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BEYOND SUSTAINABLE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE VISUAL RHETORIC
BEHIND THE BRANDING OF CHRISTY DAWN

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree Bachelor of Arts
with Mahurin Honors College Graduate Distinction
at Western Kentucky University

By

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December 2021

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ABSTRACT

This research project offers insight into the visual rhetorical of design decisions made in the marketing materials of Christy Dawn, a sustainable fashion brand. The primary goal of this research is to identify several motivators, based on prior studies, for the consumption of sustainable fashion and analyze the existing marketing visuals of Christy Dawn's brand, specifically in how they appeal to these motivators, thus also communicating their sustainable rhetoric to consumers in the process. This project defines these motivators in detail and addresses them in relation to particular elements of design in Christy Dawn's materials, such as images, color, and typography.

From this analysis, audience members will be able to determine the significant impact of visual rhetoric used in marketing on the growth of the sustainable fashion industry, particularly in brands that attempt to appeal to the specific motivators of their consumer base. Ultimately, this research makes larger connections to the fields of professional writing and visual rhetoric, as well as how marketing impacts both the success of the brand in question and the informed consumer.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Will and Jennifer McCormick, who never fail to believe in me, and encourage me every day to do my best. I also dedicate this work to my brother, Tyler, who has shown me that I'll always have someone rooting for me wherever he is.

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INTRODUCTION

Fashion and environment have gone hand-in-hand with one another for centuries. Even as far back as the 1500s, fashion was an instigator of environmental destruction, “when growing European demand for stylish hats inspired a 300-year-hunt for beaver in the New World” (Rome). The concept of replaceable goods that fall in and out of style demands some sort of environmental impact; usually, this impact is destructive. Across the centuries, this impact has continued to grow, with industrialization leading the way for the environmentally catastrophic practices that precede the yearly “25 billion pounds of textiles” thrown out by Americans alone, which end up a part of the municipal waste stream (Rome). In recent history, however, a countermovement to the ever-pervasive fast fashion culture has begun to take off, “raising questions about what we wear” and the role that fashion plays in people’s lives (Rome). This growth of slow, sustainable fashion has revealed the environmental, ethical, and quality-related implications for those who choose to consume it as an alternative to the idea of fast fashion; but, to understand these implications of consuming fast versus slow fashion, it is necessary to define these terms and determine what they encompass.

What is Fast Fashion?

Fast fashion can be characterized broadly as “a model of mass-producing cheaply made, ‘of-the-moment’ items that are sold at a lower price point” (“The Problem with Fast Fashion”), and this business model of fast fashion tends to reflect the desires of

consumers for inexpensive and readily available products. Fast fashion brands sell the trendiest items at the cheapest prices and are made out of poor-quality materials, demand unfair and unsafe working conditions of factory employees, and cause long-term damage to the environment. Growing cotton involves the use of chemicals and results in significant consumption of energy; dyeing and processing textiles involves toxic chemicals in order to “make clothes feel soft, look bright, repel water, and resist wrinkles and stains” (Rome); factories that produce these garments are based out of countries “with the lowest labour standards so that garment workers can be easily exploited,” with many workers paid lower than half of the minimum wage (“What is Fast Fashion”). Many consumers feel satisfied enough by the price and trendiness of the clothing, and fail to take these other factors into consideration. On the opposite side of the spectrum is sustainable fashion.

What is Sustainable Fashion?

There is no “industry standard” for sustainable fashion and it is difficult to provide a single, overarching definition for this idea, however, there are a variety of terms and concepts in the history of environmental arguments that are useful for differentiating sustainable fashion as a unique area of practice. In their study on the values and motivators behind sustainable fashion consumption, Lundblad and Davies seek to unpack the terminology of sustainability, and argue that the variety of terms associated with sustainability, such as “organic, green, fair trade, sustainable, slow, [or] eco,” each explain a certain aspect of the industry (Lundblad and Davies 149). These terms all attempt to “highlight or correct a variety of perceived wrongs in the fashion industry

including animal cruelty, environmental damage and worker exploitation” (Lunblad and Davies 149-50). For example, terms like “green” or “eco” are ambiguous ideas that relate to a larger notion of environmental friendliness that is important in the industry of sustainable fashion. Other terms, like “fair trade” or “organic” pertain to the sourcing of the materials and the materials themselves utilized in the sustainable fashion industry, such as the cotton used in the creation of garments being organically farmed or distributed and sold ethically, and there are standards products must meet to be certified fair trade or organic. “Slow” seems to be one of the most wide-reaching and accurate defining characteristics of sustainable fashion, implying that the process of assembling and creating the actual products is slower and more time consuming due to fair working hours, conditions, and wages for employees who produce the clothing. In general, if a company focuses on even one of these goals, they could, theoretically, fall into the category of sustainable fashion; however, ultimately, the ones that strive to incorporate the most environmentally and ethically conscious practices into the making of their products could be considered the most “sustainable” businesses in the industry.

Challenges of Marketing Sustainable Fashion

Because of the demand for newness within the world of fashion today, sustainable brands must inherently take a different approach to marketing than fast fashion brands. Fast fashion is primarily driven by low prices and trendy, always-new patterns. This in turn leads to a “culture of impulse buying in the fashion industry, where new styles of clothing are available to the average consumer every week” (McNeill 213). These are two elements of the industry dynamic that work in favor of fast fashion. Sustainable fashion

brands, however, must utilize different tactics of generating interest and demand for their products, primarily through their marketing strategy and their image as a brand.

In marketing their products, sustainable fashion brands must capitalize on the implications of purchasing their products -- for these we can look to the study of Lundblad and Davies, who emphasize the environment, human rights, and the quality of the garments consumers receive as factors involved in their consumption. Even when successfully appealing to these motivators, sustainable brands must still grapple with the relevance of a visually appealing “image” in an industry like fashion, where consumers are more heavily influenced by aesthetics (Frame and Newton 3). Regardless of the production methods and how they reflect the motivators of Lundblad and Davies, the image of a brand can be the first point of contact with potential consumers, convincing them whether or not to engage with the company and purchase their products. Therefore, sustainable fashion brands must consider the abstract motivators and translate those motivators into powerful, legible aesthetics in order to market their products to a world that has grown reliant on the quick and easy industry of fast fashion.

MOTIVATORS OF SUSTAINABLE FASHION

Just as in any product-based industry, sustainable fashion brands are constantly faced with the task of recognizing what is most important to their buyers. Sustainable brands are responsible for identifying the most important motivations that consumers have for shopping sustainably, and using these motivations to their advantage when designing and marketing their products. This is no easy task. Marketing for the average brand involves encouraging endless production, growth, and consumption under the idea that resources are abundant and practices happening within that cycle of production and consumption do not matter, or rather, can easily be put out of the mind of the consumer. Obviously, sustainability involves much the opposite, encouraging consumers to consume less (or at least less mindlessly) and to take into account the process by which goods are produced before they come into their possession, as well as how and how long the products will serve them after they possess them. Therefore, if we use the typical definition and concept of marketing, it would be natural to assume that “the goals and assumptions of marketing are incompatible with the goals and assumptions of sustainability” (White et al. 23).

Despite how traditional marketing concepts and sustainability seem to be incompatible, researchers have made it clear that sustainability and marketing have become more closely “intertwined” through the consumer-focused process of resolving a certain distance between mind and attitude (White et al. 23). In “How to SHIFT Consumer Behaviors to be More Sustainable: A Literature Review and Guiding

Framework” authors White, Habib, and Hardisty argue that paradoxical relationship between sustainability and marketing can be resolved with the presentation of the “mind-attitude gap,” which occurs when there is internal conflict between the beliefs and actions of an individual (White et al. 23). According to this study, consumers generally often have positive thoughts in their minds regarding sustainability and the elements of sustainable products that make them so, but often neglect to act or consume goods in a sustainable way (i.e. one that benefits the environment and/or the factory workers who produce these goods). Although definitions of sustainability itself can be murky, it is often quite clear which practices by companies, specifically clothing companies, are *not* sustainable, such as unfair labor practices or using materials that are harmful to the environment. These practices are typically overlooked or unacknowledged by consumers whose attitudes are driven by traditional marketing strategies of clothing brands. Addressing this “mind-attitude gap” is the biggest challenge for marketing sustainable clothing, but it is also the most promising and seemingly effective way to target consumers and guide them towards sustainable consumption.

The most obvious route of marketing sustainable fashion lies in capitalizing on aspects of sustainable clothing that resolve this gap between mind and behavior for the consumer. In identifying these characteristics of sustainable clothing that resolve the consumer issue, it helps to first identify the reasons or motivations behind sustainable fashion consumption for those consumers who already engage in consuming sustainable fashion. As of 2015, there were few reports that investigated these motives; however, Louise Lundblad and Iain Davies recognized this and published a study entitled “The Values and Motivations Behind Sustainable Fashion Consumption” which sought to

provide more tangible research on the subject. As Lundblad and Davies point out, “the approach [in marketing sustainable fashion] relies on understanding the hierarchical structure of consumer problem-solving by investigating attributes of products, which lead to consequences for the self, which are underpinned by fundamental values” (Lundblad and Davies 151). In other words, the characteristics of sustainable fashion that attract consumers are rooted in these more overarching values or motivators that are parts of the sustainability movement as a whole. These are the ideas on which whole brands as well as marketers of sustainable fashion base their strategies for successfully encouraging consumption.

In the study by Lundblad and Davies, consumers of sustainable fashion were surveyed and asked what specific things motivate them to purchase this kind of clothing. Lundblad and Davies identified six common patterns among participants’ responses (1. Less buying; 2. The self; 3. Health; 4. The environment; 5. Accomplishments; 6. Social justice), then further condensed these patterns into three major categories. These three categories are defined as “altruistic values, biospheric values and egoistic values” (Lundblad and Davies 158). Certain specific values were more or less important to the consumers, but there were three, one from each of the three categories of values, that appealed to consumers most: less buying/quality (egoistic), environment (biospheric), and social justice/ethics (altruistic).

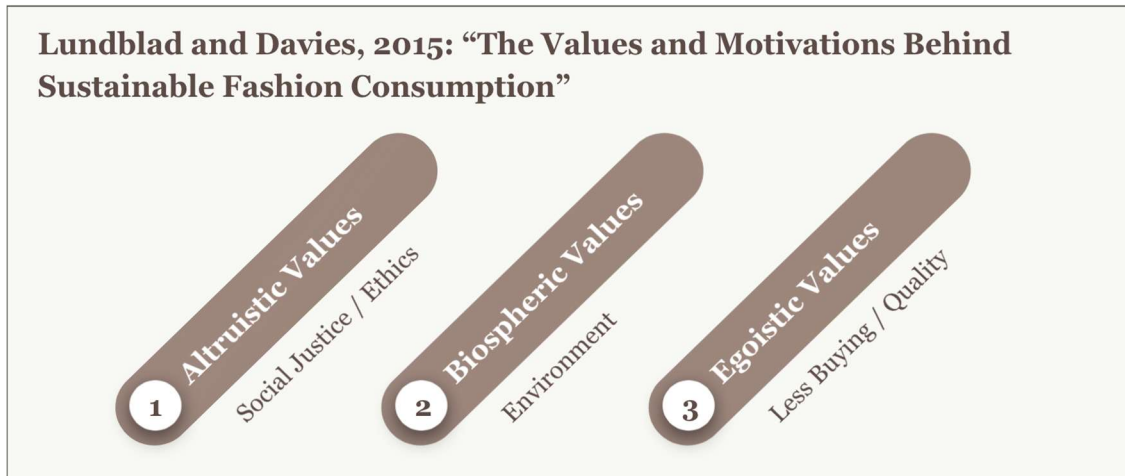


Fig. 1: The top three motivators for the consumption of sustainable fashion and their respective value categories.

Because each and every response by participants was able to be condensed into one of these three categories, I designated them as the three overarching motivators for the consumption of sustainable fashion to discuss in conjunction with the marketing of sustainable fashion. These three motivators are important to address when marketing a sustainable fashion brand, as they stand out among consumers’ responses; therefore, it is necessary to understand what each entails.

Less Buying/Quality

The first of these main motivators for sustainable fashion consumption is quality of the product. While fast fashion is cheap, even fast fashion junkies recognize that the quality of the clothing is very poor -- in order to meet the demands of the public *and* keep them coming back for more, these companies produce clothing “using cheap, synthetic materials and rudimentary manufacturing processes” (Zarrolì). In contrast, garments produced by sustainable fashion brands are perceived to be “of a sufficiently higher quality that more than compensates for the extra cost,” and consumers ultimately

concluded that sustainable clothing was a “net positive value alternative” (Lundblad and Davies 154). During this survey, open-ended questions produced anecdotal evidence that for these experienced sustainable fashion consumers, the durability, timelessness, and therefore long lifetime of clothing was one of their top expectations when buying, which was something that prompted them to start purchasing sustainably-made clothing in the first place.

Sustainable brands in particular may prefer to prioritize motivators that do not serve the self or inflate the ego because of the conflict they have with sustainability, which is inherently linked to the act of self-sacrifice. However, while the motivator of quality falls into the egoistic category of self-serving values, it is still compatible with sustainability. Consumers linked quality and “less buying” to financial stability. They believed that the quality of sustainable clothing and obligation to buy less over time resulted in a better value for their money than the alternative of fast fashion, despite the higher price tag. Because of how important this financial component was to consumers, quality is a motivator that sustainable brands must keep in mind and bring to the forefront of their marketing materials. Marketers must convey this same logic to buyers who are inexperienced or less knowledgeable on sustainable fashion in order to meet the self-serving needs of consumers in the same way that the traditional values of marketing are utilized in the fast fashion industry.

Environment

Environment, which falls into the category of biospheric values, is the second of the main three motivators for sustainable fashion consumption. Most fast fashion companies do not

make any claims about the impact of their products on the environment, but it is clear that they are overwhelmingly negative; at the very surface, the impacts of fast fashion on the environment include “depletion of non-renewable sources, emission of greenhouse gases and the use of massive amounts of water and energy” (Maiti). The environmental impact of sustainable fashion, however, is remarkably positive. This is one of the more obvious selling points for consumers, and therefore, a significant motivator for those who choose to purchase sustainable clothing.

In the survey, many participants noted their preference of sustainable fashion as a result of both the materials and the production techniques used when making the clothing. Consumers’ “responsibility and [desire to] protect the planet are the drivers of [their] will to support the environment,” as they want to feel that their personal consumption habits are making a difference (Lundblad and Davies 156). While the positive impact on the environment is primarily a biospheric value, it is clear that this value also contributes to a mildly self-serving satisfaction in protecting the planet and making this difference. Because of this internal fulfillment and the external impact that the environmental implications of the sustainable fashion industry creates, sustainable clothing brands must make a conscious effort to target consumers’ desires for an environmental impact in their marketing materials. The positive effect of sustainable fashion on the environment has been and must continue to be integrated into the marketing of sustainable brands for its potential to draw new consumers to the industry as well as keep existing consumers invested.

Social Justice/Ethics

The third motivator that Lundblad and Davies propose is the motivator of social justice and ethics beyond environmentalism, which exist as an altruistic value for consumers. Fast fashion has been historically well-known for worker exploitation, employing “a workforce comprising largely of migrant, temporary workers, who were underpaid and overworked” (Crumbie). On the opposite side of the spectrum is sustainable fashion, which maintains a focus on providing fair wages and working conditions to employees. Lundblad and Davies’s study specifically shows how consumers tie workplace practices to the value of brands, as their participants identified a lack of sweatshops, as well as “the importance of equality and human rights of the workers in the factories used by clothing companies” as factors that were extremely relevant to them when purchasing clothing (158). This emphasis on social justice and ethics by consumers makes this another selling point for sustainable fashion, and highlights it as something that should be evoked in the marketing of sustainable brands and their clothing.

It should be noted that the inclusion of altruistic values such as ethics and social justice is what creates the distinction between the concept of sustainable fashion and other ideas such as “green” or “eco-fashion” utilized by some brands. Sustainability not only involves leaving a positive rather than negative impact on the environment but also ensuring that the industry and production is maintainable in the long-term by keeping with fair labor practices and avoiding the exploitation of workers, as “a failure to maintain human rights would heavily disincentivize consumption by [the] core market for sustainable fashion” (Lundblad and Davies 158). Fulfilling more than one of these three main values for consumers, and ideally all three, in the marketing for a brand is

beneficial; studies have shown that “dual pathways often lead to purchases of sustainable goods” (Lundblad and Davies 158). Ultimately, these three characteristics of and motivators for the consumption of sustainable fashion are necessary to incorporate into the marketing of sustainable brands, since they are the driving forces that bring a person from the stage of unawareness or ignorance to being an active consumer of sustainable fashion.

VISUAL RHETORIC

For any company that relies upon graphic design and visual materials to market their brand to a target audience, understanding the rhetoric behind design choices in those materials is paramount. Rhetoric is easily defined as the art of argument and persuasion, often used within writing or speech. Just as rhetoric exists in spoken and written language, and can help to persuade, argue, and defend, rhetoric exists in the visual realm as well, helping to meet those exact same goals on a less detectable level than speech or text. The function of visual rhetoric is to communicate that same persuasion, argument, and defense implicitly through the elements on a page that a viewer sees. According to the Purdue Online Writing Lab, these visual elements can include “anything from the use of images as argument, to the arrangement of elements on a page for rhetorical effect, to the use of typography (fonts), and more” (*Visual Rhetoric: Overview*). In order for visual materials to effectively display the information they intend to communicate, the design of those materials should be grounded in the use of rhetorical strategies to aid the usability, accessibility, and personality of a design. Particularly in the case of visual marketing materials for companies, the design of their visuals is just as important a channel in getting a message across as, for example, their written mission statement or the products or services they sell. For example, much of the marketing that Coca Cola does as a company is visual because they have both come to exist in the public’s collective consciousness as their iconic red and white packaging *and* become so well known as a

brand that they no longer have such a strong need to textually market their product. For this reason, understanding the role that visual rhetoric plays in the design choices for visual marketing materials is necessary when assessing how a brand incorporates their values, or in this case, their target audience's values, into their visuals.

One of the most critical aspects of a visual document is the way in which the viewer interacts with it. This visual interaction happens at all times -- viewers are constantly perceiving alignment, balance, symmetry, and every other detail that exists on a page -- and each moment of interaction is an opportunity for rhetoric to impact, convince, and persuade the viewer. Much like the symbolism that occurs in a novel, through which authors make hidden or understated arguments and associations, the pieces of a visual design work to communicate an argument to viewers. Several important and common elements of design that must be grounded in visual rhetoric in order for this interaction to occur are images, color, text, and the use of white space; all of these are areas where a visual argument, through the use of elements that viewers already have preconceived notions on in their mind is involved that can help to support the mission of a company and engage with the company's target audience through their own values and beliefs being met and represented.

The motivators for the consumption of sustainable fashion discussed in the previous section are directly linked to the visual rhetoric and design choices implemented into the marketing materials for sustainable fashion brands. The use of each of the three motivators within the visual marketing materials is part of a larger argument for a brand. Their use allows the target audience to more effectively engage with (and ultimately purchase from) the brand, and this begs a question in the specific case of the Christy

Dawn brand: is the implementation of these motivators in marketing materials a tactic to communicate their message of “beyond sustainable” to customers in a *visual* manner?

For Christy Dawn, visual rhetoric is closely intertwined with the rhetoric of sustainability. The rhetoric of sustainability is less about persuasion and argument, and more about highlighting and representing the physical practices, such as environmental conservation or maintaining ethical business models, which are folded into the idea of sustainability. The communication of these sustainable practices to the reader or viewer is the end goal of sustainable rhetoric. As mentioned previously, what delineates the idea of “sustainability” from those of “eco-friendly,” “fair trade,” “green,” and the like is the incorporation of the multiple types of values at hand into a movement that centers around and highlights the importance of the not only the environment, but also things like quality over time and ethics. Therefore, there are practices that sustainable fashion brands engage in that constitute this rhetoric of sustainability -- these may be “textual or non-textual...[they] might be engaged individually, or they might occur across physical or digital networks...[they] might happen locally, or they might spread beyond the institution itself” (DeVoss and Sackey 196). These practices take place and are documented using a variety of methods; some may involve specific environmental or ethical initiatives from a company, such as plastic bag bans at grocery stores like Whole Foods or Aldi, while are sometimes only represented textually through, for example, the mission statement of an institution.

Donnie Sackey and Danielle DeVoss, in their article “Ecology, Ecologies, and Institutions,” sought to investigate the idea of the rhetoric of sustainability as enacted by larger institutions, which, for all intents and purposes, includes corporate entities like

fashion brands. Sackey and DeVoss go on to argue that the rhetoric of sustainability as is constituted by the practices of an institution, not just the declaration of sustainability, is necessary when determining and defining the sustainability of that institution, as “there is no definitive evidence as to whether this institutionally created definition sustains its integrity once it permeates beyond the walls of the office” (DeVoss and Sackey 195). In other words, it is necessary to see these claims of sustainability practiced and enacted in the real world to account for the ways they are represented in statements made by an institution. Sackey and DeVoss recognize the ambiguity of the sustainability movement; however, they “see one of the key promises of environmental rhetoric as not erasing ambiguity, but in equipping people with tools to recognize and navigate the ambiguity” (DeVoss and Sackey 199). This ambiguity takes the shape of the less concrete verbal indicators (green, eco-friendly, fair-trade—each of which are separate from the larger umbrella of sustainability) of the real-world practices and actions that make up sustainability. For brands that truly are maintaining this sustainable rhetoric through the enactment of various practices they may claim to engage in, the challenge is helping their audiences to see and understand it, or “navigate the ambiguity” that exists across the board in sustainable fashion especially.

One way for these brands to impart this knowledge on consumers is through their visual marketing materials; since consumers cannot physically be present to see sustainable practices taking place, it is necessary to represent and echo the mission or goals of a brand in the visuals provided to the consumer. In the realm of e-commerce, this is usually through a website, and occasionally social media platforms. For Christy Dawn, this idea of helping their consumers to navigate the sustainability of their brand (and the

ways in which they go beyond sustainable) is at the forefront of the purpose behind what they choose to include in their visual marketing. *How* they choose to go about this visual marketing is what connects the ideas of the rhetoric of sustainability and visual rhetoric together.

Earlier in this section, there was discussion of the way that visual rhetoric is a means of communicating and arguing for the values of a brand (or their target audience). In the case of sustainable fashion brands, the values that the brand stands for are often synonymous with the values of their target audience. In the last section, three motivators (or values) that drive the consumption of sustainable fashion were identified. These three values -- quality, environment, and ethics -- being what drive this consumption and what make sustainable fashion brands sustainable, are the values that must be woven into the visual marketing materials in order for their consumers to “navigate” their sustainability, as well as to be encouraged to consume their products. Thus, Christy Dawn, as a sustainable fashion brand, intentionally incorporates the motivators of quality, environment, and ethics (which are all aspects of their mission as a company) into their visual marketing materials, using principles of visual rhetoric to convey their rhetoric of sustainability. This is the core of how Christy Dawn presents themselves as beyond sustainable; the rhetorical choices for their visual marketing are an extension of the rhetoric of sustainability used in their written mission statement.

CHRISTY DAWN

Christy Dawn is a sustainable fashion brand based out of Los Angeles, California owned and operated by Christy Dawn Baskauskas. She began launching her sustainable dressmaking business out of her own garage in the year 2013, after working for years as a fashion model. As a result of witnessing the downsides of the fast fashion industry firsthand, she sought to design, craft, and sell dresses made with deadstock fabric, or fabric remnants that would typically spend their lifetime in a landfill once deemed “waste” by the fashion brands that originally sourced the fabric for their clothing. Dawn describes the process of fabric sourcing that the company was founded on, saying “We’re not making thousands of yards of fabric using thousands of gallons of water. We’re not using dyes or outsourcing. The way we look at it — one man’s trash is another man’s treasure” (Daswani). Motivations to reduce the company’s environmental footprint were not the only influence on the brand’s philosophy, however; Christy Dawn, growing up in Placerville, California, was also familiar with the practices of dressmaking that occurred in the distant past. Dawn says, “It is no coincidence that *Christy Dawn*’s way of doing business closely resembles that of a dressmaker living in Placerville, CA a hundred years ago. It’s my intention to create vintage inspired pieces that speak of quality and craftsmanship” (*A Note From Christy*). Since the conception of the brand, quality has also been at the forefront of the pieces designed and sewn by the dressmakers in the small factory in California. This quality hinges upon the relationship Dawn has with her

employees. As a former fashion model, Dawn saw the way “fashion brand executives worked and interacted with their staff members,” taking note of what she could do differently with her own brand (Daswani). This resulted in the ethical practices of the Christy Dawn brand that coincide with the quality of the products they sell. The company has only 34 employees, including Dawn herself, and “in contrast to the sweatshop scenarios that play out across the fashion industry...[Dawn’s] employees are paid more than a living wage” (Daswani). Because these same three values (quality, environment, and ethics) that motivate consumers to purchase from sustainable fashion brands are at the core of the Christy Dawn label, it is evident that these values and the sustainable rhetoric of the brand must be represented in the visuals utilized by the brand as well, in order to more effectively reflect Christy Dawn’s mission and reach their target audience.

Although there are other sustainable fashion brands in the industry that engage with the values of their consumers similarly, Christy Dawn is unique in the way that it approaches the concept of sustainability that drives the consumption of their products. Not only does Christy Dawn tackle three of the most important motivators for the consumption of sustainable fashion with the brand and its practices, but it also recognizes this ambiguity in environmental and sustainable rhetoric identified by Sackey and DeVoss in their study. Because of this, Christy Dawn has recently focused their approach to go “beyond” the vague or ambiguous concept of sustainability, and has reinforced this with the evolution of their practices as a brand. The ideas of reuse and recycling that inspired the creation of the brand have changed over time, to now push towards the concept of regenerative farm-to-closet fashion. A statement on the Christy Dawn website reads:

Since day one, we've been a "sustainable" clothing company. But sustaining our current relationship with Mother Earth simply is not enough. Our future depends on regenerative practices that go beyond sustainability to actively heal both Mother Earth and ourselves. Through creating intimate connections with the communities and ecosystems that support us, we can support them. Together, we regenerate. (*Honoring Mother Earth*)

The company now, in addition to producing the same dresses crafted from deadstock fabric, has also partnered with Oshadi Collective, a regenerative organic cotton farm in India that heals the damaged soil, to produce dresses that are made from this organic cotton and block-printed by hand with natural dyes. The unique processes that the company has adopted in order to push past the idea of "sustainable" are reflected in their visual marketing materials available to consumers -- specifically in the use of visual rhetoric through the elements of design present in images, colors, text, motifs, and white space. These are the primary focus of the following analysis of the brand's visuals, as well as how each element of design is based in the values of quality, environment, and ethics that the company was founded on and maintains in their practices today. By looking at Christy Dawn, we can see how the visual allusion to motivators for sustainable fashion consumption in a brand's marketing materials functions to not only effectively communicate their rhetoric of sustainability to their audience and encourage them to consume, but also to transcend the loose concept of sustaining and instead innovatively push forward towards regenerating and healing.

BRAND ANALYSIS

Because of the unique and progressive “beyond sustainable” practices that Christy Dawn holds and the way that this positively impacts their environmental visual rhetoric, the brand continually faces the challenge of communicating this to their audience.

Without this communication of the brand’s sustainable rhetoric, Christy Dawn might fail to appeal to the consumer base specifically motivated to purchase their products, and especially fail to appeal to those comfortable purchasing fast fashion. The goal for the brand in their methods of communication must be to reach their consumers *through* their environmental rhetoric (both visually and textually) while also attracting consumers on an aesthetic level. The brand must constantly strive to strike the balance between visually appealing materials and informative materials that educate their consumers.

Because Christy Dawn is a clothing brand, marketing materials that reflect and persuade consumers to purchase their attractive clothing pieces are just as important as materials that seek to navigate their consumers through the enactment of their environmental rhetoric. Ultimately, one place where we can see this balance occur is through the visual rhetoric driving the design decisions and elements present throughout the brand and its marketing -- specifically, in the images, colors, text, and motifs/white space. These elements, grounded in the principles of visual rhetoric and supported by values of quality, environment, and ethics (the motivators of sustainable fashion consumption), are what the analysis of the brand will be centered around. The objective

of this analysis is to determine the successes of Christy Dawn's visual marketing as compared to other sustainable fashion brands, and how sustainable fashion brands can, in the future, employ similar tactics with the purpose of attracting consumers to a more conscious and intentional method of fashion consumption. This analysis divides the visual rhetoric into four components: images, color, typography, and white space/motifs. For each of these components, I analyze the relationship between the visual elements themselves and the larger argument and appeal by Christy Dawn to the motivators for the consumption of sustainable fashion.

Images

The first component to analyze are the images used by Christy Dawn. Images have long been analyzed in visual rhetoric as a function of credibility and ethos, as "Human experiences that are spatially oriented, non-linear, multi-dimensional, and dynamic often can be communicated only through visual imagery or other non-discursive symbols" (Foss 143). Christy Dawn's images, therefore, exist as a rhetorical strategy to communicate these experiences as they relate to the brand's sustainability. These images were analyzed by identifying their respective appeals to the motivators of quality, environment, and ethics. The most immediate points of visual contact for viewers on the Christy Dawn site are these images.

The initial landing page for the website consists of an image fitted across the entire screen that displays models wearing Christy Dawn dresses arranged around a table in an outdoor setting. The user remains on this page until they scroll down for more information or visit another page with the navigation menu at the top-left corner.



Fig. 2: The landing page of Christy Dawn's website, entirely occupied by a single image.

Images are present on every page of the website, not just the ones where images of their products available for purchase are displayed. Nearly every piece of textual information on the website is accompanied by a related image. The sheer prevalence of images in the visual marketing of Christy Dawn demonstrates an important concept: images are the greatest way for the brand to actually “enact” their environmental rhetoric rather than simply rely on text, similar to what DeVoss and Sackey point out. Since their consumers cannot be present to witness Christy Dawn in action and see their farming practices, factory operations, or block-printing processes that support this rhetoric (and they might not be aware that these practices contribute to a brand's sustainability), images are vital channels to helping their consumers understand the sometimes-ambiguous written terms and ideas associated with the brand's enactment of the rhetoric.

These images also provide consumers with the security in knowing that this enactment is actually taking place, moving past the “look” or language of sustainability that some brands use without any real documentation. The concrete quality that images

give to Christy Dawn's sustainable rhetoric appeals to all three motivators for sustainable fashion consumption: quality, environment, and ethics.

Many of the images present on the Christy Dawn website appeal to the motivator of quality. While it is not always possible to present a clear picture of the quality of the garments Christy Dawn produces strictly through images showing the clothing, as quality of clothing is something inherently tactile and rooted in the feel of the fabric, the brand does deploy several strategies to indicate the quality of the items. On both the "Honoring Mother Earth" page of the website and the "Farm-to-Closet Initiative" section of their "Journal" page, there are images that display each step of the process in the creation of the garments -- from the construction of the organic cotton or the sourcing of the deadstock fabrics used in making the dresses, to the actual block-printing of the materials and sewing of the dresses. The visual demonstration of the process that goes into creating the products, through the images demonstrating the painstaking and specialized process of spinning cotton into thread and fabric or dyeing it, helps consumers to understand the time and craftsmanship dedicated to the dresses, which evokes quality.

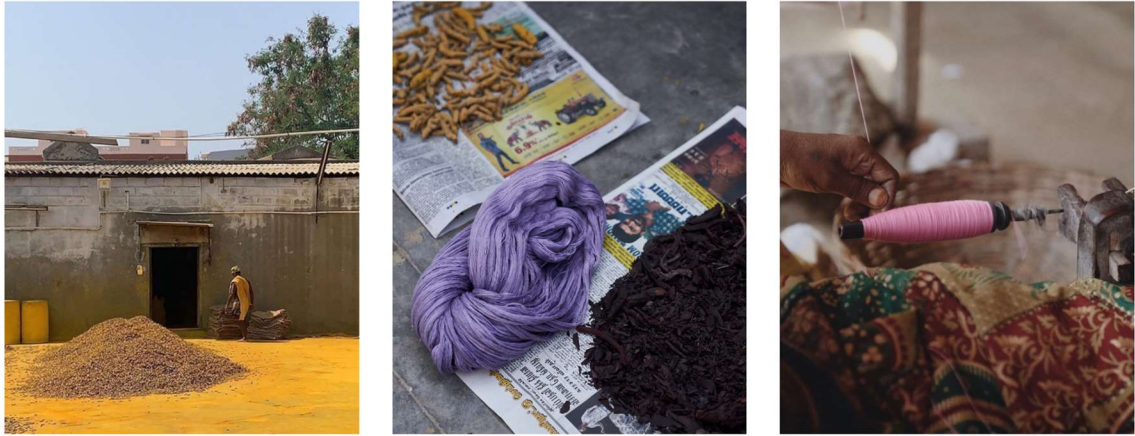


Fig. 3: These images display the steps in the process of constructing and dyeing the organic cotton fabric from which the dresses in the farm-to-closet collection have been made.



Fig 4: An image of one of the brand's partners in India constructing the organic cotton fabric.

Another subtle indicator of quality that Christy Dawn emphasizes in the images on their website is the focus on the patterns and prints of the fabrics used to create their dresses. An image on the “Honoring Mother Earth” page of the website under the section entitled “Repurposing Fabrics” depicts the rolls of deadstock fabric used by Christy Dawn, which feature similar floral prints. Floral functions as a constant in the realm of fashion and textiles, existing throughout history as a classic print that rarely seems dated or obsolete. While this may seem trivial, their aim is to underscore an important aspect of quality: the timelessness, rather than trendiness, of their products. According to Christy Dawn, “We have an understated timeless aesthetic, designing pieces with classic silhouettes. We don’t design with trends in mind, but rather create pieces that serve as staples for decades to come” (*Honoring Mother Earth*). These claims, accompanied by images that support them, directly confront and appeal to any expectations consumers of sustainable fashion may have regarding quality, not only in the materials used but also in the designs used by the brand that echo the most lasting features of fashion from the past.



Fig. 5: This image, next to the description of their deadstock fabric collection, displays the fabric remnants from which the dresses are made, focusing on the delicate and unique prints and patterns.



Fig. 6: An image shows the process of block-printing the organic cotton fabric with one of the patterns used in a variety of dresses from the brand.

Ensuring that each photo represents a different element of quality in some way for their audience is a key determiner in the types of photos Christy Dawn chooses to include. In contrast to Christy Dawn's selection of photos, other sustainable clothing brands make claims regarding quality, but do not support these visually with any images indicating the steps taken to preserve quality in the materials or processes by which the garments are created. For example, the sustainable brand Reformation has a statement and discussion of the quality of the fabrics they utilize on their website, but it is simply accompanied by images of the brand's products rather than images that show the physical *enactment* of the quality standards held by the brand.

High standards

Fiber selection affects how you're going to wash the garment and potentially recycle it one day. That's why we have our own Ref fiber standard. We tried to make these as holistic as possible, taking into consideration water input, energy input, land use, eco-toxicity, greenhouse gas emissions, human toxicity, availability, and price.

Fig. 7: The statement regarding fabrics on the sustainable brand Reformation's website.



Fig. 8: The textual claims regarding quality on Reformation's website are only supported by images of the brand's clothing, rather than the processes and fabrics used in production.

While other brands like Reformation make textual claims about the process behind the assembly of their products in their factory, which indicate the quality of their clothing, there are, again, no images present to support these textual claims and help their consumers to understand their enactment of the sustainable rhetoric they outline in these kinds of statements.

The images on Christy Dawn's website also appeal to environmental values that motivate the consumption of sustainable fashion. Both the subject matter and the composition of the photographs seek to further the enactment of the brand's sustainable rhetoric. Similar to the way in which the brand prioritizes communicating the sustainability of their products through both the textual evidence and visual representation of the quality, this approach remains the same for addressing their environmental values. Christy Dawn textually outlines these values in the following statement:

A dress can only be considered beautiful if the process used to produce it preserves the integrity and beauty of the Earth and her people. When deciding what to wear, we have an obligation to consider how it's made and the impact of that process. (*Honoring Mother Earth*)

The website goes on to detail the brand's regenerative farming movement and the positive impact it has been proven to have on the regional environment of the farms as well as the more widespread impact these practices have had in the fashion industry as a whole. The brand not only discusses goals of avoiding a negative effect on the environment, but also how their practices heal the earth.

Christy Dawn's website represents this motivator visually with photos that demonstrate the "before and after" of these practices, as well as with photos that demonstrate what this process looks like in action. For example, on the "Farm-to-Closet" page of their website, a screenwide interactive photo reveals the effects their regenerative farm has had on healing and nurturing the soil to combat the destructive effects of traditional farming on the land. On the left is an image of the farmland before the utilization of regenerative farming tactics; the earth is dry, dusty, and barren. On the right is an image of the farmland during the season of the regenerative cotton farm; there is life and growth, and the earth appears healthy and green. This visual is almost shocking and reveals, through a firsthand perspective, the enactment of their sustainable rhetoric that comes from their practices as a fashion brand.



Fig. 9: An interactive sliding image at the top of the website's "Farm-to-Closet" page.



Fig. 10: An image on the Farm-to-Closet page of the website depicting workers at Oshadi Collective, the regenerative farming community partnered with Christy Dawn.

Other images that display the enactment of these claims depict the workers in the regenerative farming community the brand has partnered with in India. Images like these, which put a face to the environmental values of the brand, allow consumers to understand that these practices that lead to the production of the dresses are directly impacting both the environment and the regional community in a positive way. The effect of seeing the faces of the movement, rather than reading distant details *about* the movement is what makes these images a powerful communicator of environment for Christy Dawn. Appealing to this motivator of the environment encourages consumers to consider the more wide-reaching and less personal effects of supporting such a business and purchasing their products.

In addition to the images that show the physical processes that contribute to their sustainable rhetoric, other photographs used on the website, even ones of the products themselves evoke the values of the environmentalism that drive the actions of the brand. In contrast to other sustainable brands, such as Reformation, the product photos for Christy Dawn are not shot in traditional studio spaces. All of the photos depicting the garments sold by Christy Dawn were shot in natural spaces in the outdoors, as opposed to more sterile or cold environments. Although Reformation's product photos are still well-composed, well-lit, and professional photos that effectively showcase their products, the setting of the outdoors in Christy Dawn's images feels natural, almost as if they were not posed images at all; yet, they retain all the positive qualities of posed and planned studio images. While the purpose of traditional studio images for fashion brands are meant to highlight the clothing over the model, setting, or any other aspect of the photo, Christy Dawn attempts to allow the setting and the clothing work in conjunction to evoke these feelings of environmentalism that are core to the brand.

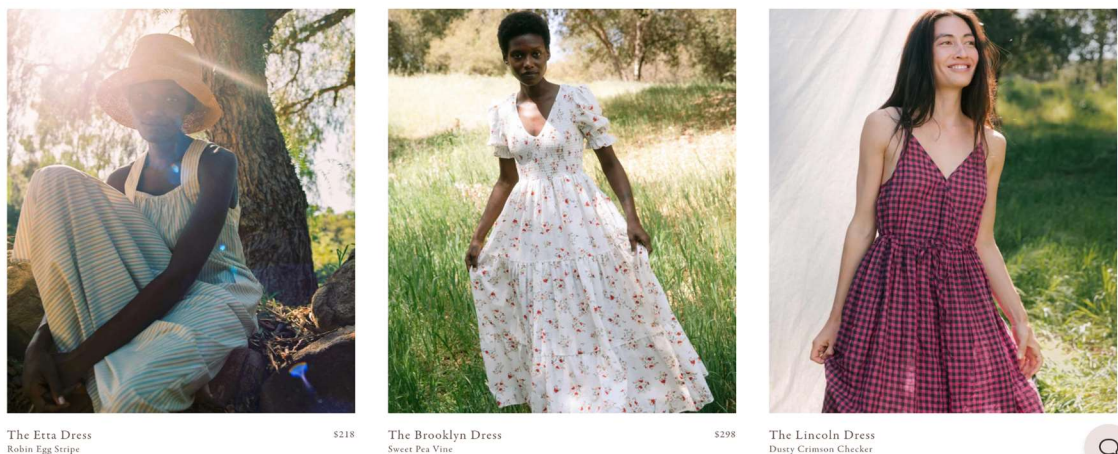


Fig. 11: Christy Dawn's product photos are shot entirely outdoors.



Christine Dress
\$218

7 colors



Nikita Dress
\$248

10 colors

Fig. 12: Reformation's product photos maintain the more traditional posed models and studio settings typical of most fashion brands.

The outdoor settings showcase not only the beauty of the products, but also the beauty of the earth, which the brand seeks to protect and preserve through their environmental values and the resulting practices they implement in the creation of the clothing.

Consumers may not even perceive this while shopping through their website, but they may feel that the overall aesthetic of the product photos contributes to the mission of the brand -- this is the goal of the brand in using such photos. Ultimately, Christy Dawn uses these natural, outdoor settings for their photographs to communicate the ways in which the garments themselves are products of a larger movement to protect the environment and positively, rather than negatively or even neutrally, impact the earth.

Christy Dawn's use of images on the brand's website also works to further their sustainable rhetoric by appealing to the motivator of ethics in the consumption of sustainable fashion. In opposition to fast fashion brands, and even some less ethical environmentally-friendly clothing brands, Christy Dawn makes claims of their ethical

values through the way in which the company seeks to “treat every member of [its] team like family” (*Meet Your Dressmaker*). The brand works to provide excellent working conditions as well as payment to their employees, who are paid above a living wage for the factory work they do in assembling the dresses. These textual claims of the brand’s sustainable rhetoric are backed by the types of images displayed on the website. On the “Our Team” page of Christy Dawn’s website, each and every member of the company is pictured along with their name, a short statement, and their job title. The employees in the photographs are smiling and looking directly into the camera, appear proud of the work they do, and certainly embody the “family” spirit of the company and how it treats its employees.

While other sustainable brands such as Reformation provide photographs and names of their employees in their factory, the employees have all been photographed while working, and some do not even show the employee’s face. They are all also framed with the working environment visible in the background, so it is clear that these people are workers in their factory. The ethical treatment of employees may be similar between the two companies, but Christy Dawn has highlighted the necessity to portray its employees as humans and family members first, and workers second.



Fig. 13: A portrait of each employee that works in the factory, accompanied by their name, a statement from them, and their job description is present on the “Our Team” page of Christy Dawn’s website.



Josefina



Lucila



Beira

Figs. 14-16: Reformation’s website does contain photos of the brand’s employees, though they are all pictured while working.

Images like Christy Dawn's, which, through the use of portraits present the employees as dignified and professional (as all employees should be treated, but is often not the case in the fast fashion industry), illustrate the enactment of the ethical claims made by the brand to support their sustainable rhetoric, and ultimately appeal to the ethical values at the forefront of the motivators for the consumption of sustainable fashion. This appeal to quality, environment, and ethics through the use of rhetorical imagery on Christy Dawn's site helps the brand to more effectively reach their consumers and communicate their sustainable rhetoric to them.

Color

Another element of design considered when analyzing Christy Dawn's brand is color. When taking the idea of color into account in this context, it encompasses not only the colors used in components of the design, such as text or backgrounds, but also the color scheme maintained in the photographs present in the design. Although photographs are referenced, the focus of the argument surrounds the toning and color correction of the photos in order to align with a certain color scheme rather than the content of the photos, which is discussed in the previous section. Photographs are thus relevant apart from their content in the context of Christy Dawn's visual success with color (as a result of the concept of a coherent color scheme and adherence to principles of design), as well as in the context of Christy Dawn's communicative success with color in regards to reaching their consumer base's motivators of quality, environment, and ethics. Color, which plays a large (albeit less consciously perceivable) role in the success of a design, is a principle of visual rhetoric whose persuasive effect relies on both design theory and the "emotional

muscle,” or the unconscious, involuntary responses or feelings associated with color or attached to color by the viewer (Golombisky and Hagen 116-17).

The use of color throughout Christy Dawn’s visual marketing materials allows another point of connection with their consumers and their motivations for the consumption of sustainable fashion. Color is extremely relevant to not only the aesthetic of Christy Dawn’s visual branding, but also the message Christy Dawn seeks to send to their consumers regarding their environmental, ethical, and quality related values. In order to effectively send this message, Christy Dawn’s use of color across their website must be in line with the rhetorical goals of color as an element of design: to “[create] visual impact,” “organize,” and “[evoke] emotion” (Golombisky and Hagen 116).

Color is utilized in various elements across the Christy Dawn website, such as in text, the toning of images, and the background, buttons, and footer of each webpage. A notable way in which color enhances the visual design and creates organization for Christy Dawn’s website is the relationship between the color of textual components and the background color of the website. On the website, the background color is white and the color for all textual components on the website is a dark, earthy brown tone. While the brown tone strays slightly from the conventions of black text on a white background, the website still maintains an adherence to the principles of design (such as contrast) that promote readability and visibility of text, as, in general, “the rule of thumb says stick with dark-on-light or light-on-dark color combos” (Golombisky and Hagen 126).

CHRISTY DAWN

honoring mother earth

Fig. 17: The header, featuring the brand's logo, on Christy Dawn's website is the first place where viewers see the brown text on white background.

The choice of the brown tone for text and white for the background is also rooted in another goal when designing with color. This color scheme comes directly from the images present on Christy Dawn's website -- all images, both by nature of their subject matter and outdoor setting, as well as by the color correcting and toning of the images to avoid high-key, intensely saturated color palettes (an effect achieved by changing the color saturation and warmth of the images).

Featured



Farm-to-Closet



Organic Cotton



All

Fig. 18: Viewers can see where the text and background colors are derived from the color scheme generated by the choice of photos on the website and how these photos are toned.

As a result, the light, natural tones represented in the images (for example, the skin tones and tones of stone and earth in the “Featured” collection of photos) become the basis for the colors used in the design of the website. This move follows best practices in design theory, as dominant colors in color photographs used in a design can suggest a color scheme (Golombisky and Hagen 123-124). The color scheme chosen by Christy Dawn is one that produces a more organized design, since the colors used between text, background, icons, and images all align. It is also one that subtly reaches that “emotional muscle” of the viewer which creates associations; these colors, having been plucked from the photos used, derive directly from nature itself and are generally associated with nature and the earth. This contributes to how consumers view the brand’s aesthetic and sustainability measures. Ultimately, the success of color in creating a fluent, visually appealing design for Christy Dawn’s website contributes to and aligns with the brand’s awareness of the communicative potential of color as a reminder of their identity (Golombisky and Hagen 124). This translates directly into how consumers, either consciously or unconsciously, perceive Christy Dawn’s environmental, quality-related, and ethical values.

Having established a successful baseline in accordance with other principles of design like contrast, the first persuasive move that Christy Dawn makes with color is an appeal to the motivator of quality by avoiding reliance on color trends. The color scheme of Christy Dawn is generally composed of neutrals and warm, earthy tones, such as browns and taupes contrasted with white. This is also seen in the footer of the website, accessibility icons, customer service icons, and in the text buttons that direct users to other pages of the website. The footer is separated from the background by an off-white

block, which stays true to this neutral color scheme of whites and browns. The accessibility and customer service chat icons that move with the screen as the user scrolls are, respectively, a taupe color paired with a lighter pink tone in the color family of browns used elsewhere on the website.



Fig. 19: The footer of the website maintains the white and brown color scheme in the background and icons, which Christy Dawn also keeps consistent across other pages of the website.



Fig 20: The clickable text buttons on Christy Dawn's website utilize the same brown tones as other icons and textual elements present on the homepage and footer of the website.

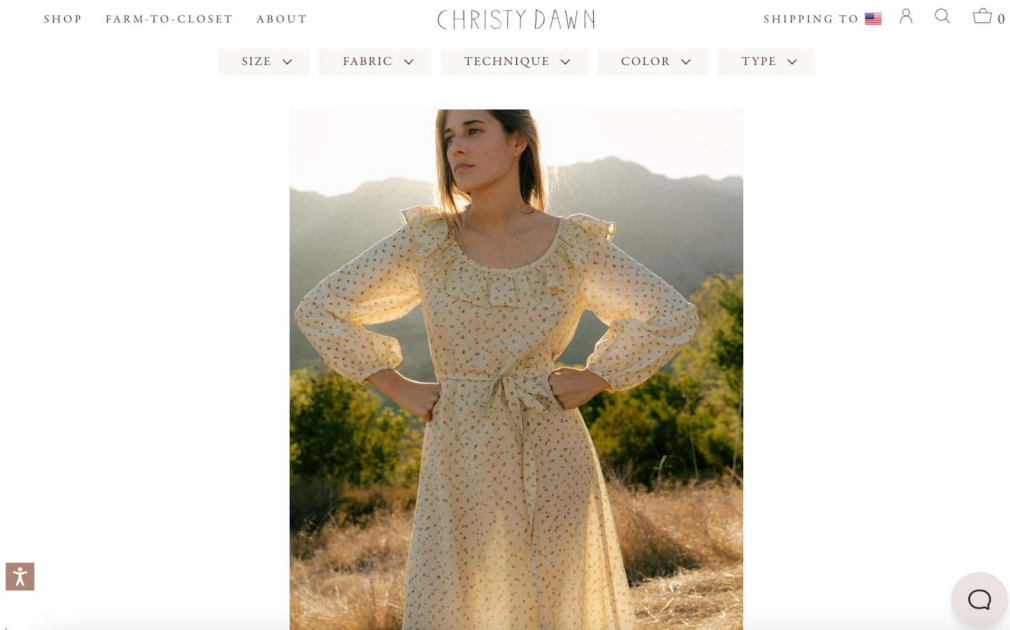
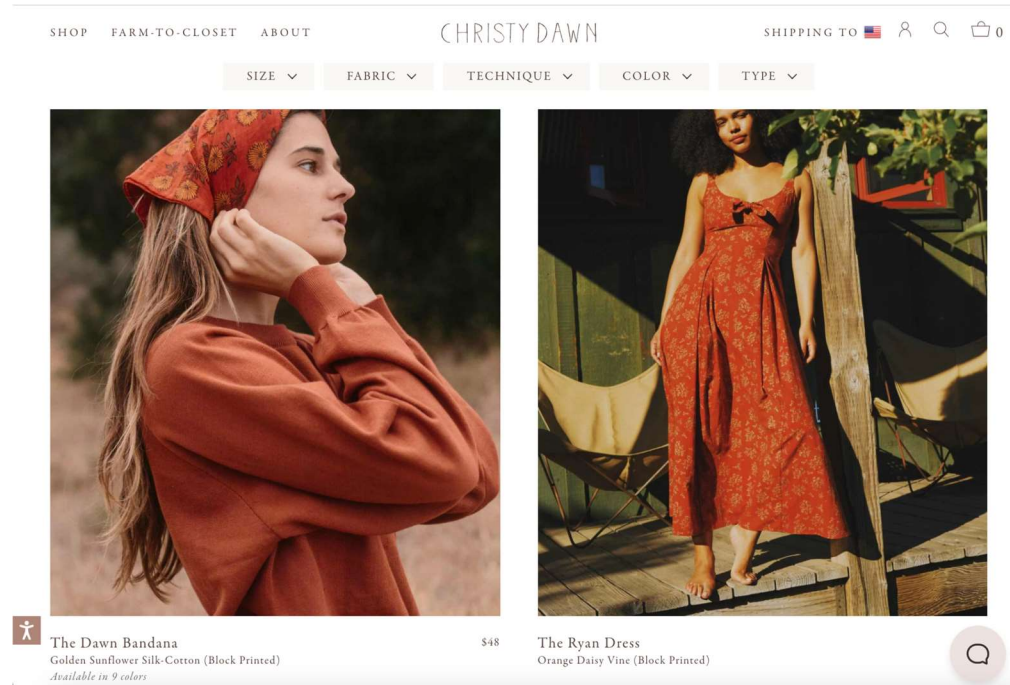
Rather than using brighter, trendier colors that may be the popular colors of the moment within fashion or advertising, Christy Dawn makes use of a two-color scheme that implies longevity. The neutrals utilized across the website underscore the brand's values of creating classic designs that will age well, rather than pieces that will no longer be trendy as soon as fashion trends complete another cycle. Here, Christy Dawn is avoiding the dominant approach of other fashion brands, who rely heavily on color forecasting and

trends. Color forecasting through companies like Pantone identifies these trendier colors, and many brands will race to incorporate them into both their visual marketing materials as well as their clothing; however, these colors die out just as quickly as they became popular, meaning neither the marketing materials nor the clothing will be able to withstand the next change of season in color (Segran). The colors used throughout the Christy Dawn website are, similar to fast fashion brands, the same ones echoed in their actual clothing designs. The difference is that Christy Dawn sought to focus on the motivator of quality to develop a color scheme, rather than trend. The brown and white tones used in the website imply that the Christy Dawn brand as a whole will not go out of style or quickly become obsolete like many fast fashion brands, but will instead remain grounded in their values of quality *as* long lasting, characterizing both the brand and the garments they produce as things that will, in the consumer's mind, stand the test of time.

This same color scheme is also rhetorically grounded in its appeal to the motivator of environment for sustainable fashion. Seeing as the website's color scheme reflects the colors utilized in the garments produced, there is an obvious link between color and environment for the brand. Two large environmental components of Christy Dawn's garment production are the sourcing of deadstock fabrics and the creation of organic cotton fabric colored and printed with "natural or organic dyes" (Honoring Mother Earth). Deadstock fabrics are sourced carefully so the prints and color schemes stay relatively close to the preferred aesthetic of the brand, all while maintaining a closeness to the roots of environmentalism in the sustainable fashion movement, where the use of deadstock fabrics is commonplace. Organic cotton fabric that is dyed without the use of synthetics is done so with "natural dyes [that] are extracted from plant roots,

leaves, and bark” (Printing the Alchemy of Plants). The lighter colors and faded tones not only feed into this specific idea of quality, but are also reminiscent of these natural dyes rather than harsh chemical dyes.

Because both of these sources of color for the garments produced by Christy Dawn are so inextricably linked to environmentalism, generating a color scheme for visual marketing materials from the colors used in their clothing is an effective way to reach their consumer base motivated by environmental values. When viewing the website one one page as a cohesive unit, especially on the “Shop” page where actual product photos are displayed, it is evident that the use of color in the visual elements of the website is inspired and influenced by the colors present in both the garments and the toned photos produced by the brand. The garments themselves, having been naturally dyed, obviously represent warm, rich, earthy tones of taupe, rust, dark brown, and off-white. These are the same colors presented in the visual elements of the website, specifically in the brown color of the textual components, the taupe utilized in buttons and icons on the site, and the off-white used in the dropdown menus of the “Shop” page of the website, as seen in Figs. 18-21. These colors add to the organic imagination of color, rather than pure, perfect whites and stark black.



Figs. 21-22: The color scheme developed throughout the visual elements of the website mimics the colors utilized in both the photos and the physical garments produced by the brand, creating definite links to the motivator of environment for consumers.

Since the processes that generate the color scheme used in the creation of the garments sold by Christy Dawn are so heavily tied to the brand's environmental values, the generation of a color scheme for the brand's visual materials that reflects these processes is persuasive in the way it appeals to the environmental values that ultimately encourage consumption.

The color used, as well as the lack thereof, across the visual elements of Christy Dawn's website also works persuasively to communicate the brand's ethical values to their consumers. Despite every product or process photo on the website being in color and toned to fit the aesthetic and color scheme of the brand, portraits of all of Christy Dawn's employees on the "Our Team" page of the website are toned in black and white. Just as Christy Dawn focuses on maintaining ethical standards within their factory and workspace by paying employees a higher than average living wage, proper working conditions and hours, and a "family" atmosphere, rather than the more common alternative in the fast fashion industry, the use of black and white toning on employee portraits represents another ethical choice to accompany their existing ethical values that drive production. Black and white toning allows not only visual impact and contrast from the plain white background of the website, but it also allows contrast from the product and process photos on every other page of the website.



Fig. 23: Each employee portrait is toned in black and white, rather than to fit the color scheme or aesthetic used by the brand in other visual elements of the website.

This decision underscores Christy Dawn's ethical goals by avoiding the act of commodifying employees or changing their physical appearance to fit the established aesthetic and color scheme of the brand. Employees are seen by consumers as something entirely separate from the products sold by Christy Dawn, unlike the way in which the fast fashion industry fuses the two and even allows products to overshadow workers by erasing all evidence of their part in the assembly of garments. Black and white toning also emphasizes the familial atmosphere of the employees working for the brand -- they are depicted as equals, even the brand's founder. The black and white photography puts all employees on equal footing, emphasizing their collective value as forces to bring about the larger mission of the brand. As a result, consumers, whether they recognize it or not, are made aware of the ethical goals met by the brand even through the use of color alone.

In all of Christy Dawn's visual marketing materials, their use of color is the same: there is a consistent reliance on a natural and neutral color palette, which exists to reach customers through the effective and pleasing design of the materials, and in turn, communicate and reiterate their message as a brand to these consumers. Color, as it exists on the website in background color, textual elements, buttons, and icons, functions persuasively in the way it is presented to viewers, making it an effective tool of visual rhetoric *and* an effective contribution to the "beyond sustainable" rhetoric of Christy Dawn's brand. The fluency and appeal of Christy Dawn's design in the brand's visuals in the way color follows principles of design like contrast, as well as the nuanced method of weaving together color and the values of the brand, reach the brand's consumers on the levels of quality, environment, and ethics.

Typography

The element of typography also has an important role when analyzing the branding of Christy Dawn and how the values of the brand are communicated to consumers. In this context, typography refers to the different typefaces utilized by Christy Dawn across their brand visuals, and does not include the actual text or its meaning; typography is an element of design, whereas the text itself and its meaning is part of the written portion of branding that Christy Dawn does rather than their visual branding. The different typefaces discussed originate in the brand's logo, headers for pages of the website, headings for textual content and images, and clickable text buttons across the website. Typefaces will be discussed in their role as an element of a functional design (for

example, creating visual hierarchy) as well as how the different varieties of typefaces used by Christy Dawn appeal to the motivators for consumers of sustainable fashion.

Typography plays a significant role in discussions of visual rhetoric within writing studies and professional writing, but especially within the area of visual design, where different styles of typefaces are utilized more freely. In a 2003 study by Eva Brumberger, she sought to investigate whether or not typefaces have begun to be perceived as having “personas” (Brumberger 2007). These personas are identified in this study as the result of a recent shift in media towards an “intellectual cognition” process where “we consciously identify visual components and their relationships to one another and to the verbal rhetoric of the document” (Brumberger 2007). In other words, Brumberger posits that typefaces, as a tool of visual rhetoric in design, are perceived by viewers as having different identities, which can contribute to the overall rhetoric of the designer (or brand, in the case of Christy Dawn) that is being conveyed in the text itself. For Christy Dawn, this overall rhetoric is the rhetoric of sustainability, as communicated by the verbal mission of Christy Dawn and further affirmed by their visual design choices, which has been discussed previously.

Supported by the arguments of other rhetoricians, Brumberger makes the claim in her study that typefaces almost certainly have personas that affect the rhetoric of the designer or brand utilizing them. Scholars quoted by Brumberger indicate that the “visual language of typography” can convey texture and mood, and even “sound” serious, funny, or friendly in the same way that language can (Brumberger 2008). Ultimately, scholars share an opinion that typefaces can demonstrate distinct personas, and there are “as many possibilities for typeface persona as there are typefaces” (Brumberger 2008). These

various personas offered by typefaces provide companies with a launch point from which, at first contact with a consumer (such as in a logo), they can begin to communicate their overall rhetorical message. For example, a serif typeface commonly used in academia, such as Times New Roman, may suggest formality or rigidity, rather than playfulness. In this way, typefaces work similarly to elements of design such as color, in that an “emotional muscle” is responsible for their perception. This emotionally charged perception can be based on popular social connotations built around different families of type, but can also be the result of personal feelings or the collective feelings expected from a certain demographic. By keeping in mind studies like Brumberger’s, Christy Dawn ultimately utilizes type to communicate and promote their rhetoric of sustainability to their consumers by appealing to the motivators of quality, environment, and ethics that drive consumption.

The typography utilized by Christy Dawn appeals to the motivators of sustainable fashion in several ways through the two main families of type used. These two families, serif and sans serif, are present in two recurring fonts. The first, a serif font similar to Old Style typefaces like Times New Roman or Palatino, is the most heavily featured across the site. It is used in all headings, subheadings, and written blocks of text on each page. For example, this typeface appears in a heading and body of text on the “Honoring Mother Earth” page of the site, in the website’s footer, and in the dropdown menus in the header (see Figs. 23-25).

Reciprocal Relationships

We forge mutually beneficial relationships with all of the people and ecosystems we work with, from the farm and weavers in India to dressmakers and photographers in Los Angeles. We strongly believe in the power of reciprocity and view ourselves as part of a larger web that we all rely on. Every member of the community making our dresses is essential, and we honor their contribution through long-term commitments.

Follow The Journey Of Christy Dawn

your email

Gift Cards • FAQ • Shipping & Returns • Instagram • Give \$30, Get \$30

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ABOUT

Honoring Mother Earth

Our Team

Our Community

Journal

Figs. 24-26: The serif font used most commonly across the website can be found in headings, bodies of text, clickable links in the footer, and dropdown menus in the header.

The second typeface utilized in Christy Dawn's visual marketing is, while not as widely used throughout the website, one of the defining visual features of the brand itself as a result of its use in the Christy Dawn logo (see Fig. 26). This typeface falls into the sans

serif family and is in a handwritten style, with the thickness of strokes varying throughout each letter in order to mimic the natural flow of writing on paper with a utensil.

The logo for Christy Dawn features the brand name in a tall, thin, hand-drawn sans-serif typeface. Below the brand name, the tagline "honoring mother earth" is written in a smaller, lowercase, handwritten-style font.

Fig. 27: The sans serif font used in Christy Dawn's logo is one of the defining visual features of the brand.

The most crucial part to understanding the effect of these typefaces on consumers is identifying the context these typefaces are being used in by Christy Dawn. In the context of a sustainable fashion brand attempting to appeal to the motivators of quality, environment, and ethics, the traditional collective social perception of these two typefaces are not the only forces at work on the consumer. While general social perceptions of typefaces (such as Times New Roman as academic or formal) impact consumers across the board, the “emotional muscle” that influences personal perception is connected to the mindset of Christy Dawn’s consumer base: one where sustainability (and therefore quality, environment, and ethics) is at the forefront. Thus, Christy Dawn relies on both the widespread, general social perceptions of these fonts by those situated outside of the realm of visual design, as well as the more targeted contextual associations of their consumer base, in order to most effectively reach their buyers. This is why both social perceptions and context-driven associations with these typefaces are important when analyzing how Christy Dawn communicates their sustainable rhetoric through the use of typography.

The motivator of quality plays a role in the choice of both the serif and sans serif font used by Christy Dawn. Quality, as a motivator driving the consumption of sustainable fashion, is (as discussed in previous sections) linked to notions of timeless or lasting garments in terms of outliving trends, slow production due to the handcrafted nature of products, and garments made from materials that will also *physically* last over time. Therefore, when appealing to quality with the typefaces used in their design, Christy Dawn prioritized typefaces that would evoke these notions of “timeless,” “handcrafted,” and “lasting.” Apart from reasons related to visual hierarchy, contrast, or variety, this is what makes the inclusion of both a serif and sans serif font work. Each appeals to the motivator of quality in a different way.

For the serif typeface, context is necessary and important. Outside of the context of these motivators like quality, an old-style serif typeface like the one used by Christy Dawn could be, according to some social perceptions, formal or academic, and not suitable or attractive enough for use in the visual marketing of a fashion brand. However, in the context of quality as it is linked to sustainability, the use of a serif typeface strengthens Christy Dawn’s credibility and communicates their rhetoric effectively. A serif typeface is used to recall these notions of “timeless” and “lasting” -- unlike the seemingly more modern, trendy, or corporate sans serif typefaces utilized by most major clothing brands.

The sans serif typeface used by Christy Dawn is also a deliberate choice for the way it appeals to different notions of quality. Rather than a sterile or corporate sans serif typeface with clean lines and uniform thickness, Christy Dawn uses a handwritten style of sans serif for their logo. Because the majority of text on the website is present in the

serif font, the use of a sans serif not only promotes visual variety, indicating hierarchy and adding interest to the site, but this particular handwritten sans serif also emphasizes the quality related notion of “handcrafted” or “handmade.” A more natural and organic handwritten typeface results in the fulfillment of this aspect of Christy Dawn’s appeal to the motivator of quality.

Other sustainable fashion brands, such as Reformation, choose to employ only sans serif typefaces in their visual design, which abides with current design trends and seems natural for a fashion brand, but also links them to the practices of many fast fashion brands, which could potentially discount any notion of their quality almost entirely and fail to reach their consumer base on the grounds of quality, even if that is a motivator they attempt to appeal to with their actual products.

Reformation

SHEIN

FOREVER 21

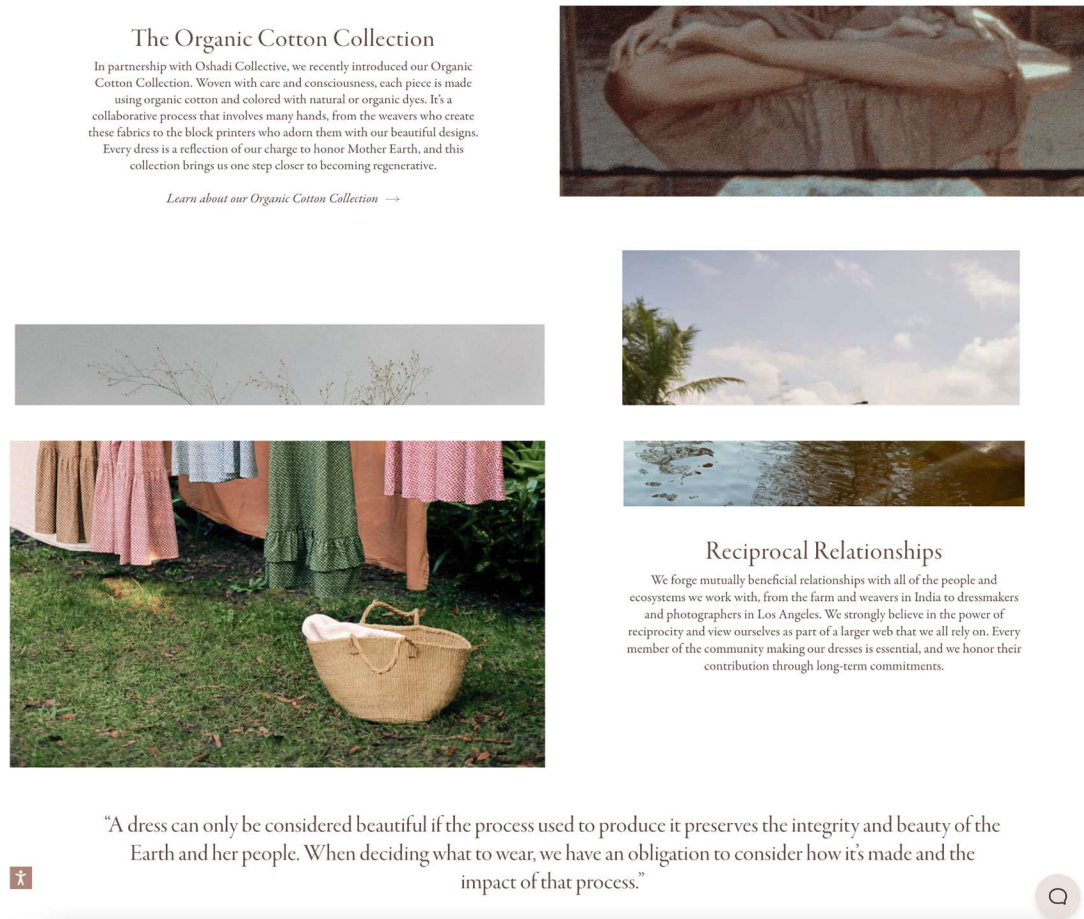
Figs. 28-30: A comparison of the sans serif font used in the sustainable brand Reformation’s logo to the sans serif fonts used in the logos of highly popular fast fashion brands like Forever 21 or Shein that do not attempt to appeal to quality as a motivator for consumption of their products.

Because quality is such a core belief and practice in the industry of sustainable fashion, and specifically for the Christy Dawn brand, it is clear why the typefaces chosen must present a persona that aligns with notions related to quality. In this way, the communication and enactment of sustainable rhetoric, through reaching consumers with the motivator of quality, is more effectively achieved by Christy Dawn's brand visuals.

White Space and Motifs

There are some elements of the visual marketing of Christy Dawn that are important and necessary to touch on briefly in addition to the more comprehensive discussions on images, color, and typography. While not all of these elements make an appeal to all three motivators for the consumption of sustainable fashion, a deliberate appeal to at least one is present in these visual elements. These elements may also only appear on one specific page of the website, rather than across the site as a whole. Finally, these design decisions are also points for further discussion and analysis in future research in visual rhetoric, as not much literature exists on the implications of these design moves in marketing materials (rather than more professional documents like whitepapers or infographics). The first of these is the concept of white space. White space can be defined as negative space within a visual design that contributes to an overall fluidity of a document or design. Though white space can refer to many aspects of a design, I will primarily be discussing white space in Christy Dawn's branding as it relates to the placement of images and text on the website. Christy Dawn utilizes white space in an unconventional way, particularly on the webpage "Honoring Mother Earth": images and text are not placed in a uniform pattern across a page, but rather placed in no pattern at

all. Images are seemingly scattered across the page, and white space is present in different areas throughout the page. The spacing between images and text on the page is not uniform either.



Figs. 31-32: Screenshots from the “Honoring Mother Earth” page of the Christy Dawn website, where white space is used in conjunction with images and text to create a “scattered” look across the page.

While in design theory, it is generally more commonplace and more accepted to organize on a grid, utilize the same margins throughout the page, and avoid trapped space (Golombisky and Hagen 76), Christy Dawn turns design theory on its head in a deliberate way by going against each of these general rules and instead opting to appeal more to the

motivators that drive the consumption of their products and promote their rhetoric of sustainability.

By employing a “scattered” design with the use of white space and spacing of visual elements across a page, Christy Dawn creates a more organic and authentic persona for their brand. Rather than appealing to the strict, corporate boundaries of traditional design, the layout of Christy Dawn’s website almost feels more akin to a hand-curated scrapbook or journal than a company platform. This is both authentic and reminiscent of high culture as opposed to the more corporate practice of maximizing the amount of visual information on a page to present as much to the consumer as possible at one time. Christy Dawn, knowing that sustainability is the most important value for their consumer base, chooses to distance themselves as a brand from mass consumerism and the large corporations of fast fashion and contradict the opposite values, even in the realm of visual design, that perpetuate the culture of consumerism. By crafting this more genuine and personal design, the brand appeals to the motivator of quality by reinforcing the handcrafted nature of their products. This move also appeals to the environment as a motivator. Environmental conservation emphasizes the closeness to the natural state of being and nature itself, which is unpredictable, scattered, and sometimes messy, but beautiful because of that. This unpredictable use of white space and placement on the layout of their website is a subtle but highly impactful decision to further appeal to their consumer base and strengthen their sustainable rhetoric, and is brought about by the continuous return to the values that both they, as a brand, and their consumers hold.

The second smaller point for analysis involves Christy Dawn’s use of motifs on one page of their website. A motif is a visual element or pattern that occurs repeatedly

throughout a document or design in order to bring consistency to the overall look of the design. On the “Our Team” page of the Christy Dawn website, the motif of pressed flowers appears down the margins of the entire page. Even though this motif appears primarily on one page of the website, it serves as a visual reminder of the aesthetic of the brand on other pages of the website, which feature color images of nature and floral fabrics, ultimately appealing to the motivators for consumption.



Figs. 33-35: The motif of pressed flowers appears throughout the “Our Team” page of the website, cutting into corners of images and scattered down the margins of the page.

Before the discussion of why the pressed flowers themselves are specifically significant in the appeal to consumer motivators, it is necessary to understand how they contribute to the same authenticity as the use of white space and placement. These flowers are not artwork -- they appear as images of real, actual pressed flowers that have been “placed” on the page by its creator. Because this motif appears as an image of an actual flower, it

evokes the same feeling of the design functioning as a personal journal or scrapbook rather than a corporate website. Typically, pressed flowers will be pasted onto a physical page by the creator of a journal, underscoring the idea of a “scattered” or unpredictable design in line with nature. The flowers are not only present in the white space of the page; they also cut into and across the corners of images, highlighting the lack of precision in such a personal and authentic design.

Pressed flowers as a motif also contribute to the strength of Christy Dawn’s appeal to the motivators that drive consumers to their brand. Because this motif reinforces notions of the handcraftedness of the brand as a whole in addition to their products, this motif exists as an appeal to quality, much like the use of white space and placement. The motif of pressed flowers additionally, by nature of the associations between flowers and nature, provide a deliberate appeal to environmental motivators as well. The fact that the flowers are pressed and not living is significant as well for the discussion of environment, as it emphasizes the idea of something saved or preserved. This aligns with the way that the brand seeks to save the seemingly unusable farmland where their regenerative cotton is grown, one of the environmental practices that they employ, and thus seek to communicate to their consumers as part of their sustainable rhetoric. Pressed flowers are also symbolic of something used or past its prime that have been made beautiful or worthwhile that will continue to last into the future, just as Christy Dawn does in their practice of utilizing deadstock fabric that is seemingly waste and giving it a second life. This motif serves as an allusion to the enactment of their sustainable rhetoric that involves both environmental and quality-related practices, which each contribute to the appeal to consumers based on the motivators that influence them.

Both white space and motifs work together on different pages of Christy Dawn's website to make more understated appeals to the motivators of their consumers, but still contribute to the overall mission of the brand by communicating the enactment of their values of quality, environment, and ethics that make up their sustainable rhetoric.

CONCLUSIONS

Professional Writing and Rhetoric

Since so much of writing is driven by rhetoric and argument, there are reasonable connections between this research and the broader field of Professional Writing. While it is natural for all writers to understand that arguments occur textually, Professional Writing also depends upon the use of visual rhetoric, as many professional documents exist in a digital space and are design-based, making them ideal vehicles for a visual argument that works together with a written one. Even if a written mission statement is successful in communicating the brand's purpose and values to a consumer or viewer, the inclusion of visuals that support and reaffirm the notions of a written statement, ultimately appealing to viewers and making their own argument, can more effectively reach the audience of a brand or company.

The most important takeaway for scholars, then, is the way this research serves as an extension of the study by Donnie Sackey and Danielle DeVoss. Sackey and DeVoss posit that the sustainable rhetoric of an organization relies on the enactment of sustainability communicated to an audience. This enactment cannot exist in text alone, but must be communicated in other ways to audiences. This research demonstrates that professional writers must rely on visuals much more faithfully than written text as a communication of the enactment of sustainable practices. The communication of this enactment through visuals is an overarching need of audiences, and identifying audience

motivations such as environment or ethics (places where this enactment occurs) can provide a concrete strategy for professionals to follow in their appeal to the needs of their audience. Once a professional is able to identify the needs of an audience (or consumer base), they can target that audience by appealing to those needs, just as Christy Dawn has done by appealing to the motivators of quality, ethics, and environment that promote the consumption of sustainable fashion. This research pushes Professional Writing scholarship forward by solidifying methods of visually demonstrating Sackey and DeVoss' concept of *enactment* in sustainable rhetoric through the identifiable needs and motivations of an audience.

Business and Marketing

This research has broad implications for marketing with the idea that visual materials are an extremely effective way to target and convince consumers to buy a product. However, the most important conclusions to be made are for smaller businesses and sustainable brands. Specifically within the challenging and competitive industry of fashion, sustainable brands should understand how to reach an existing and invested consumer base. Even though Christy Dawn is a sustainable brand and has a smaller consumer base than most larger fast fashion entities, they still utilize marketing concepts to construct visuals that reach their audience on the level of their needs from the brand, such as the motivators of quality, ethics, and environment that are discussed in this analysis.

Although smaller brands may have a slightly different audience to market to and should ideally research and identify the demographics of their existing consumer base to narrow down individual motivators, the three motivators that this research identifies are a

good place for these small brands to begin. Small sustainable business can utilize the broader concepts of quality, environment, and ethics to market to their consumer base, and then begin to identify which consumer motivators they value and enact the most and can ultimately appeal to the most in a visual setting (whether it be through images, color, typography, or even another element of design not discussed in the analysis of Christy Dawn). This research creates a bridge between the refined machine of Christy Dawn's visual marketing methods and much smaller sustainable brands and businesses, demonstrating that careful marketing tactics developed from market research (which should identify a consumer base's needs and priorities) can certainly support a brand and draw in consumers, even if the consumer base is particularly niche, like those who support and consume sustainable fashion. For professionals creating visual documents for a client, whether it be a brand selling a product or a company providing a service, this research demonstrates the necessity to understand the importance and weight of visual rhetoric in communicating the larger mission of that brand or company.

Role as Consumers

This research also teaches readers of all disciplines the need to stay conscious of how they are being marketed to by companies, especially as this pertains to the sustainability, or lack thereof, of a brand or company. Since marketing teams create visuals that may overtly appeal to consumers, as evidenced by Christy Dawn's visual appeals to quality environment and ethics, it is of great importance to, as consumers, understand the way that marketing shapes our consumption. Although some brands, like Christy Dawn, use their marketing tactics to promote sustainability and reach consumers on the level of their

environmental or ethical priorities, other brands may make appeals to motivators like price, trendiness, or availability that may mask or overshadow their lack of sustainable practices as a brand. This is one reason for the rise in popularity of fast fashion despite its catastrophic effects on the environment and factory workers. The more that ecological problems like these exist and are impacted by the consumption habits of the general public, the more consumers need to be aware of the sometimes unnoticeable effects of marketing on their individual actions. While aesthetics alone are not enough to make a judgment call on a brand's sustainability, these visual appeals to consumers coupled with written data and documentation of sustainable practices are positive indicators of sustainability to trust in a brand. Because consumers cannot always be expected to do research on the specific sustainable practices of a brand, the best examples of branding and marketing materials that effectively communicate sustainability are the ones, like Christy Dawn, that provide this kind of documentation and data within their materials textually. Additionally, consumers can use this research to shape how they interact with and make purchases from brands, understanding that brands most committed to sustainability or even "beyond" sustainability will commit to visually representing more aspects of sustainability, such as ethics and quality, than just environmental impact. Ultimately, the influence of marketing on our role as consumers and the sustainability of our collective consumption is a dominant and global conclusion to be drawn from this research.

This project begs a final question: is this countermovement of sustainability a sign of hope for the world? Can the growth of sustainability work to offset (and ideally heal)

centuries of ecological damage? There is no easy, definitive answer; however, with increased stock and value placed in the movement of sustainability, and the more that sustainability moves to the forefront of processes like writing, marketing, and business, there is a decrease in the ignorance and complacency that prevent hope altogether. A *future* of sustainability demands a *present moment* of mindfulness, consciousness, and action. The research done here is just one of these many opportunities, and one piece of the movement.

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