that did not contain the observed issues, such as holidays, Independence Day, general information, or other irrelevant content, was removed.

We focused on the posts’ images and/or videos as the primary unit of analysis. We also included captions accompanying images and/or videos to provide additional context and facilitate accurate content classification. Especially for posts in the form of videos, we encoded them in their entirety. In the case of carousel posts or posts comprising multiple images and/or videos, the initial image or video was encoded, given that it is the main element that Instagram users encounter when perusing their feeds.

Instrument

The study derived issues from the dimensions of slow fashion from the slow fashion process model (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013) and the five principles of slow fashion (Jung & Jin, 2014). Six issues were identified: ecological practices and ethics related to the design, quality of production, localism related to production, and consumer education and longevity

related to consumption. We assigned nominal scale codes to the identified issues (1=ecological design, 2= ethics, 3=quality of production, 4=localism, 5=consumer education, 6=longevity) when the posts mentioned any hints related to the issues. We only coded one dominant issue in each of the analyzed posts. The ecological design was coded if the content mentioned sustainability, green or eco-friendly design, or raw materials in producing fashion. Ethics were coded if the content paid attention to the welfare of workers (not exploiting them in the production process). Quality of production was coded if the content mentioned high-quality clothing production, hand-made clothing craft, or production involving experienced labor. Localism was coded if the content mentioned locally-based production or supply chain. Consumer education was coded if the content mentioned literacy in practicing slow fashion (such as recycling, upcycling, swapping, or thrifting). Lastly, longevity was coded if the content mentioned an invitation to maximize the long term durability of clothes.

As for content types, they were categorized deductively from previous studies (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021), namely rational, interactional, and transactional. Afterward, we assigned the nominal scale codes (1=rational, 2=interactional, 3=transactional) when the posts mentioned any reference to the content types. We only coded one dominant content type in each of the analyzed posts. Rational content was coded if there was informative or educative content (e.g., information about an event, actor, program, or campaign related to slow fashion). Interactional content was coded if the content was about social interaction related to consumer experiences (personal/group) or motivation to do an action (e.g., a personal statement, testimony, opinion, or call to action). Transactional content was coded if the content was about a call to action with remuneration (e.g., quizzes or prizes).

Inter-coder reliability

Before doing the actual coding, we tested the coding instrument with two independent coders. The first author was the primary coder, and another was an academic beyond authors. We briefed them about slow fashion issues and content types on social media via online meetings and explained how they were to code using a provided coding guideline. According to Kimberly Neuendorf (2002), the number of samples used to test the validity and reliability of the research instrument is at least 10% of the total population. Thus, as many as 52 posts of the @setali.indonesia account and 106 posts of the @klothcircularity account were sampled. Lombard et al. (2002) stated that intercoder reliability is critical to content analysis. The data and its interpretations can never be considered valid without doing

intercoder reliability. Under Ole R. Holsti's (1969) formula, a coefficient reliability lower than 0.8 is considered doubtful. Therefore, based on our results of 0.8 and above, the coding instrument of this study was reliable in further analyzing the data.

Results and discussion

Adopting the slow fashion concept defined by many experts beforehand (Clark, 2008; Fletcher, 2010, 2014; Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013; Jung & Jin, 2014; Solino et al., 2020), this study determined that slow fashion has been communicated thoroughly (e.g., design, production, and consumption) by both Indonesian and Malaysian social enterprises. They dispersed slow fashion issues through various content types on Instagram (see Table 1).

Table 1.

The proportion of slow fashion issues and the content types on Instagram

Issues	Count	%
Consumer Education	741	71.9
Ecological Design	156	15.1
Ethics	40	3.9
Longevity	37	3.6
Quality of Production	32	3.1
Localism	23	2.2
Total	1,029	100
Content types	Count	%
Rational	547	53.2
Interactional	421	40.9
Transactional	61	5.9
Total	1,029	100

Table 1 shows that almost all the slow fashion posts ($n = 741$) were consumer education-related. Ecological design-related issues were posted ($n = 159$ posts) less. Ethics-related issues ($n=40$), longevity ($n=37$ posts), and quality of production ($n=32$ posts) were posted even less so. The issues related to localism ($n=23$ posts) were posted the least.

Table 2.

Content types communicating slow fashion issues on Instagram

	Rational		Interactional		Transactional		Total	
	Counts	%	Counts	%	Counts	%	Counts	%
Consumer Education	375	36.4	314	30.5	52	5.0	741	71.9
Ecological Design	95	9.2	54	5.2	7	0.7	156	15.1
Ethics	29	2.8	10	1.0	1	0.1	40	3.9
Longevity	16	1.6	21	2.0	0	0.0	37	3.6
Quality of Production	23	2.2	9	0.9	0	0.0	32	3.1
Localism	9	0.9	13	1.3	1	0.1	23	2.2
Total	547	53.2	421	40.9	61	5.9	1,029	100

Mostly rational content was deployed when communicating slow fashion issues ($n=547$), followed by interactional content ($n=421$), and then transactional content ($n=61$). The data indicate that rational content was the most deployed on Instagram (53.2%). Here, we know that slow fashion is communicated through rational content containing information, current events, or educational material about slow fashion practices, mostly related to consumer education issues (see Table 2). Meanwhile, slow fashion issues related to longevity and localism are communicated more often through interactional content, and only a few issues are communicated through transactional content. It is an indication that slow fashion communication aims to educate consumers mainly through rational content to inform people about slow fashion lifestyles ($X^2=25,428$, $p\text{-value}=.005$, $Cramer's V=.111$).

Although consumer education-related issues featured in rational content were predominant in Indonesia and Malaysia, their slow fashion communication was different to a certain extent (see Table 3).

Table 3.

The comparison of slow fashion issues on Indonesian and Malaysian social enterprises' Instagram

Issues	Setali Indonesia (%)	Kloth Circularity Malaysia (%)
Consumer Education	68.5	73.4
Ecological Design	10.8	16.8
Ethics	1.7	4.7
Longevity	9.1	1.5
Quality of Production	5.6	2.2
Localism	4.2	1.5
Total	100	100

Content types	Setali Indonesia (%)	Kloth Circularity Malaysia (%)
Rational	64.3	48.9
Interactive	32.2	44.3
Transactional	3.5	6.9
Total	100	100

Note.

N Setali Indonesia = 286; N Kloth Circularity Malaysia = 743.

Kloth Circularity Malaysia attempted to disseminate ecological design and ethics-related issues more than Setali Indonesia did. Meanwhile, Setali Indonesia conveyed longevity, quality of production, and localism more than Kloth Circularity Malaysia did. Besides issues, we also found a difference in content types: the slow fashion content of Kloth Circularity Malaysia was more interactive than that of Setali Indonesia.

The findings reveal that consumer education issues are predominant in communicating slow fashion, which means consumption behavior is the most concerning issue of slow fashion in Indonesia and Malaysia. Thus, slow fashion communication aims to educate consumers about sustainable fashion lifestyles in response to the fast fashion environmental problem. In educating consumers, sustainable consumption lifestyles are symbolically expressed in rational content containing texts, images, or videos posted on Instagram. It is described in one of the captions on the Instagram post as follows:

Clothing industry is the second largest polluter after oil and gas. An industry that employs more than 300 million people along the value chain. Repost @cdmlaudatosi by @media.repost: According to the documentary, ‘The True Cost’, released in 2015, the garment industry is the second largest polluter in the world, next to oil. A long production cycle, filled with emissions and chemical-based treatments all contribute to this case—and with the added high demand for a lot of clothes at a low price, the impact that the garment industry leaves on the world is immense—to the point that it’s unachievable to fully calculate the actual carbon footprint of the industry. It may seem like an heavy task to try and solve, but simply buying secondhand, buying less clothes or even using just what you have, can lessen the impact that this industry has on the world. (Klothcircularity, 2019, para. 1.)

As social media like Instagram makes information exchange possible, the rational content is pivotal to gaining awareness of slow fashion lifestyles, supporting what Rebecca Dolan et al. (2019), Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021), and Tafesse (2015),

pointed out in their study. Through rational content, slow fashion organizations provide information, update about current events, and educate consumers about practicing slow fashion in daily routines. Slow fashion is constructed as an emblem of sustainability, and as a self-expression of lifestyle reflecting sustainable values (Lee & Weder, 2021).

Seen in the sampled Instagram post above, the process of meaning-giving of slow fashion relies on the message in the social media content (Bendor, 2018; Jung & Jin, 2014), in which slow fashion is interpreted as a holistic view consisting of not only how to produce sustainable fashion, but also how to consume it sustainably. Based on the study of Lee and Weder (2021), there are two main messages in slow fashion communication in social media. First, slow fashion is the reverse of “bad” fashion, and is better for the environment than fast fashion. Second, sustainable practices in the fashion realm, emphasizing consumption—consuming sustainable fashion, secondhand clothes, and *do-it-yourself* fashion, is fundamental.

In addition, the study discovered from the rational content that slow fashion is not industrialized like the fast fashion industry. Instead, it reflects the effort to encourage an alternate vision in the fashion production and consumption system, in which designers, producers, retailers, and consumers are more mindful of sustainability (Fletcher, 2007, 2010, 2014; Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013; Jung & Jin, 2014). The implication here is that producers or retailers are gradually educating consumers to prioritize the durability of their clothing purchases over the allure of acquiring new items as a long-term investment (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). The study believes that advocating for long-term investments to promote sustainable fashion may lead to the frequent repurchasing of clothing items (Jung & Jin, 2014).

A characteristic of social media is its ability to facilitate content creation and information exchange about sustainable lifestyles, which empowers social media to promote sustainability. The affordance of Instagram in sharing activities allows it to reach a vast audience and connect people through video or photo posts on slow fashion. Thus, rational content on Instagram is a perfect tool to educate consumers about sustainability attitudes and behavior (Al-Mulla et al., 2022; Fardouly et al., 2015).

Through rational content sharing, educational material on sustainable fashion can be created by crafting posts with long-term goals, value promotion, and creative skills development. Critical functionality of the

rational content here is the processes of “using” and “educating” (Orminski et al., 2020). “Using” gives information on how we optimize the versatility and longevity of clothing and are responsible for the circularity of clothes (Fletcher, 2007; Jung & Jin, 2014; Shephard & Pookulangara, 2014). As part of “using,” slow fashion communication aims to share the long-term goals and value of slow fashion lifestyles with consumers, which is reflected by a caption in one of the Instagram posts:

Check out @bakedkl social media profile. ❤️ Repost @bakedkl by @media.repost: I have always loved the thrill of thrift and vintage shopping since my uni days, and studying fashion marketing opened my eyes in how the fashion industry works. 2 years ago, I finally have stopped buying new clothing and even apply the same lifestyle with baby H as well. Just seems fitting that this year, we would like to not only #jointhemovement but also share the benefits of fabric recycling with @klothlifestyle. We are super excited to share how you can help through us! Stay tuned! (Klothcircularity, 2020, para. 1)

Meanwhile, “educating” gives knowledge to consumers about creating circular fashion (e.g., recycling, upcycling, and thrifting). This could be demonstrated in a practical guide for creative skills development, such as:

The story of a new cloth from @sessaxuanthi: denim on the top and dress with colorful ornaments recycled by @setali.daur to become an outer with the addition of the shirt’s sleeves. Steps:- split the denim at the front to be outer–dress is cut, and ornament part is taken–removes sleeves only from shirt–dress and denim are combined, but ornament application is placed at the back to make it more beautiful–shirt sleeves fitted so outer can be worn at formal... (translated from Bahasa Indonesia) (Setali Indonesia, 2019, para. 1)

The importance of focusing on rational content must be considered. Consumers can decipher the underlying significance of the content and consequently interpret it when receiving messages about sustainable lifestyles. Logically, rational content can be an essential variable influencing consumer behavior because individuals learn habits continuously and gain awareness. It will be the initial catalyst for prompting action of slow fashion lifestyles.

In other words, communicating slow fashion on Instagram prioritizes consumer education through rational content by providing information and knowledge about slow fashion lifestyles. This study argues that rational content is essential to gain consumer awareness of sustainable fashion lifestyles as it activates the informational function of social media (Carpenter et al., 2016' O'Neill & Boykoff, 2011). Information and knowledge contained in rational content can be a foundation for a call to action since consumers can learn how to practice slow fashion as a lifestyle through shared information and knowledge. Ultimately, promoting knowledge of slow fashion has the potential to induce a shift in consumer behavior toward greater sustainability.

Nevertheless, there are deficiencies in the conveyance of slow fashion through rational content. Lee and Weder (2021) said that slow fashion communication is associated with a communicative process of environmental and ethical issues, this study found evidence that it did not significantly emphasize ethical considerations. While the ethical conduct of production and consumption is an essential principle of slow fashion, the analyzed Instagram posts did not show much concern for it yet. Communicating ethics is one of the ways to increase consumer awareness of slow fashion vividly. Thus, encouraging the fashion industry's societal interest in ethics and sustainable lifestyles can be a strategy for slow fashion practitioners in challenging fast fashion (Velasco-Molpeceres et al., 2022).

The research findings have identified several slow fashion communication strategy differences in Indonesia and Malaysia. Besides consumer education issues, Kloth Circularity Malaysia communicates more ecological design and ethics-related issues than Setali Indonesia. Meanwhile, Setali Indonesia communicates more on longevity, quality of production, and localism. Communicating the quality of production and localism face challenges in how slow fashion communication addresses style to win consumers' attention following the fast fashion trend, not only in terms of design but also the low prices (Štefko & Steffek, 2018). The two social enterprises' Instagram posts also differ in terms of content. While the rational content is predominant in both, Kloth Circularity is also concerned with interactional content more than Setali Indonesia.

This study argues that these distinctions exist because the two social enterprises are different entities. Kloth Circularity Malaysia is an environmental consultant that offers innovations to solve fashion sustainability problems, and informs the public about them through social media. Given the paramount importance of capturing individuals' attention, an effective content strategy encompasses not just the dissemination of information but also active engagement with individuals, thereby prompting

them to undertake specific actions. Meanwhile, Setali Indonesia identifies itself as a product and service provider. Given their focus on promoting slow fashion goods and services, they prioritize informative content to effectively educate and persuade individuals to invest in slow fashion products.

Overall, an imbalance in sustainability communication occurs when slow fashion content focuses on the environmental aspect instead of a balanced treatment of environmental, social, and economic aspects. Balancing the environment, society, and economy is essential as it is the main principle of sustainability (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011). The present study can contribute to developing content strategies for practitioners promoting slow fashion. These strategies should consider the various aspects of slow fashion, including eco-friendly design, production quality, local distribution, and labor welfare. The study also has given recommendations of content types that can be applied to educate consumers about slow fashion lifestyles as part of slow fashion communication. It contributes to enriching media and sustainability communication studies, especially in the analysis of the role of social media content in communicating sustainability.

Conclusions

Social media like Instagram facilitates information exchange by connecting people through shareable content. Communicating slow fashion on the said platform in Indonesia and Malaysia is predominantly via sharing rational content that facilitates consumer education, the intention of which is to give consumers information and knowledge about sustainable fashion lifestyles. Rational content is essential in communicating slow fashion lifestyles and educating consumers since it activates the information function of social media. When receiving information and knowledge about slow fashion lifestyles contained in the rational content, consumers can interpret the meaning of the content, learn habits, and gain awareness about sustainable lifestyles. Thus, it can be the foundation of the call to action that triggers consumers to implement slow fashion, influencing their consumption behavior.

Slow fashion on Instagram is somewhat communicated differently in Indonesia and Malaysia, depending on the slow fashion organization's identity. Kloth Circularity Malaysia conveys more ecological design and ethical issues besides consumer education because, as an environmental consultant, they offer innovations for fashion sustainability problems. On the other hand, Setali Indonesia emphasizes longevity, production quality, and local distribution besides consumer education issues since they must promote its commodity, considering its role as a slow fashion product and service provider. Kloth Circularity Malaysia's content is more interactive

than Setali Indonesia's as they have to inform and attract the public about the innovations. Meanwhile, Setali Indonesia can focus on rational content as they only have to inform the products and services.

Furthermore, the study also discovered that slow fashion communication encounters some challenges. First, while slow fashion is based on ethical production and consumption, ethics have not been extensively communicated by the Instagram accounts studied. Second, advancing long-term investments as a sustainable fashion strategy may lead to regular purchasing. Lastly, slow fashion communication faces competition with fashion trends, which is equally challenging to compete against in terms of design and pricing. Slow fashion practitioners should face these challenges and find ways to develop a balanced sustainability communication that covers environmental, social, and economic aspects.

The practical implication of the study can inspire slow fashion practitioners to enhance their planning of social media content strategies that can formularize an effective slow fashion campaign to promote slow fashion lifestyles. It would be advisable for education to cover environmental areas as well as social and economic/governance areas as an integrated part of communication strategies, especially ethical conduct in fashion production and consumption. In addition, the study's results can also contribute to highlighting the social media content to communicate about sustainability that enriches media and sustainability communication studies.

Limitations and further research

Despite arriving at some findings, the study has a data limitation. For one thing, the research period is only three years, from January 2020 to December 2022. A time-series research design is needed to analyze the trend to grasp the slow fashion communication development. Since the study included only two social enterprises in its analysis, the results cannot yet be generalized. The data is also limited to posts containing texts, images, and videos; this study did not observe Instagram stories or reels. Furthermore, this research is noncommittal toward the analysis of socio-demographics, especially religious affiliation (considering that Indonesia and Malaysia are predominantly Muslim countries). Religiosity is believed to be one of the important aspects influencing sustainability communication that this research has not addressed. Moreover, the study has not analyzed how slow fashion communication on social media has influenced consumers' consciousness and engagement on slow fashion issues. These limitations can inspire academia to do further research on socio-demography and consumer consciousness.

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Grant Support Details

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, Angga Ariestya and Petra Koudejkova; methodology, Angga Ariestya, Nicky Stephani, and Maria Advenita Gita Elmada; investigation, Angga Ariestya; data curation, Angga Ariestya, Nicky Stephani, and Maria Advenita Gita Elmada; writing—original draft preparation, Angga Ariestya, Nicky Stephani, and Maria Advenita Gita Elmada; writing—review and editing, Angga Ariestya, Petra Koudejkova, Bakidzanani Dube; project administration, Nicky Stephani. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded through an internal grant application from Universitas Multimedia Nusantara through the University's Research and Community Service Institute to researchers at the Faculty of Communication Sciences. Project title: Slow Fashion Discourse in Online Communities in Southeast Asia (Study of Slow Fashion Issues in Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia). The grant code is 020/PI/LPPM-UMN/III/2022.

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank all intercoders (Dyan Nuranindya, FX. Kevin Sanly Putera, and Silvanus Alvin) and key informants (Kloth Circularity and Setali Indonesia) for their time and commitment to this study. We appreciate all forms of support from Universitas Multimedia Nusantara and Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism, Charles University until the completion of this research.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analysis, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results,

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