

**The Role of the Sustainable Development Goals in Ethical
Manufacturing in the Fast Fashion Industry**
An Analysis of Inditex, Fast Retailing, and Gap Inc.

Claudia van Dijk
s1640259
c.m.m.van.dijk@umail.leidenuniv.nl
Mr.dr. Willem Visser 't Hooft
January 3, 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
CHAPTER 1: Literature Review	6
1.1: Historical Context: The Development of the Sustainability Discourse	7
1.2: The SDGs and the 2030 Agenda	8
1.3: The Sustainable Development Discourse and Human Rights	10
1.4: Agenda 2030 and Multinational Corporations	11
CHAPTER 2: The Fashion Industry Up Close	15
2.1: The Rise of Fast Fashion	15
2.2: Ethics in the Fashion Industry	17
CHAPTER 3: Methodology	20
3.1: Sources	20
3.2: Case Study Selection	22
CHAPTER 4: Case Study and Results	
24	
4.1: SDG Implementation of Inditex, Fast Retailing, and Gap Inc.	24
4.2 Reporting Practices: Economic Growth and Expansion	30
4.3 Reporting Practices: Auditors and Compliance with Code of Conduct	34
4.4 Third Party Report Results	37
CONCLUSION	40
BIBLIOGRAPHY	42

Introduction

On April 24, 2013, the eight-story Rana Plaza building in Dhaka, Bangladesh collapsed, killing 1,134 factory workers and injuring 2,500 more. The workers were garment workers, producing clothes for (mostly) Western fashion brands (Hira and Benson-Rea 2017, 12). The factory collapse shocked many, and exposed the dangerous and inhumane circumstances in which the clothes we wear every day are often made. The industry responded by signing agreements or pledging to improve safety conditions in the factories their clothes are manufactured, most notably through the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in. Amongst the signatories were some of the biggest players in the industry, including H&M, Inditex (Zara), and Primark (Burke 2013). While many of the fashion brands expressed surprise or confusion with regards to the tragedy, apart from its scale, it is not a stand-alone incident. A factory collapse in April 2005 killed 64 workers and injured over 80, two incidents in 2006, a fire and a collapse, kills over 85 people in total and injured dozens more, and another fire in November 2012 killed 112 factory workers in Bangladesh's deadliest factory fire to date - and these are examples taken only from Bangladesh (Hira and Benson-Rea 2017, 12-13; Paul and Rocha 2017).

For years now, the fashion industry has been under fire for the harm it does to people and planet - specifically, environmental harm has received a lot of attention in response by consumers and producers alike (Haug and Bosch 2016, 318). The garment industry is the biggest manufacturing industry after automotive and electronics, as production and sales of clothing have doubled over the period of 2000-2015 and is responsible for 10% of the global carbon emissions (Drift 2018, 11; Sustain Your Style 2019). Fashion brands have responded with targets to reduce their environmental impact and by launching supposedly more sustainable collections next to their usual collections (Li et al 2014, 823; Segran 2019). In terms of its harmful impact on people, however, relatively little is known about the working conditions of garment workers, despite promises made after Rana Plaza. In the 2019 Fashion Transparency Index, only 5 brands, including Adidas, Reebok and H&M, score between 61-70% out of 250 possible points for transparency. Of the total 200 companies that were reviewed, 5 companies disclosed no information at all (Fashion Revolution 2019). Thus, the production supply chain is an oft-neglected aspect of the fashion industry that needs to be given more attention in order to understand how tragedies like the Rana Plaza accident can happen - and more importantly, how they can be prevented.

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) adopted Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to serve as a framework to collectively address the socioeconomic and environmental challenges the world is facing today (Kraak et al 2018, 1). Amongst the 17 SDGs, the final goal stresses the need for global partnerships between different state and non-state actors in order to achieve the other global goals. Many fashion brands have announced their commitment to the SDGs and its incorporation into company business models. Therefore, this thesis aims to answer the following question: How, if at all, has the implementation of the SDG framework in the business strategies of the fashion industry contributed effectively to improvements in the supply chain, as seen in the cases of fast fashion brands Inditex, Fast Retailing (FR), and Gap Inc?

The UN states that the goals, which are the follow-up of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that were in place from 2000-2015, reflect a decision with “great historic significance, as it aims to build a better future for all people,” including those who have been left behind before (UN General Assembly 2015, 1). The goals are in part a continuation of the MDGs, but also include new goals that focus on topics like (youth) employment and the environment (UN Development Group 2013, 5). The environmental goals, such as Clean Water and Sanitation (Goal 6), Life on Land (Goal 15), or the encompassing goal Climate Action (Goal 13) are products of the newly incorporated sustainable development discourse. The sustainable development discourse is heavily debated in academic literature: on the one hand, it is argued that environmental considerations are still second to economic push and development (French and Kotzé 2018, 11; Adelman 2018, 16), while on the other hand, it is argued that the SDGs fail to protect marginalized groups, as it is argued to not have a strong stance on human rights (Pogge and Sengupta 2016, 84; Knox 2015, 518). The literature review of this thesis will address the tension between the sustainable development discourse and the human rights discourse, as understanding the two different discourses is vital to examine whether the SDGs may play a role in ensuring ethical working conditions for garment workers. Furthermore, the literature will discuss the integration of partnerships into the goals, specifically addressing the role of big multinational corporations (MNCs) in achieving the Global Goals.

While the fashion industry is comprised of a number of branches that may all contribute to the harm the industry inflicts on people and planet, this thesis will focus on fast fashion - mostly low to mid-range fashion brands. The fast fashion business model is relatively new but has proven to be an extremely profitable model in a short amount of time: of the 20 most profitable fashion corporations of 2017, around half were fast fashion brands

(McKinsey & Company 2018, 95-96). The fast fashion model is characterized by high turnover rates and low prices, and an ever-increasing number of clothes need to be sold to remain profitable (Haug and Bosch 2016, 320; Drift 2018, 11). The second chapter of this thesis will further outline the characteristics of fast fashion, and moreover, discuss why this model is considered to be enabling hazardous working conditions, as Human Rights Watch (HRW) reports in the 2019 report *Paying for a Bus Ticket and Expecting to Fly*.

After critically analyzing the SDGs and the fast fashion industry, I will conduct a qualitative research in the second half in this thesis in order to answer the research question. Three of the top 20 most profitable fast fashion brands will be analyzed. The selected companies are Inditex, Fast Retailing and Gap Inc., which represent different parts of the world; Europe, East Asia, and North America respectively. Through examining company reports, I will analyze how the SDGs are implemented in each companies' sustainable strategy. The reports covered in this thesis are from 2013-2018. 2013 is chosen as a starting point as this was the year in which many companies pledged to increase efforts to protect human rights in factories, and to be able to compare how sustainability strategies were implemented prior and after the adoption of the SDGs. It must be noted that, although all companies have all adopted the label "sustainability strategy" and produce "sustainability reports" which report on the progress of both environmental and ethical goals, this thesis focuses on the ethical aspect of this strategy, as it is the ethical aspect that is often overlooked or invisible. When discussing companies' sustainable strategies and sustainability reports, I thus refer to their ethical strategies, unless stated otherwise.

Finally, the case study will compare the reporting of fast fashion brands on factory working conditions with those of third-party reports. While companies perform audits at factories both by themselves and by hiring third-party auditors, in recent years, more organizations such as NGOs began reporting on the ethicality of garment factories completely independent from the companies itself. This thesis will primarily make use of the Ethical Fashion Report, published by Baptist World Aid Australia. In 2019, it rated 130 companies' systems to mitigate the occurrence of human rights violations in the supply chain (Baptist World Aid Australia 2019, 5). By analyzing these reports, progress as stated by the companies and the independent organizations can be compared to establish an understanding of to what extent companies' sustainability strategies effectively contribute to reaching their goals that they aligned with the SDGs. By doing so, this thesis aims to contribute to the debate on whether human rights are adequately integrated into the SDGs.

1. Literature Review

In 2015 the UN adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is set up around the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to the UN, the agenda is meant to serve as a ‘blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and planet’ (SDG Knowledge Platform 2019). In order to achieve this, the SDGs incorporate the newly introduced sustainable development discourse, which is focused on, but not limited to, green technological advancements, environmental restrictions, and financially responsible economic practices, as Jane Briant Carant notes (2017, 28). While newly introduced in the SDGs compared to the preceding Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the concept of sustainable development is not necessarily a new one, and has in fact been heavily debated, as this chapter will explain. Moreover, it has been largely discussed in the context of Agenda 2030, because like the name of the Agenda suggests, the discourse is at the core of it.

The Agenda states its commitment to aiding people and planet, and while the sustainable development discourse is aimed at both, the concept of human rights plays a role in the SDGs, and even more so in the debate around it. While not as explicitly mentioned as sustainability, the official UN resolution *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* does state the importance of upholding human rights and that the new Agenda is rooted in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly 2015, 6). Therefore, this literature review aims to critically analyze the sustainable development discourse, specifically in regard to its tension with the human rights discourse. This literature review will address the discussion on to what extent the SDGs address the rights of people specifically. This sections below will reveal that the literature is divided on whether Agenda 2030 adequately protects the rights of people. First, to fully understand the discourse, a brief historical context of the sustainable development discourse will be provided. Next, I will go over to what extent the SDGs incorporate a human rights discourse as part of its sustainability discourse. Finally, the axis between Agenda 2030 and cooperation between different state and non-state actors will be discussed. This is a key characteristic of the Agenda, as it has been given its own goal overarching all the others; Goal 17 ‘Strengthening the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development,’ has been included as global partnerships are thought to be vital to achieving the SDGs. Given the focus on the garment industry in this thesis, it is important to look at the role of the SDGs for Multinational Corporations (MNCs).

1.1 Historical Context: The Development of the Sustainability Discourse

Since its introduction in the 1980s, the concept of sustainable development has changed vastly over time. At the center of the debate has been whether it focuses too much on people and too little on planet, or the other way around. Leading up to its formal introduction in the 1980s, discussion was largely aimed at environmental problems like pollution or endangered species, which was amplified by for example the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment (Manulak 2015, 9). The 1987 Brundtland Report formally introduced the concept of sustainable development, defining it as ‘development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 40). Furthermore, the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development formally linked economics and social factors to the definition of sustainable development (Long 2018, 93). Many scholars have argued that the declarations highlight a very human-centered approach to development (Adelman 2018, 16; Kotzé 2018, 47). Lynda Collins stresses that the Rio Declaration even treats development as a human right, reaffirming the anthropocentric approach to development (2018, 73). In fact, the first principle of the Rio Declaration states that ‘humans are at the center of sustainable development’ and that they have the right to ‘a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature’ (UNCED 1992, 1).

The UN agenda in the early 2000s saw an increased focus on development, but not so much in relation to sustainable development specifically. The MDGs that were put in place from 2000-2015 consisted of 8 goals, largely focusing on development and targeting issues like poverty and hunger. Thus, while also being seemingly people focused, the MDGs have often been criticized for its focus and scope. It has been argued that the MDGs did not consider the root causes of poverty and inequality and were targeted at the developing world, in effect widening the gap between the Global North and South (Adelman 2018, 33; Kotzé 2018, 41; Long 2018, 97). While the MDGs may have been people focused, their scope was selective and even then, underlying causes of poverty and inequality were criticized for not being adequately addressed. Furthermore, it can be seen that since the Rio Declaration greater value has been placed on measuring development through economic growth or standards like the GDP, which Briant Carant reviews as having increased inequality within and among nations, and simultaneously failing to translate into improved human rights conditions (2017, 24). While the (sustainable) development discourse up until this point has been criticized for being human-centered, the human rights aspect in these discourses has appeared to be rather

absent. The SDGs, however, are meant to be a departure and improvement from the MDGs. So, how do the SDGs compare to their predecessors?

1.2 The SDGs and the 2030 Agenda

The sustainable development discourse is implemented in full force in the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. In the UN document *A Million Voices: The World We Want* the UNDP shared the results of worldwide consultations and an online survey citizens globally could participate in, which would help shape the new development goals. It is the first time the UN has implemented citizens' views on global issues to this extent. The document acknowledges the criticism on the MDGs on multiple occasions, for example in regard to (gender) inequality, poverty, as well as environmental sustainability (UNDP 2013 11; 13; 40). In the finalized SDGs, this call for targeting root causes translates into a wider variety of goals as well as a more ambitious approach in setting targets. The Agenda 2030 resolutions pledged that the goals will be universally applicable and that "no one will be left behind" (UN General Assembly 2015, 1). This is a significant change in scope compared to the MDGs which mainly focused on developing countries.

Furthermore, compared to the MDGs, which consisted of 8 goals, the SDGs are expanded upon significantly as they consist of 17 goals, with a total of 169 targets across these goals to further specify the goals. *Transforming Our World* states that the goals balance what is defined in the document as the three pillars of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. Furthermore, the document states the goals are meant to expand upon the MDGs, but also improve on aspects where the MDGs were lacking (UN General Assembly 2015, 3). This is especially manifested in the "zero-based" nature of a lot of the targets. SDG 1 No Poverty and SDG 2, Zero Hunger are clear examples of this, as they aim to completely eradicate poverty and hunger rather than raise the poverty line by x or relieve a certain amount of people of hunger. While a number of the goals were met, and can be considered as significant progress, halving the amount of people suffering from hunger still meant the other half is suffering. The mantra to leave no one behind, is also visible in other goals such as SDG 4, Quality Education - instead of aiming to ensure a certain amount of people get access to primary school, as was the case with the MDG education-focused goal, the goal has expanded to include education throughout life (secondary and tertiary education, continuous learning) and explicitly stresses the importance of delivering quality education. This universality of the SDGs has often been critiqued for being too ambitious or too unrealistic to achieve (Kotzé 2018, 44; Briant Carant 2017, 31), however I would argue

that these goals do enable developed countries to also look inward and work on achieving these goals - it means the most marginalized people in any country, at least in theory, are being considered in the Agenda.

However, much like other UN charters or resolutions, the SDGs are not binding. Graham Long argues that this is not necessarily a bad thing - the 'global-yet voluntary, universal-yet national compromise' actually entices nations to participate in a way they seem fit, allowing them to adapt the goals to the issues countries are faced with (2018, 94). Lynda Collins, while discussing the non-binding nature of the SDGs in relation to human rights specifically, offers a more nuanced approach: on the one hand she argues that the SDGs are weaker than their human rights counterparts, despite the 2030 Agenda referencing human rights multiple times (2018, 68-69). On the other hand, she acknowledges the non-confrontational, voluntary nature of the goals may encourage nations to implement the goals into their policy, especially benefitting the 'bottom billion' (2018, 76). The universal-yet individually applicable character of the goals enables nations to address country-specific issues and has helped set up the targets in a way that they are applicable not only to the Global South like before, but also to the Global North.

Additionally, the Goals are largely focused on cooperation, not only between states but also between states and NGOs, corporations, or other non-state actors. This allows for more possibilities to reach certain goals as actors like corporations also highly influence the current issues identified as goals that need to be worked on, specifically in terms of equality. I would agree that due to its non-confrontational nature, the goals as a whole are more approachable and may, at least in theory, entice countries to tackle certain goals, resulting in significant progress. However, where the MDGs and its methods to measure progress have been criticized for not improving human rights or overall well-being within countries, a similar argument may be applicable to the SDGs. This section briefly touched upon the absence of the human rights discourse in Agenda 2030. If the Goals are as human-centered as many authors argue, this may be surprising, as the human rights discourse uses much stronger language in condemning the violations of human rights like hunger or poverty. The following section will address the tension between the sustainable development discourse and the human rights discourse and analyze how Agenda 2030 may or may not effectively protect human rights.

1.3 The Sustainable Development Discourse and Human Rights

That Agenda 2030 and the SDGs take a sustainable development approach to their goals and targets is obvious from the language used in the titles of the document to label the goals as ‘sustainable development’ goals. From the preamble onwards, however, the Agenda claims to also be grounded in human rights principles, noting specifically the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international human rights treaties, the Millennium Declaration and the 2005 World Summit Outcome, as well as being based on instruments like the Declaration on the Right to Development (UN General Assembly 2015, 6). However, beyond that, human rights are rarely explicitly mentioned in the agenda, despite the inclusion of numerous equality-focused goals and the mention of specific human rights such as the right to health care or clean water and sanitation in Goal 3 and Goal 6. Before going into the critiques why the SDGs do not take a strong enough stance on human rights according to scholars, it is important to distinguish between the sustainable development discourse and the human rights discourse.

Pogge and Sengupta state that the development goals discourse, which is what Agenda 2030 utilizes for their sustainable development policy, is about “overcoming deprivations over time, through a step-by-step approach,” whereas the human rights discourse recognizes the immediate need to end any human deprivation and characterizes it as a top priority (2016, 84). Thus, Pogge and Sengupta argue that the SDGs do not meet the expectations given in the Agenda as much more could be done with the knowledge and resources available today (*ibid.*). . Furthermore, they observe a lack of authority in identifying which parties are required to take additional action when goals are not being met, often resulting in a “blame game” in which the West has an advantaged position and developing countries often end up having to carry the largest burden (Pogge and Sengupta 2016, 88). This lack of authority and responsibility taken by countries may be attributed to the non-binding nature of the goals. John Knox notes that very general language is used to promote human rights-related targets, or any of the SDG targets for that matter (2015, 518). In relation to this, Collins notes that the SDGs appear to be weaker in formulation than human rights counterparts; the Agenda for example claims to *promote* human rights, whereas before UN bodies like the Human Rights Committee used the word *fulfill* instead (2018, 69). This expressed a much stronger commitment to achieving goals and realizing human rights for those who are deprived of them. She does, however, as opposed to Knox, argue that the targets of the goals contain a level of specificity that other human rights treaties may lack. Collins argues that this is largely due to the fact that the Agenda has been a global

cooperative effort, referencing to the consultations and surveys executed for *A Million Voices* (2018, 77). I would argue that the targets do contain a certain level of specificity as it is clearly stated what targets need to be met in order to achieve a certain goal. However, there is no clear objective as to *how* to achieve this, or by any other timetable than 2030, which is when the SDGs ought to be achieved. The fact that a more defined step-by-step plan is not provided may be because the SDGs are meant to serve as a blueprint for the signatories of Agenda 2030 (SDG Knowledge Platform 2019). This has, however, been subjected to some criticism.

A large concern that has been raised in relation to the perceived lack of specificity is that a lot of targets allow implementation as is seen “nationally appropriate” (Knox 2015, 527; Pogge and Sengupta 2016 89). It can be argued that this is also part of the ‘vague,’ non-confrontational language used in the SDGs. However, as Long notes, that the Agenda is directed at all does not mean it is equally applicable to all (2018, 98-99). I would agree with this, because that is why the SDGs are often zero-based - the goals are intended to be universally applicable, but different nations may require different approaches in order to reach the targets attached to the goals. Both Collins and Pogge and Sengupta, while being relatively skeptical of the SDGs and their effectiveness as opposed to their human rights counterparts, highlight that, apart from the possible drawback of states not taking responsibility, the other option in theory is that states may be more willing to adopt aspects of the agenda when they are not binding (2018, 70; 2016, 83). This is not only applicable to member states, but also to other non-state actors or private sector corporations. Therefore, the final section of this chapter will analyze this final characteristic of the SDGs: global partnerships.

1.4 Agenda 2030 and Multinational Corporations

The universality of the SDGs does not only entail that the goals apply do all member states - it also means that it emphasizes partnership and globalization and calls for collaboration among governments, the private sector and civil society. As awareness increased that the private sector has a growing responsibility of the issues the world is facing, the private sector became more involved than ever in the creation of the new UN agenda than ever before. Already in the years leading up to the final formulation of the Agenda and its Goals, the private sector often partook in the 88 national consultations held in countries around the world, next to civil society, think tanks and governments, when discussing the new direction of the development agenda (UN Development Group 2013, 4). In its conclusion on each

theme that was discussed, *A Million Voices*, outlines the role of the private sector in most of them, especially highlighting the link between the private sector and environmental responsibility, while not necessarily linking it to social or human rights concerns. The document does, in relation to equality state that there is a need to “realign the power relations between the public and private sector, as well as with (local) communities,” to ensure the rich are no longer privileged and the poor no longer suffering the consequences while the rich are reaping the benefits (ibid., 137).

Apart from acknowledgement that in most SDGs the private sector plays an important role in achieving the goals, the final Goal serves as an umbrella over all the other, reaffirming the need for collaboration. SDG 17 is the goal to “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development,” in which target 17.16 and 17.17 specifically address multi-stakeholder partnerships, expressing the need for effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships (UN General Assembly 2015, 30). In terms of the private sector, the document states that private business activity is crucial to advancement in innovation and job creation and that it is thus necessary to foster the well-functioning of the private sector, and this is asserted in accordance with important international agreements, most notably the UN General Principles on Business and Human Rights (ibid., 32). Adopted in 2011, the UN GP stresses the commitment to address human rights circumstances in the supply chain of corporations. In the three pillars under the principles, the first one addresses the responsibility of the state to regulate and reinforce human rights measurements, while the second specifically calls for a “know and show” approach which requires corporations to know and be able to present they are upholding human rights in their businesses. This is necessary throughout the supply chain, as corporations are still responsible for any violations through linked operations even without their direct involvement (Addo 2014, 134). Again, while a commitment to human rights is implied by referencing another UN document, it is not explicitly mentioned in the Agenda.

While the inclusion of the private sector has never been so extensive as in Agenda 2030, businesses have slowly been more and more involved in international conferences for some time. Already in the Brundtland Report businesses were heard in the discussions, and since the 1992 Rio Conference have been included in all major conferences, specifically the environment and development-related conferences. Scheyvens et al. argue that the major difference with the 2030 Agenda is that governments, the private sector and civil society are *equally* called upon in contributing to reaching the SDGs (2016, 372).

Ghosh and Rajan reaffirm the need for collaboration amongst all actors, as the Agenda is based on the 5P's - People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships - which addresses all stakeholders and their interconnectedness; they outline the tough terrain businesses are facing that cause the need for re-evaluation of the current business model, for example environmental issues like resource scarcity, financial regulation and the increasing awareness and demands of consumers to more sustainably and ethically sourced and produced goods (2019, 345). In their research, they highlight the most important SDGs for various industry sectors. While some sectors cite SDGs specifically relevant to their sector (e.g. the Health Care sector cite SDG 3 Health as a priority), most sectors, including textiles, cite goals dealing with poverty, (gender)equality, sustainable production and consumption, and economic growth as their main priorities (ibid., 349). Scheyvens et al. discuss the participation of corporations in the consultations used for the post-2015 agenda and note the disproportionate involvement of the private sector compared to civil society, asking whether corporate interests may be outweighing civil society interests in the resulting *Transforming Our World* document (2016, 374). Wary of their inclusion in the sustainable development agenda, the question arises of how corporations should participate as a development actor. Scheyvens et al. argue that it is difficult to establish partnerships among the different actors as long as businesses do not take adequate responsibility in their role in human rights violations, corruption and increased inequality that are caused by the current economic system (ibid., 378).

It is often argued that the sustainable development discourse and the SDGs are not challenging current neoliberal mechanisms enough at best, while being critiqued for reinforcing them at worst (Adelman 2018, 33-34; Scheyvens et al. 2019, 376; Cervantes 2013, 26). Kumi et al take the enhancement of economic growth as the main objective of neoliberalism, which overemphasizes economic values at the expense of social values (2014, 544). This growth "fetishism," as Adelman even calls it (2018, 16), promotes a link between consumption and the ideal of progress (Cervantes 2013, 31). The profit-making focus of businesses has often been a leading cause for the increasing equality gap, both within and among countries (Kumi et al 2014, 547; Scheyvens et al. 2019, 376). Ghosh and Rajan appear slightly more optimistic in their approach; while they confirm that all businesses are profit-seeking entities, it is in their own best interest to adjust as long-term profits are at risk (2019, 344). While this may be true, most industries rank SDG 8 Economic Growth as a priority (ibid., 349). Thus, it remains the question whether these adjustments will be adequate if businesses solely operate out of their own profit-focused interest. Indeed, as shown in a

survey Ghosh and Rajan highlight, consumers appear to be more likely to support a corporation that is signed up to the SDGs (ibid., 346). As the focus remains on the sustainability of *profit* rather than the sustainability of the 5P's, it seems sustainability is often only of interest as an “add-on” to the established business model, corporations often citing ‘maintaining corporate position,’ or ‘reputation’ when asked about their motivation to implement more sustainable practices (Scheyvens et al. 2016, 379). In any case, it is argued that, much like is the question about whether nations’ commitment to the SDGs should be voluntary or not, whether corporate commitment should move from responsibility to obligation (ibid., 380). Ghosh and Rajan’s research show that corporations are in fact actively trying to incorporate the SDGs into their policies. The case study in chapter 4 attempt to pinpoint how corporations implement the SDGs into their business policies and if this is effective in reaching these goals, by the example of the garment industry. First, the next chapter will address this industry more in-depth, and outline why it is necessary to focus on the garment industry in this debate.

2. The Fashion Industry Up Close

The fashion industry is the third biggest manufacturing industry, after the automotive and electronics industry, and has reached this large size in a remarkably short period of time (Drift 2018, 11; Pulse of the Fashion Industry 2019, 2). This growth does not appear to be ending any time soon; the McKinsey Global Fashion Index (MGFI) estimated the worth of the industry at \$2,5 trillion in 2015 and only predicts more growth in their annual reports (McKinsey 2018, 64). By 2030 the apparel and footwear industry are estimated to be worth \$3,3 trillion and producing 102 million tons worth of apparel in volume, the Pulse of the Fashion Industry report predicts (2019, 2). Positive changes are being made according to the report, however, most initiatives are developing too slow to keep up with the expansion of the industry - if this trend continues, the SDGs or targets set out in the Paris Agreement will not be met (ibid., 1).

Like in other sectors, partnerships with big names in the fashion industry are necessary. Many companies have adopted Agenda 2030 and the SDGs in their own sustainability agenda, and 2019 has seen some remarkable public statements from various brands; LVMH, the world's leading luxury conglomerate announced a five-year partnership with UNESCO in May, while Fast Retailing has announced in September to be partnering with the ILO to improve worker conditions in Asia (LVMH 2019; Nikkei Asian Review). The Drift Report, however, remains critical that industry shows "signs of initiative fatigue and slow progress" (2018, 6). In order to research this further in the case studies in the following chapters, this chapter will provide a brief analysis on the current state of the fashion industry. The focus of this thesis will be the fast fashion business model, as this is often credited to be the model that resulted in shaping the fast-paced industry we have today (McKinsey 2018, 65). Given that this is such an active and influential industry, it is necessary to research how the industry can move towards reaching the SDGs more adequately. First, however, I will define fast fashion and provide motivation as to why I am focusing on this aspect of the fashion industry rather than for example luxury brand or SMEs.

2.1 *The Rise of Fast Fashion*

As a "cross-sector" industry the fashion industry is a rather complex one. It consists of apparel, footwear, and accessories at the very least, and is sometimes argued to encompass other items that may be 'in fashion,' extending to perfumes and cosmetics; many clothing brands diversify their companies by offering consumers products such as shoes, jewelry, or

make-up, more so in recent years (Macchion et al. 2014, 173). Macchion et al. argue that diversification occurs to find new ways to expand and attract new customers and, ultimately, build sustainable businesses (ibid.), referring to sustainability in the sense of longevity of a business. Interestingly, this type of ‘sustainability’ and growth of businesses is in direct contradiction with the sustainability movement, and as argued in the literature review any sustainability of stable profit cannot be ensured if environmental and social adjustments are not made. Over the past couple of years McKinsey & Company conclude in their 2019 State of Fashion report, the “super winners” of economic profit were only 20 companies, accounting for 97% of profit made out of the over 500 companies included in the analysis - in 2010 this was ‘only’ 70%, amplifying the massive growth of multinational fashion enterprises (McKinsey & Company 2019, 95). The top 20 tells us that the fashion industry is becoming increasingly polarized. The companies are mainly high-end brands and fast fashion enterprises, while the middle man is growing less or experiencing losses (ibid.). Consequently, it can be assumed that either the luxury brands or fast fashion brands should be the main focus when analyzing the SDGs, as these are the branches that contribute the most to the issues laid out in Agenda 2030 given their size.

Particularly remarkable here are fast fashion enterprises, as they follow a relatively new approach to producing and selling clothes, which accelerated in the past 25 years. In order to meet demands, the fast fashion business model developed into what it is today; between 2000 and 2015 global production and sales doubled, surpassing 100 billion produced garments annually in 2014 (Drift 2018, 11). While fast fashion is a rather recent concept, Gérard Cachon and Robert Swinney argue that there are at least two components that define fast fashion, which are 1) quick response times, referring to the short production and distribution cycle due to the rapidly changing demand from consumers, and 2) enhanced design techniques, referring to the focus on “trendy” pieces that are considered to be highly fashionable at the time, often found by “trend spotters” as per example of the brand Benetton (2011, 778). Reports analyzing the fashion industry confirm this, as they demonstrate that the fashion industry has the highest turnover rate in the supply chain in any industry - traditionally the design-to-scale process could take up to nearly two years, while in the fast fashion model this rate is typically four months at most (McKinsey & Company 2018, 65; Drift, 2018, 12). This has resulted in a highly competitive sector led by a “growth-fetish” for profit as described in the previous chapter, driving prices at an all-time low while needing to sell increasingly large quantities to remain profitable (Drift 2018, 11). Haug and Bosch therefore note low garment prices as another characteristic of fast fashion and argue that this

leads to a sense of disposability of clothing (2016, 320). Indeed, data by the Environmental Protection Agency shows that since 1960 textile waste has increased by 811%, the majority of it ending up in landfill (Leonard, 2019). Finally, fast fashion is often linked to the “democratization of fashion” as ready-to-wear clothes are now available in surplus for everyone, as opposed to more exclusive or class-based forms of fashion. This “fashion for all” rhetoric is often considered the greatest benefit of fast fashion (Horton 2018, 516). As people, specifically young adults from developed countries, can dress themselves in the latest trends and enjoy new collections weekly at stores like Zara, Primark, or H&M. It must be asked, however, at what price this high turnover comes.

2.2 Ethics in the Fashion Industry

People have become increasingly aware of how environmentally hazardous the fashion industry is. For example, it generates 10% of the global carbon emissions and uses 1.5 trillion liters of water annually for production (Sustain Your Style 2019). In terms of ethics, it is much more difficult to gather accurate data of the harm done by the industry. Labor violations are often made in factories. Most familiar amongst the general public are the unethical conditions in sweatshops, often enabled by ill-traceable supply chains and illegal subcontracting. However, per the example of Rana Plaza and many other factory accidents it has become clear that the factories are often also safety hazards. (Hira and Benson-Rea 2017, 12-13; Paul and Rocha 2017). Kate MacDonald outlines some of the power and human rights abuses garment workers face, such as unpaid overtime, lack of time to eat or go to the bathroom, low wages that fail to cover the basic costs of living, and verbal, physical, and sexual abuse (2014, 22-23). Workers rarely have the ability to challenge these circumstances, as they are typically denied the freedom of associations, because they risk being fired when attempting any form of unionization (ibid.). The abuses often also consist of a gendered dimension, as the majority of garment workers are female; though numbers are not conclusive, it is estimated that worldwide around 80% of garment workers are female, which is often ascribed due their subordinate position in patriarchal societies (Fashion Revolution 2015; Baylies and Wright 1993, 585). What, then, are fashion brands doing about these perilous circumstances?

Li et al note that the increasing awareness of consumers of the environmental and social impacts of their clothes is being picked up by companies such as Inditex, Fast Retailing and Gap Inc. and that they have adopted ‘green marketing’ policies (2014, 823). Many retailers like H&M Group Stores or Marks & Spencer have adopted recycling policies

where customers can return old clothing and textiles, which is rewarded with a discount coupon - essentially prompting more consumption. Moreover, recycling programs are not that effective, as a mere 0.7% percent of H&M's brands' materials is made from recycled materials. The majority of the 5-10% of fibers that plants are able to collect goes into lower-value products like insulation in 2016 (Beeler, 2017). Brands are also pledging to only use renewable or sustainable materials by 2025 or 2030 and are coming out with more 'sustainable' collections or even launching new sustainable brands as alternatives to what is already on the market, in order to give consumers a choice (Segran 2019, McKinsey & Company 2018, 65). Overall, the advertisement and public pledges focus primarily on the environment but has little overall substance. Haug and Bosch confirm this, by noting that companies often exercise these strategies by marketing their products with terms like 'green,' 'eco-friendly,' 'natural,' or 'organic,' but that there is little substance to these claims, as companies provide little information on materials or production methods (2016, 325).

As established in the previous section, it has been reported that industry innovation related to the targets of the SDGs is slowing down. None of these initiatives, however, focus on the real culprit of the current state of the fashion industry: lowering production volume. Not only would this help reach the environment-focused SDGs, it would help significantly to improve the circumstances for often overlooked garment workers. This group is arguably the most important in the production cycle but receives little attention publicly as brands do not like to be associated with the dark side of fashion, often consisting of labor rights violations, sweatshops or even child labor. These days most apparel brands have adopted codes of conduct as a direct response to consumers' scrutiny, and MacDonald argues that this is a step in the right direction, as companies are taking at least some responsibility and starting to institutionalize acknowledgement for the power they hold over manufacturers (2014, 71). However, to bring about real change, lowering the production volume would significantly lower the pressure on manufacturers.

In theory, factories are being checked to see whether brands are adhering to what has been outlined in their codes of conduct. In practice, however, MacDonald notes that audits, which are sometimes taken by the company itself or by third-party profit-driven auditors, may be limited in effectiveness; often manufacturers know beforehand when they can expect audits, garment workers are prepared in advance to give answers to questions and cannot answer questions without the presence of a supervisor, and a lack of communication means workers often do not know what brands they work for, or even that codes of conduct exist, and thus what their rights are (ibid., 76-78). Many reports back the claim that codes of

conduct are good in theory, but that they are not being upheld. Not only because of flawed audits, but because brands themselves make it nearly impossible to adhere to the codes due to their high demands. The fast fashion model is dependent on the cut of time and costs. The retailers demand a certain quantity of clothes, for a set price and by a set time, driving many manufacturers into cutting costs on wages or safety regulations at the factories (Human Rights Watch 2019, 14; MacDonald 2014, 25). Furthermore, brands often do not adhere to their own set deadlines of approving pieces for production; the Better Buying Purchasing Practices Index for 2018 found through anonymous supplier surveys that only 16% buyers met deadlines of pre-production and product development phases - sometimes leaving manufacturers only two weeks to finish an order (Human Rights Watch 2019, 24). The high demands may also result in another risky endeavor: to meet deadlines, manufacturers often see no other choice but to subcontract their orders, without notifying the brands. Often conditions in subcontracted factories are even worse (McKinsey & Company 2018, 64; Human Rights Watch 2019, 43).

The fast fashion model demands high production volumes in a very short amount of time. The small changes apparel brands are making now, often in response to public scrutiny rather than out of their own initiative, are a start, but change is not happening fast enough to meet targets. Moreover, these changes often focus on improving their environmental footprint, rather than the improvements necessary to give garment workers a decent life. In the previous chapter Ghosh and Rajan argued that in relation to the SDGs, there are currently no proper frameworks in place to measure progress or lack thereof by corporations. This sentiment is echoed in fashion-specific reports, which urge governments and fashion corporations to work together and for the fashion industry to engage more on policy levels (Pulse of the Fashion Industry 2019, 17). The case study that follows next will address these issues and closely analyze the relation between the SDGs and the improvement of working conditions in garment factories.

3. Methodology

In order to answer the research question “has the implementation of the SDG framework in the sustainable strategies of the fast fashion industry contributed effectively to improvements in the production supply chain, as seen in the cases of Inditex, Fast Retailing, and Gap Inc?” this thesis will conduct a qualitative analysis of the three aforementioned fast fashion retailers (for case study selection, see below) and will analyze their sustainable strategies over a period from 2013-2018, which as of the writing of this thesis is the most recent information available. As Agenda 2030 and the SDGs were adopted by the UN in 2015, the inclusion of the SDG framework in these companies’ annual reports starts appearing in the 2016 reports. 2013 was chosen as a starting point not only to be able to compare the situation before the implementation of the SDGs with the situation afterwards, but also because of the Rana Plaza factory collapse that happened in 2013. Due to this tragedy, many companies reported extensively on their commitment to safe working conditions that year. Over 43 companies made official pledges to improving the conditions for garment workers in factories, specifically in Bangladesh, by signing the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh (The Bangladesh Accord 2019). Therefore, it can be analyzed whether this momentum has resulted in increased attention on the supply chain when companies identified what SDGs were relevant to their sustainability strategy and overall business strategy.

By looking at the situation before Agenda 2030, in this thesis I will look at a) how the adoption of the SDG framework has shaped companies’ sustainability strategy and b) if this is effectively contributing to improving workers’ conditions. The former will be established by analyzing the annual reports and, when available, CSR or sustainability reports, while for the latter, the achievements in these same reports are critically analyzed and contrasted by independent or third party reports, In regards to the question of how the SDGs are *effectively* implemented, this thesis will critically review what information is disclosed in company reports that is said to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and what is shown to be measured to trace progress, which will in turn be compared to independent reports. These reports will be more elaborated on in the next section.

3.1 Sources

First, I will look at annual reports and CSR/sustainability reports of the selected companies, specifically focusing on the sections that address ethical working conditions and how

companies - with the help of the SDG framework - report to be addressing factory working conditions safety and the protection of human rights.

Second, this will be compared to third party reports. In recent years, more of these reports have become available, while all focusing on different aspects of the fashion industry. The State of Fashion report published annually by McKinsey & Company mostly focuses on the business side of the industry, projecting the industry growth over the next year, as well as reporting on innovation, for example in environmentally conscious production of clothes. Additionally, the Pulse of Fashion began reporting in 2017, providing a wider overview of the environmental and social performance of companies. These reports do not necessarily mention brands explicitly, though might be important to keep in mind when placing the selected cases in the bigger discussion on ethical supply chains in the fashion industry. Focusing explicitly on the protection of garment workers is the work executed by Human Rights Watch. Their 2019 report *Paying for a Bus Ticket and Expecting to Fly* reports on some of the leading causes of unsafe and unethical working conditions for workers, with information gathered largely through interviews with garment suppliers, social compliance auditors and other garment industry experts (Human Rights Watch 2019, 2). Compliance auditors and other garment industry experts (Human Rights Watch 2019, 2). The report, however, does not explicitly name or shame brands, because as HRW states, specifically when garment suppliers are concerned, anonymity is needed to protect their business relationships with brands. Therefore, interviewees did not ask about any specific brands when interviewing people (HRW 2019, 10). The report, however, can still be used to compare to the case study's brands' ethical practices to see if the reports results are applicable to the brands.

Finally, some third-party reports that do report on brands specifically, are the Fashion Transparency Index published by Fashion Revolution, and the Ethical Fashion Report published by Baptist World Aid Australia. The former reviews 200 of the biggest fashion brands based on the information they disclose on social and environmental practices, while the latter grades brands on different practices concerning factory working conditions, such as policies, monitoring and workers' rights. The results of this research may be especially useful for this thesis, as the report asks an extensive number of questions and specifies further under each category, for example covering codes of conduct, the right to unionization and guarantee of living wages. These are all elements that directly relate to the SDGs and ethical strategies of companies this thesis aims to analyze. Thus, the Ethical Fashion report will mainly be used for this analysis. The report, first published in 2013 in light of the Rana Plaza tragedy,

covered 40 companies in its first year, but in 2019 already expanded to 130 companies representing 480 brands. In 2019, the report announced its inclusion of environmental impact as a category alongside labor rights management system as it argues that for a company to be “truly ethical” this needs to be considered (Baptist World Aid Australia 2019, 6). While environmental considerations are important too, this thesis will analyze the categories related to labor rights management systems only and focus on their related scores, as the working conditions in factories now are often neglected, or even overshadowing by greenwashing as explained in chapter 2, enough as it is. The final section of this chapter will briefly discuss the case study selection for this thesis, before moving onto the actual analysis and its results.

3.2 Case Study Selection

As the SDGs are applied globally, the three case studies chosen for this thesis are three fast fashion retailers from different parts of the world. The selected companies are Inditex (Spain), Fast Retailing (Japan), and Gap Inc (USA), and were chosen from McKinsey & Company’s top 20 “winners” of the 2019 State of Fashion report, as outlined in chapter 2. The top 20 that the State of Fashion 2019 report is outlined in Figure 1:

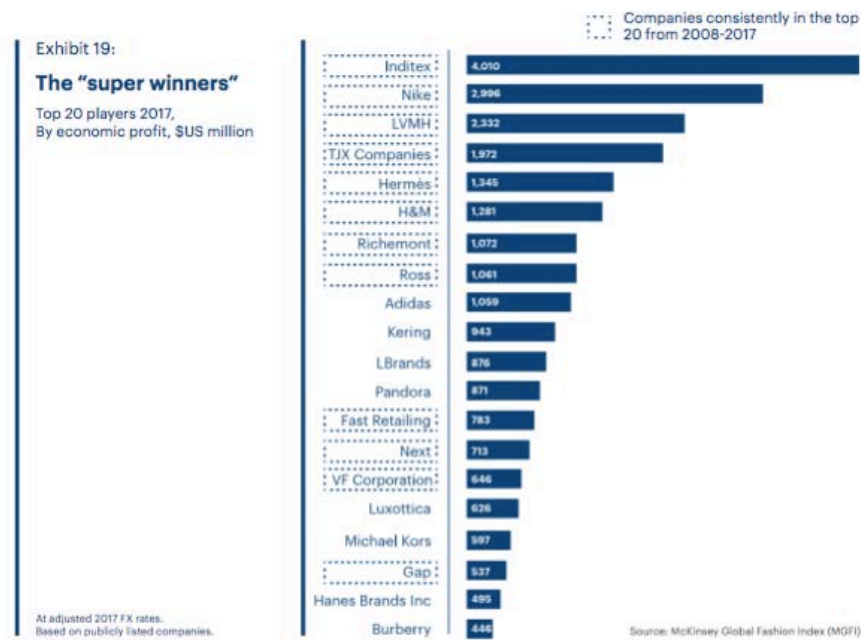


Fig. 1. The “super winners:” Top 20 players 2017, by economic profit, \$US million (Graph by McKinsey & Company. In *The State of Fashion 2019*).

As the previous chapter outlined, roughly half the top 20 consists of fast fashion companies and is a main contributor to the acceleration of production turnover and the increase in production volume, which is why this thesis is focusing on this part of the industry for the case study. As noted in figure 1, Inditex, a fast fashion brand, is by far the most profitable company of the top 20, highlighting the large presence and profitability of fast fashion retailers in the industry. Furthermore, Inditex, Fast Retailing (FR) and Gap Inc. are all companies that have been consistently in the top 20 since 2008.

While the next chapter will outline what particular SDGs the three selected companies consider to be of importance for their sustainable strategies, I will also refer back to Ghosh and Rajan's research, which revealed that the textile industry identified SDG 1 Poverty, 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, 5 Gender Equality, 10 Inequalities as top four important SDGs. The textile industry was the only industry which only selected a top 4, in the order as stated above, rather than a top 5. Considering this is also important when looking at the selected companies in comparing what they have stated as their top prioritized SDGs. The next chapter will delve into this deeper and analyze what has been outlined in this chapter.

4. Case Study and Results

To analyze the effect of the SDG framework on brands' business and sustainability strategies, it must first be outlined how the framework has been implemented. The following sections will therefore provide an introduction of the three companies and an overview of how they frame their global sustainability strategies before, during, and after the implementation of Agenda 2030.

4.1 SDG Implementation of Inditex, Fast Retailing, and Gap Inc.

Inditex

Established in 1963 in Spain, with the launch of its first brand Zara, Inditex is currently the highest-grossing chain retailer with eight brands (Zara, Pull&Bear, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, Stradivarius, Oysho, Zara Home, and Uterqüe). Inditex has 7,420 stores in 202 markets across the globe (Inditex 2019c). Through its biggest brand Zara, Inditex is often credited for making the fast fashion formula big, by producing thousands of designs annually that are made in relatively small quantities, resulting in consumers having to decide quickly to buy a garment, which it usually does out of fear of missing out. Moreover, the constantly renewed collections ensure frequent visits from consumers (Siegle 2011, 21; Roll 2019; Segran 2019).

Before adopting the SDG framework in 2016, Inditex stated its commitment to the UN Global Compact (Inditex 2015, 8), and devoted a section in its annual report of fiscal 2014 how its strategy aligns with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, highlighting the company's responsibility in the *Ruggie Framework* which is outlined in the report (Inditex 2015, 42). Inditex identified six key areas in their sustainability strategy. Concerning garment workers "traceability and management of the supply chain," was listed, which announced a strategic plan to achieve a "stable and sustainable" supply chain from 2014 to 2018 (Inditex 2015, 28-29). The company's identified top priorities consisted of eight different aspects, of which the first two were "traceability of the supply chain" and "integrity of the supply chain" respectively. The rest concerned priorities like product quality, environmental impact, customer service and contribution to community welfare (ibid., 5).

The SDGs were adopted by the UN on September 25, 2015 and incorporated by Inditex in 2016. In the FY 2016 report, Inditex first discusses its own employees under the header "people," while the second to be discussed is "sustainable management of the supply chain," (2017, 58). The 2014-2018 strategic plan Workers at the Center identifies worker

participation, living wages, responsible purchasing practices, women's empowerment, occupational health and safety, protection of migrants, and training and awareness as key areas, in that particular order (ibid., 63). The SDGs that are specifically linked to the supply chain by the company in 2016 can be found below in figure 3 and has remained unchanged in the reports thereafter. In the reports of 2017 and 2018 Inditex further divided their supply chain section into traceability of the supply chain and a socially responsible supply chain, identifying them as third and fourth priority (Inditex 2018, 69, 79).

Fast Retailing

Fast Retailing (FR) is a Japanese company established in 1943 mostly known for owning UNIQLO, which has over 2,000 stores in 21 countries. In recent years, FR has expanded its brands and launched new ones, including GU and Theory (Fast Retailing 2019d).

Prior to the implementation of the SDGs, FR did not mention the UN Global Compact or GP on Business and Human Rights, unlike the other to companies. The main collaboration with the UN at this point is in the form of a global partnership with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as part of their clothing recycling policy as well as a charity fund for UNICEF (2014, 57; 60). FR identify the supply chain as their number one priority but does not frame it within a sustainability strategy like the other brands. (2015, 7; 2016, 8). In fact, FR's social commitments were framed within a corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy. The CSR framework identified four key challenges in the following order: production, environment, human resources, and community (Fast Retailing 2016a, 3).

FR implemented the SDG framework in 2017, and alongside it reformulated their CSR report to become a sustainability report, demonstrating the adoption of the sustainable development discourse. The four key challenges as stated previously remained the same and were linked to one SDG per challenge. SDG 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth is linked to the production challenge (Fast Retailing 2017a, 11). The second year after adopting the framework, however, figure 2 shows FR expanded on the SDGs, attributing multiple SDG per challenge while stating SDG 17, Global Partnerships serves as an umbrella goal for its sustainability strategy. The SDGs specifically linked to the supply chain also expanded, as can be seen in figure 3. Neither the annual report nor the sustainability report on 2018 includes an extensive statement on the SDGs like the reports in the years before that, but merely include a statement that the company is committed to the SDGs. It reformulated its four key challenges to six key issues which the report states are grounded in the SDG

framework, although no issues are linked to specific SDGs (Fast Retailing 2019a, 10-11). Among these identified issues, “respect human rights in our supply chain” is the one related to working conditions. Overall, it can be said that the implementation of the SDG framework in the case of FR been rather unstable, changing every year.

Gap Inc.

Gap Inc. was established with the opening of the first Gap store in 1969 in San Francisco, California. Currently, other brands owned by Gap Inc. are Banana Republic, Old Navy, Athleta, Intermix, Hill City, and Janie and Jack. Gap Inc. sells in its clothes in nearly 3,700 stores in 90 countries (Gap Inc. 2019c). Like Inditex, prior to the adoption of the SDG framework Gap Inc, has stated its commitment to the UN Global Compact (Gap Inc. 2015b, 16), and mentions to have signed the UN’s Women’s Empowerment Principles, which aligns with their P.A.C.E. program, focused on the education and development of female garment workers (2015b, 64). Similarly, the brand also stated traceability and integrity of the supply chain and factory working conditions as its priority and provides a report on the progress of company goals related to the supply chain (Gap Inc. 2015b, 11). Further down the report, Gap divides the sustainable strategy into two key aspects, people and planet, where working conditions are again discussed first.

After adopting the SDG framework, Gap Inc, unlike the other two companies, does not link SDGs to the supply chain in particular. It has chosen to highlight certain SDGs that they state align with their overall sustainability model, for which they see leadership roles in some SDGs. As can be seen in figure 3, after one year of implementation the highlighted SDGs are slightly tweaked but remain the same mix of environmental and ethical focused SDGs.







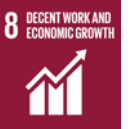
















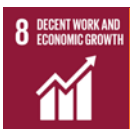















	2015	2016	2017	2018
Inditex				
Fast Retailing		   	          	States commitment to SDGs.
Gap Inc.	       	     	     	

Fig. 2: Relevant SDGs to sustainability strategy, as identified by brands since the implementation of the SDG framework 2015-2018





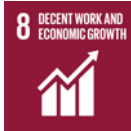

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Inditex				
Fast Retailing	N/A			States commitment to SDGs.
Gap Inc.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Fig. 3: Relevant SDGs to the supply chain, as identified by brands since the implementation of the SDG framework 2015-20

Some observations can be made on the general implementation of the SDGs. First and foremost, the three companies all have a different approach to the implementation and linking of the SDGs to existing ethical strategies and goals. Inditex and FR identify SDGs that are not just of overall importance of the company, but also to different aspects of the business, such as production, commerce, or contribution to community welfare. Gap Inc on the other hand, only links the SDGs to its overall business strategy. In doing this, they have been consistent in their selected goals, decreasing the number of goals from eight to six after one year of implementation. Inditex is also very consistent with its chosen goals. For its overall approach, all SDGs have been linked to different aspects of their business, ranging from their supply chain to tax transparency. However, while all SDGs are listed in the legend explaining how the SDGs are linked to the company, SDG 1 No Poverty and 2 Zero Hunger are not linked to specific concerns (Inditex 2018, 43). In terms of SDGs the company has identified as being directly related to the supply chain, this has also remained stable with a slight tweaking of the goals after the first year of implementation, but this has been unchanged ever since. FR is the only company who appears to be less consistent in how they apply the goals, as this varies per year. 2018 even saw a completely different approach with newly identified key issues to focus on, which the company states is grounded in the SDG framework, but which are not directly linked to any SDGs.

In addition, Ghosh and Rajan demonstrated in their survey-based research that the most valued SDGs in the textile industry are SDG 1 No Poverty, 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, 5 Gender Equality, and 12 Responsible Consumption and Production (2019, 349). As for the companies, the only SDG that is present consistently, especially in regard to the supply chain, is SDG 8. SDG 5 is present in all companies for the overall selected SDGs, but in the case of the supply chain, only Inditex has linked this SDG. This is remarkable, considering that it has been established previously that an estimate of 80% of garment workers are women, who are faced with gender-based discrimination or violence regularly. Also striking is that only FR stated its commitment to SDG 1 in 2017, also with regards to the supply chain. Neither Gap Inc nor Inditex explicitly mentions this SDG, while, as Ghosh and Rajan have shown, this seems to be an important one as guaranteeing a living wage remains difficult in the supply chain, as will be further elaborated later in this chapter. Regarding the selected cases at hand, no consistent approach to the implementation of SDGs can be seen across the three companies, as they all vary in their approach. Especially FR appears to still be in the process of finding the right approach to doing so. The next section

will build upon this short analysis and will look at the content of the reports more in-depth to see what exactly the companies report which they claim contributes positively to the SDGs.

4.2 Reporting Practices: Economic Growth and Expansion

All three companies state to report on their progress through the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), which is aligned with for example the UN Guiding Principles and Global Compact Reporting Framework. The GRI and UN Global Compact have released a guide on corporate reporting on the SDGs, which departs from principled prioritization for reporting on the SDGs. It is meant to assist in integrating the SDGs into existing reporting processes rather than beginning from scratch with the SDGs as starting point for new targets and strategies (GRI and UN Global Compact 2018, 7). The guide warns against cherry-picking and SDG-washing, which refer to the need to focus on SDGs that need the highest priority rather than what is easiest to report on and reporting on positive contributions to the Goals while ignoring negative impacts (ibid.). The guide was published after the initial adoption of the SDGs, however it can be argued that the three companies used the principled prioritization approach for incorporating the SDGs into their strategies, as they largely remained committed to earlier set priorities and targets, while then deciding which particular SDGs aligned with these targets the best.

One thing in relation to SDG reporting is that often specific SDGs are linked to charitable programs and community welfare. Gap Inc. for example, has linked its P.A.C.E. program, focused on the education and development of female garment workers to SDG 4 and 5, and link their Woman + Water initiative to SDG 5 and 6 (2019, 15). Inditex has linked no less than 6 SDGs, SDG 3, 4 and 10 amongst others, to contribution to community welfare (2019, 43) and in particular, report on their Corporate Community Investment Program that focuses on a variety of projects on the topics of health, education and more (2019, 192). FR has identified a link between SDG 1 and 4 and community welfare in its 2018 report and support initiatives for children and refugees (2019, 39-40). These contributions to community welfare are great efforts to help those in need and the achievements made through ongoing projects should be applauded, but it is equally important to recognize that these programs do not solve structural programs such as increased production or non-binding CoCs as will be explained below. It could even be argued that linking the SDGs to these relatively 'easy' traced projects are what the GRI guidelines describes as SDG-washing and cherry-picking. The community welfare contributions certainly appear to have improved people's lives but

affirm the critique on the former MDGs and a fear for the SDGs, which is that structural issues on especially poverty and inequality are not being acknowledged and dealt with.

Moving away from the SDG reporting methods, understanding the overall report and what is being prioritized in reporting is needed in order to put the reporting on SDGs and working conditions into perspective. Because as I will soon demonstrate, the main aspect companies are concerned with reporting, are financial updates, and reporting on expansion of business into new (digital) markets. Certainly, annual reports are meant to update shareholders and others interested in the performance of the company on their finances and economic performance. Perhaps that is why Gap Inc. keeps their annual reports strictly business related, while releasing additional sustainability reports which discuss the supply chain more in-depth. Since the implementation of the SDGs, the sustainability reports are being published every year instead of bi-annually. Inditex and FR include a summary of their sustainability report (or formerly CSR report in the case of FR), but the focus is also on economic performance and expansion of brands. They too publish annual sustainability reports that provide more information than what is stated in the annual reports.

A main critique of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs as outlined in the literature review is that the SDGs do not challenge the neoliberal standards that promote and encourage economic growth, and in fact go against what the SDGs aim to achieve not only environmentally, but equally as important, socially (Kumi et al. 2014, 544; Cervantes 2013, 31). As stated in chapter 2, increasing sales and production volume tends to be the root problem of high pressure at factories which leads to unsafe and unethical working conditions. When looking at some primary financial data and other numbers of the companies, it became evident very quickly that here too, growth and expansion are being promoted:

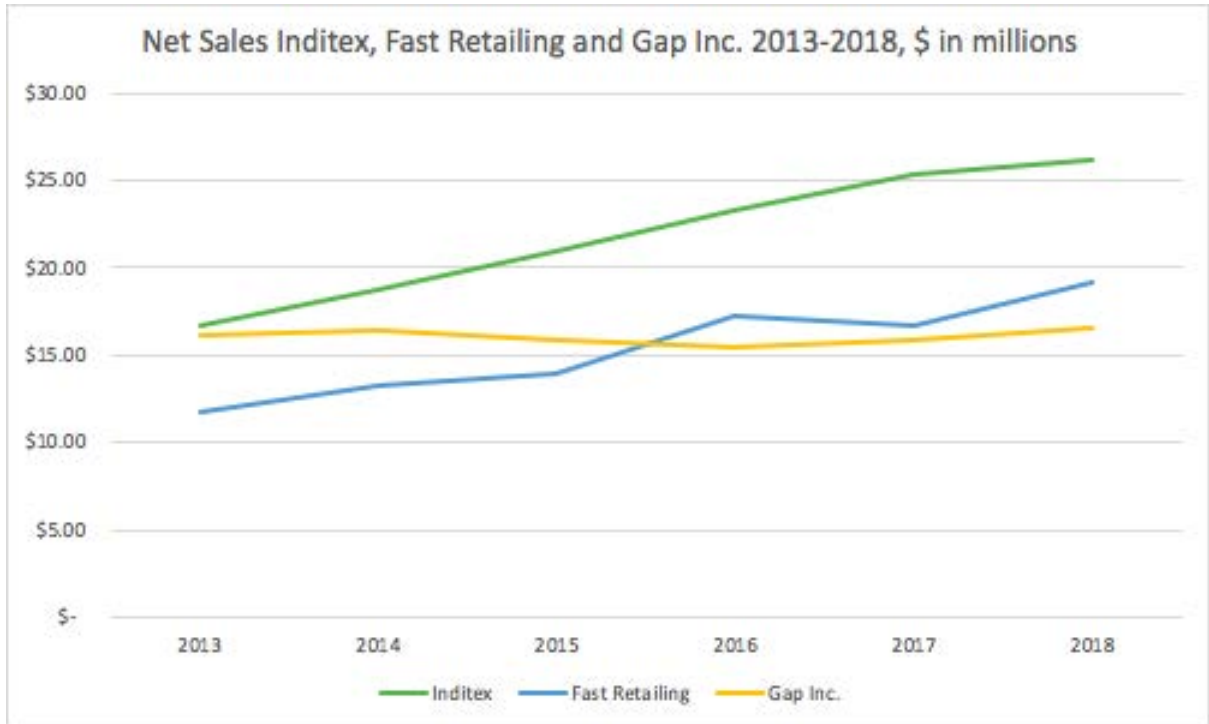


Fig. 4: Net sales Inditex, Fast Retailing and Gap Inc. 2013-2017, \$ in millions.

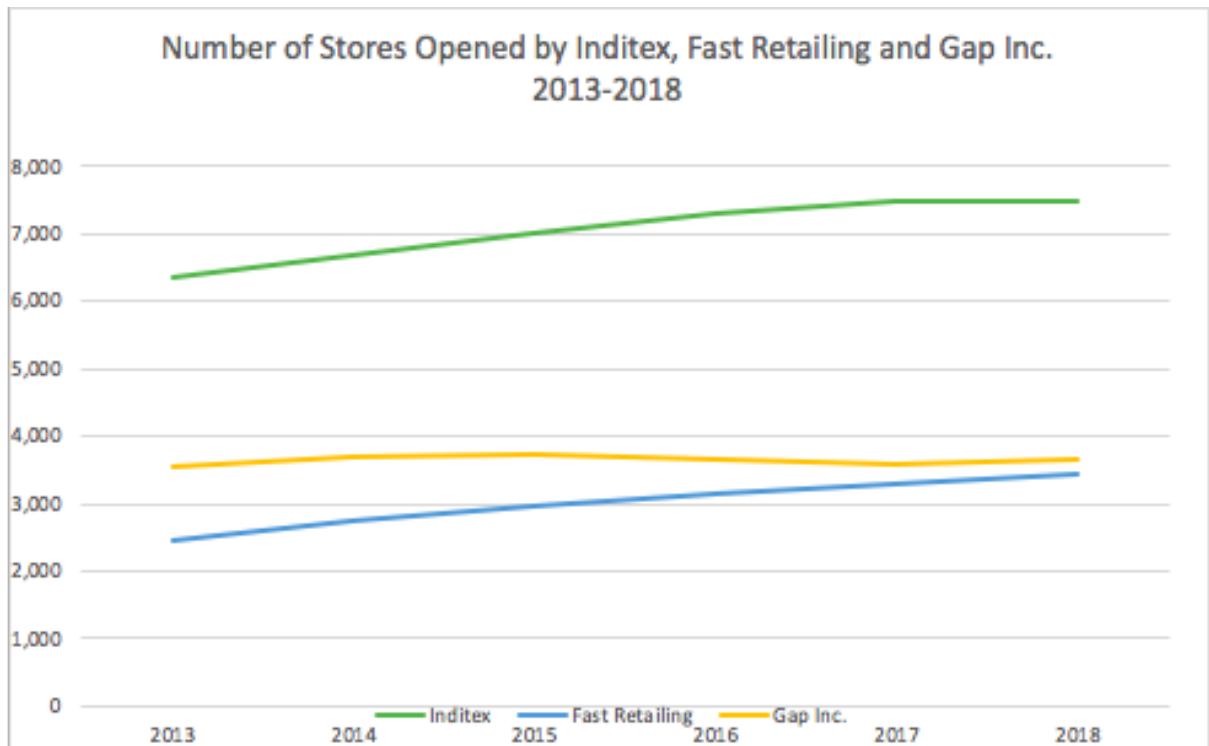


Fig. 5: Number of stores opened by Inditex, Fast Retailing and Gap Inc. 2013-2018.

As the figures above demonstrates, net sales for Inditex and FR have been growing steadily, and the aim for expansion has continuously been expressed, especially concerning entering new markets and expanding digitally (Inditex 2019, 32; Fast Retailing 2019, 9). Gap Inc.'s

results have been stagnant, and net sales at times have even been decreasing as well as the number of stores operated by the company. Earlier in 2019 Gap Inc. announced to close down over 200 stores by 2020 and splitting with one of their brands Old Navy, which will become an independent company. For now, however, the company announced to be focused on “profitable growth opportunities” for Old Navy as well as Athleta, the company’s activewear brand and to “invest in technology and supply chain initiatives that position all our brands well for competitive differentiation” (RIS News 2019). Although the company is struggling to keep consumers coming back to their stores, economic growth and a strengthened competitive position on the market are the company’s priority. Additionally, as the numbers for both net sales and operating stores has fluctuated slightly, it can be seen in figure 4 and 5 that the company continuously attempts to increase the number of stores. As of 2018, the number of stores and net sales are both higher than 2013.

Overall, the growth discourse is visible throughout the reports of the brands. While pledging to become more sustainable, the companies also pledge to increase sales, not just by expanding (digitally), but for example also by stating specific revenue targets, as is the case of FR: in their 2016 annual report CEO Tadashi Yanai pledged to increase FR revenue to ¥3 trillion by 2020 as part of a strategy to make FR “the world’s number one digital-powered apparel retailer” (Fast Retailing 2017, 6). This expansion of markets inevitably leads to the increase in production and thus the increase in needed suppliers. Inditex reported that in 2016, more than 1,5 people worked in the Inditex supply chain (2017, 62), while over 2018 this number had already increased to over 2 million people (2019, 97). Furthermore, this expansion does the exact opposite of what is argued to be needed to achieve the SDGs; companies are steadily increasing production volume. Out of the three companies, Inditex is the only company that explicitly lists its production volume each year as can be seen in figure 6. In the CEO letter of FR’s 2018 annual report, Yanai disclosed that the company produces 1.3 billion clothes annually (2019, 6). In the 2017 report, however, it was stated that FR produces around 1.2 billion garments, meaning that in one year alone the production volume increased by about 100 million garments (2018, 53). Gap Inc. has not disclosed information on production volume, but it has been established by previous reports that the global clothing production has doubled between 2000-2015 (Drift 2018, 11). In the case of Inditex, the increase in production volume seems to be in line with the general trend that has been outlined by the Drift report.

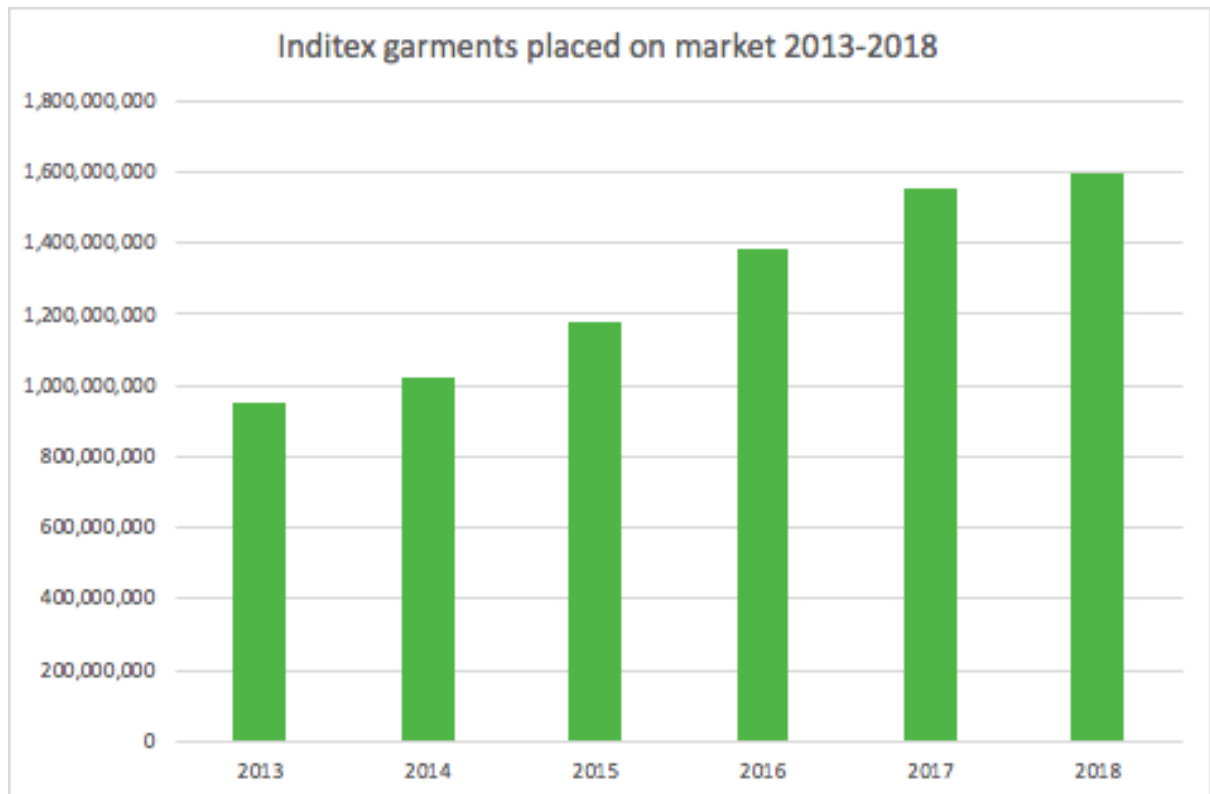


Fig. 6: Inditex garments placed on the market between 2013-2018.

This constant drive for growth and expansion both financially and in terms of physical attributes embodies the critique on the SDGs that economic growth and sustainable goals are counterintuitive and the drive for economic growth has often resulted in increased inequalities both within and across countries, which is directly the opposite of what SDG 10 and other equality and poverty-related SDGs aim for (Scheyvens et al. 2016, 374).

Interestingly enough, SDG 10 is only mentioned once in relation to the supply chain, by FR in 2017. Other than that, acknowledgements of poverty and inequality appear to be scarce.

4.3 Reporting Practices: Auditors and Compliance with Code of Conduct

To facilitate expansion, companies tend to need more suppliers. Inditex and FR are reporting increased supplier and factory numbers every year. Gap Inc on the other hand, actually reduced the number of factories they work with. This was done deliberately, as they stated that with a smaller supplier base they aim to have closer working relations with their suppliers (Gap Inc. 2017, 50). It should however be noted, that this decrease in suppliers may be in response to the difficulties Gap Inc. is facing on the market; they have not experienced growth to the extent that Inditex and FR did, meaning there might be a need to expand suppliers as much. When dealing with such a massive supply chain as in the case of

Inditex and FR, it can be difficult to maintain control over it, and thus to adhere to the SDGs applicable to the protection of garment workers. This leads to the next major aspect of reporting practices, which is the reporting of auditor rankings of suppliers. The reporting practices on this mostly consist of reporting on the audits the company and third parties have conducted at factories the companies work with. Each company has its own system of ranking suppliers based on these audits, placing them in 3-5 ranks. Gap Inc. for example ranks companies by giving them a green, yellow, or red ranking (formerly this was green, light green, yellow and red), while Inditex and FR have divided the scores into 5 different rankings. While the rankings tend to differ a bit each year, overall it appears that the lower rankings have decreased significantly and that suppliers tend to move up and down in the mid and upper rankings. None of the reports, however, disclose detailed information the content of the audits, or the times of questions asked during interviews, for example. Audits consists of either in-house audits or audits conducted by the companies, but also increasingly by third-party audit companies. When Inditex announced in its 2014 annual report when announcing their 2014-2018 strategic plan, the company reported on how their CSR team at the time provided auditor training for external auditors and also accompanied a number of third-party auditors in a practice called “shadow-auditing” (Inditex 2015, 43).

While the number of auditors partaking in such trainings is low compared to the number of audits that are performed annually, it leaves the question of how impartial these third-party auditors may be. It is especially difficult to assess this when information on the content of an audit is not being disclosed by the companies. Some companies disclose scores for specific areas of auditing. Amongst the compliance issues auditors often encounter, working overtime and wage compliance, as well as hygiene violations are named as some of the most named violations (Gap Inc. 2019b, 35; Inditex 2019a, 134). This ‘compliance’ is in relation to the Code of Conduct (CoC) as drafted up by each individual company. The CoC is often considered to be the document that should ensure ethical working conditions and is the basis for the auditor's assessment. Under the 2014-2018 sustainable strategy executed by Inditex, goals under specific areas that were linked to the SDGs were sometimes phrased as to be targeted to “ensure sustainable compliance” with the CoC, for example regarding living wages or women empowerment goals, showing the results as a percentage of compliance (Inditex 2017, 67; 71). This language is rather vague and does not disclose what is understood as “sustainable” compliance.

When looking at the CoCs for the three companies, they are all quite similar in terms of content and quite brief. Inditex and FR’s CoC is 5-8 pages long, while Gap Inc’s is much

longer and includes information for workers on how they can ask for help when the code is violated. There are two main points on which I would like to elaborate. First, the codes all state the same regular work week of 48 hours, and a maximum of 60 hours of work per week including overtime (Inditex 2019b, 5; Fast Retailing 2019c, 3; Gap Inc 2016b, 26). However, as established earlier on, the fast fashion model's high turnover rates require the production of a lot of garments in an often-unreasonable short amount of time, or that often pre-production deadlines are not met on the buyer's end, leaving manufacturers with little time to finish orders on time and therefore inciting overtime (Human Rights Watch 2019, 24). In the CoCs, only Gap Inc includes a clause addressing unreasonable production quotas, but states that "the facility shall not shall not set production quotas or piecework at such a level that workers need to work beyond regular working hours (excluding overtime) to earn the legal minimum wage or prevailing industry wage" (Gap Inc 2016b, 23). Thus, the responsibility is mainly put on the suppliers to ensure working hours are being upheld. While it is true that factories are responsible for ensuring safe working conditions as much as the buyers, it is especially difficult to put the responsibility for production quotas on suppliers when the companies decide on the production. Suppliers often feel they cannot afford to decline an order as brands will easily find another supplier willing to take the order in the highly competitive industry (Human Rights Watch 2019, 2-3).

The second aspect is the inclusion of a clause to ensure a decent wage. All three CoCs such a clause. The CoCs all define a minimum wage as a wage that cover a worker's basic needs and provide some discretionary income (Fast Retailing 2019c, 2; Gap Inc. 2016b, 23). Inditex slightly broadens this definition, stating that it should be a wage that can cover the basic needs of workers *and* their families, and any other which might be considered as 'reasonable additional needs,' (Inditex 2019b, 5). In the case of Inditex, it is the only company out of the three to also mention this in its annual reports (2019a, 105). The CoCs, however, all state that the minimum wage needs to be either the minimum legal wage or the local industry standards, thus abiding local laws. However, it has been reported on many times by NGOs and news outlets that the minimum wage in many Southeast Asian countries, where most of our clothes are produced, are much lower than the calculated living wage, which is needed to cover the basic needs and discretionary needs as stated in the CoCs. Asia Floor Wage, calculated for example that while the minimum wage in Bangladesh and Cambodia is €49,56 and €72,62 respectively, the living wage in 2013 was estimated to be at €259,80 and €285,83 (Asia Floor Wage 2013). While in recent years, partially due to demonstrations of workers, minimum wages have been raised slightly across Asia, countries

like Vietnam and Thailand have announced to slow down this raise in 2020 to maintain a competitive position in the region and that overall, minimum wages still do not live up to living wages (Muramatsu 2019; Chan 2019.) This is important to keep in mind when discussing third party reports in the next section.

4.4 Third Party Report Results

As established in chapter 3, the most useful reports to conduct this research is the Ethical Fashion Report, as it names brands specifically and rates them on a wide variety of issues under the denominator ethics. Let us take a look at the scores of the three brands in the Ethical Fashion Report since its first publication in 2015 up until now.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Inditex	A-		A	A-	A
Fast Retailing	B		B	D+	B+
Gap Inc.	B		B-	B-	B

Fig. 7: Ranking of Inditex, Fast Retailing and Gap Inc. by the Ethical Fashion Report 2015-2019

At first sight, the overall scores seem to be good, and consistent over time. The only remarkable score is that of Fast Retailing in 2018. For that year, the report states that Fast Retailing (stated as UNIQLO in the report) was a non-responsive company, which may explain the given score (Baptist World Aid Australia 2019, 5). The four main categories the report ranks brands on are: Policies, Transparency and Traceability, Auditing and Supplier Relationships, and Worker Empowerment. In 2019, a fifth one, Environmental Management has been added. This thesis will not look at the rankings for this category as it only focuses on ethics concerning human rights - while, as the report argues, a truly ethical company may indeed also need to consider its environmental impact, it drives away attention from unsafe and unfair working conditions, the same can be argued for companies to report on ethics under the sustainability denominator, as it creates confusion about what falls under these categories. It does appear, however, that the inclusion of the environmental category in 2019 does not influence the overall scores of the companies too much as can be seen in figure 7.

The report divides each category further in scores for Raw Materials, Inputs Production, and Final Stage Production. This thesis will only focus on the latter.

In terms of CoCs and other policies, all three companies have been rated an A- or above since 2015, meaning that overall, the needed elements for an all-encompassing CoC are present. The one thing that stands out is concerning policies on responsible purchasing practices. In 2015, all companies were stated to have partial policies in place (Baptist World Aid 2015, 17). In 2019, only Fast Retailing received the green ranking, while the ranking of Inditex and Gap Inc. was still rated yellow, meaning partial policies are in place (Baptist World Aid 2019, 66). Considering that the production volume is one of the issues facilitating unethical working conditions and all companies state to explicitly support SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production, this might be something Inditex and Gap Inc. should look into more. Concerning transparency, all brands score a B+ or higher in the 2019 reports. While all companies are said to trace their production supply chain, none of them are fully transparent.

The report provides some information on auditing practices. While not focusing on the content of the audits, the report is able to provide information on the frequency of (unannounced) audits, and the efficiency of corrective action plans (CAPs). While the number of audits has increased, the question remains whether quality increased. In the case of Inditex and Gap Inc., the percentage of third-party auditors that specializes in labor standards is estimated between 50-75% and 26-50% respectively. FR is the only company receiving a green score on this question, correlating with 76-99% of third-party auditors specializing in labor standards. However, results on CAPs seem to indicate that audits and resulting plans may not be effective regardless. None of the companies scored higher in 2019 than 26-50% on the question whether CAPs pertaining to living wage and/or working hours are resolved within 12 months, and in the case of FR the score is 0% (Baptist World Aid 2019, 73-74). This score is alarming, because as the 2018 report notes, audits work best when paired with effective CAPs, which does not appear to be the case ((Baptist World Aid 2018, 41). Since we established earlier in this chapter that the companies mostly reported lack of compliance with hygiene and working overtime, it leaves the question of whether strong improvements are made on these issues through CAPs.

What is even more remarkable, is that despite high overall grades, under working conditions Inditex is the only company with a decent grade, being a B+, while Gap Inc. and FR score a D+ and D respectively. This is largely due to the red scores under wages, as none of the companies can ensure a living wage is paid in the factories (Baptist World Aid 2019,

79-80). Gap Inc. and FR fail to give any detailed information concerning living wages in their reports, while Inditex does address it. Even so, it is reported that no more than 50% of their factory workers earn a living wage. The higher score for the company is partially attributed to its high score to have programs in place to promote a higher wage, as well as receiving high scores for having grievance systems and effective child labor detection mechanisms in place (Baptist World Aid 2019, 79). It is striking that none of the companies mentioned SDG 1 No Poverty as an SDG which they could link to their sustainability strategies, when all the companies are lacking in this respect. Only FR identified SDG 1 as an important SDG, but this was in relation to its community welfare, which puts its contribution to SDG 1 in a positive light. By not addressing the lack of insurance of a living wage, companies may be SDG-washing in their reporting. FR and Gap Inc. score red or orange on all worker voice and child and forced labor scores meaning they cannot or can only partially ensure the protection of workers.

The scores given in this report reveal that even though the companies analyzed in this thesis were given good overall ratings, this is mostly due to the proper policies being in place in theory, and to increased transparency on supplier information. However, if one only takes a brief look at the overall score, this yields a skewed view on the current state of ethical performance of companies. While having the right policies in place is necessary, they need to be enforced. While some brands are rated positively, for example, for having grievance mechanisms in place, or educating workers on their rights as outlined in the CoCs, it begs the question whether this is completely deserved. It leads back to the discussion on whether the sustainable development discourse was the right approach to Agenda 2030, at the cost of the human rights discourse which is more rigorous, a point that was raised by Lynda Collins and Pogge and Sengupta among others. Can a company be considered ethical when it does not enforce the insurance of a living wage, or cannot guarantee workers are being protected?

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to get a better understanding of how the implementation of the SDGs by fashion MNCs contributes to better working conditions for garment workers. After the Rana Plaza tragedy, it became clear just how dangerous and inhumane working conditions could be at factories that supply for the biggest fashion brands in the world. The SDGs posed an opportunity to continue the momentum of the ethical fashion movement. While sometimes thought to be too ambitious and aspirational, the universal goals, aimed at both the Global North and South, at governments, civil society and the private sector, provide a framework that all the different parties involved may utilize to fit their needs or strategies. This global-yet-voluntary, universal-yet-national ‘compromise’ as Long called it may actually incentivize countries and non-state actors to adopt the framework. I would argue that this approach exemplifies the tension between the sustainable development discourse and the human rights discourse, especially in the fashion industry. Given the ambitious zero-based targets, more explicit emphasis on human rights may be necessary to reach the targets as they are more rigorous approach and require immediate action. Moreover, it has become apparent that, through the sustainable development discourse, ethics are often overshadowed by environmental efforts, which are more often associated with sustainability.

Overall, in the case of Inditex, FR and Gap Inc, it becomes clear that the companies’ implementation of the SDGs varies, and in the case of FR, is rather inconclusive as it changes every year. Furthermore, while using the principled prioritization method in linking SDGs to business strategies, the companies prioritize different SDGs, of which only a few match with Ghosh and Rajan’s outlined top four for the textile industry. This division may play a role as to why stronger improvements are not made, which is further amplified by the lack of authority and responsibility Pogge and Sengupta have described when discussing accountability to achieve the Goals. As we have seen in the case study, companies are especially lacking in taking responsibility for achieving SDG 1 and SDG 10 while Scheyvens et al. noted that MNCs and the current economic system appears to be the main culprit of increased inequalities.

Indeed, it appears the main critique of the sustainable development discourse applies to the garment industry; growth is prioritized at all costs. While in relation to the discourse, most people link this to the harm caused to the planet, the same applies to working conditions in garment factories. The figures in chapter 4 demonstrated the growth the companies experience does not appear to be slowing down. Moreover, considering suppliers’

disadvantaged position they often have little choice but to comply with the companies' increasing purchasing quotas, leading to inhumane and unsafe working conditions. While the scores of the brands appear to be good judged by their own reports as well as the overall score of the Ethical Fashion Report, when looking further it becomes apparent that these good scores are mostly based on having the proper paperwork in place that, in theory, should ensure the protection of workers. Unfortunately, companies often cannot guarantee that policies are being upheld. This again leads back to the discussion on the different discourses. It brings up the question whether we should be content with small changes or if we need a more rigorous approach that makes working conditions a priority rather than something that is expected to be achieved by a set date. The companies' reporting practices on community welfare amplify that some effort is made, but not by much, as some SDGs are linked to charitable causes rather than issues in the supply chain that adequately address the root causes of poor working conditions. It appears that, at least in part, companies may be SDG-washing or cherry-picking in their reporting practices, which does not help to advance the SDGs overall before 2030.

While effort made by the companies should be encouraged and applauded, this does not mean we should not remain critical of the companies' overall sustainability strategy or practices, like for example purchasing practices. The UN has called for a Decade of Action from 2020 in an effort to reach the SDGs in time, confirming that progress right now is too slow (The Sustainable Development Goals 2020). If companies truly want to contribute to achieving Agenda 2030 they should focus more on people and less on economic growth. In case of the garment industry, critique of the SDGs' neoliberal nature is applicable and lower production volumes are necessary to achieve the goals on the industry's end. It is time for 'less is more' to come back into fashion.

Bibliography

Addo, Michael K. 2014. "The Reality of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights." *Human Rights Law Review* 14(1): 133-47.

Adelman, Sam. 2018. "The SDGs, anthropocentrism and neoliberalism.' In *Sustainable Development Goals: Law, Theory and Implementation*. Edward Elgar: 15-40.

Asia Floor Wage. 2013. "Living Wage versus Minimum Wage." Accessed December 25, 2019. <https://asia.floorwage.org/living-wage-versus-minimum-wage>

Beeler, Carolyn. 2017. "How Good is H&M's Recycling Program?" *WGBH*. Accessed November 24, 2019. <https://www.wgbh.org/news/2017/12/11/how-good-hms-clothing-recycling-program>

Briant Carant, Jane. 2017. "Unheard Voices: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Millennium Development Goals' Evolution into the Sustainable Development Goals." *Third World Quarterly* 38(1): 16-41.

Burke, Jason. 2013. "Fashion Chains Sign Accord To Help Finance Safety In Bangladesh Factories". *The Guardian*. Accessed September 30, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/13/fashion-chain-finance-safety-bangladesh-factories>.

Chan, Emily. "Why Do We Still Know So Little About How Our Clothes Are Made?" *Vogue Britain*. Accessed December 25, 2019. <https://www.vogue.co.uk/fashion/article/how-are-our-clothes-actually-made>

Drift. 2018. "The Transition To Good Fashion." Accessed September 30, 2019. https://drift.eur.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/FINAL_report.pdf

Fashion Revolution. 2019. "Fashion Transparency Index: 2019 Edition." Accessed October 2, 2019. https://issuu.com/fashionrevolution/docs/fashion_transparency_index_2019

Fast Retailing. 2014a. *Annual Report 2013*. Accessed December 23, 2019. https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/ir/library/pdf/ar2013_en.pdf

Fast Retailing. 2014b. *CSR Report 2014*. Accessed December 23, 2019. https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/sustainability/report/pdf/csr2014_e.pdf

Fast Retailing. 2015a. *Annual Report 2014*. Accessed December 23, 2019. https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/ir/library/pdf/ar2014_en.pdf

Fast Retailing. 2015b. *CSR Report 2015*. Accessed December 23, 2019. https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/sustainability/report/pdf/csr2015_e.pdf

Fast Retailing. 2016a. *Annual Report 2015*. Accessed December 23, 2019. https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/ir/library/pdf/ar2015_en.pdf

Fast Retailing. 2016b. *CSR Report 2016*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/sustainability/report/pdf/csr2016_e.pdf#page=1&pagemode=thumbs&zoom=80

Fast Retailing. 2017a. *Annual Report 2016*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/ir/library/pdf/ar2016_en.pdf

Fast Retailing. 2017b. *Sustainability Report 2017*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/sustainability/report/pdf/sustainability2017_en.pdf#page=1&pagemode=thumbs&zoom=80

Fast Retailing. 2018a. *Annual Report 2017*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/ir/library/pdf/ar2017_en.pdf

Fast Retailing. 2018b. *Sustainability Report 2018*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/sustainability/report/pdf/sustainability2018_en.pdf#page=1&pagemode=thumbs&zoom=80

Fast Retailing. 2019a. *Annual Report 2018*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/ir/library/pdf/ar2018_en.pdf

Fast Retailing. 2019b. *Sustainability Report 2019*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/sustainability/report/pdf/sustainability2019_en.pdf#page=1&pagemode=thumbs&zoom=80

Fast Retailing 2019c. *Code of Conduct for Production Partners*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/sustainability/labor/pdf/coc_en.pdf

Fast Retailing. 2019d. “About Fast Retailing” Accessed October 2, 2019.
<https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/about/business/aboutfr.html>

French, Duncan and Louis J. Kotzé. 2018. “Introduction.” In *Sustainable Development Goals: Law, Theory and Implementation*. Edward Elgar: 1-12.

Gap Inc. 2014. *Annual Report 2013*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
<https://investors.gapinc.com/static-files/3f97edbd-fe13-427f-bfbd-a1ea573e7943>

Gap Inc. 2015a. *Annual Report 2014*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
<https://investors.gapinc.com/static-files/0848bcfa-23d3-4707-9626-136391318db2>

Gap Inc. 2015b. *Global Sustainability Report 2013-2014*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
<http://www.gapincustainability.com/sites/default/files/Gap%20Inc.%202013%20-%202014%20Report.pdf>

Gap Inc. 2016a. *Annual Report 2015*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
<https://investors.gapinc.com/static-files/60321f58-1852-4805-9e9f-9a4b21bb8aab>

- Gap Inc. 2016b. *Code of Vendor Conduct*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
https://www.gapinc.com/content/dam/gapincsite/documents/CodeofVendorConduct_FINAL.pdf
- Gap Inc. 2017a. *Annual Report 2016*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
<https://investors.gapinc.com/static-files/921edeb2-c3da-4af7-9303-55f945b419e6>
- Gap Inc. 2017b. *Global Sustainability Report 2015-2016*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
<http://www.gapincustainability.com/sites/default/files/Gap%20Inc.%202015%20-%202016%20Report.pdf>
- Gap Inc. 2018a. *Annual Report 2017*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
<https://investors.gapinc.com/static-files/ff1fc1f2-ed73-4717-9227-3c25c6c8aa18>
- Gap Inc. 2018b. *Global Sustainability Report 2017*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
<https://www.gapincustainability.com/sites/default/files/Gap%20Inc.%202017%20Report.pdf>
- Gap Inc. 2019a. *Annual Report 2018*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
<https://investors.gapinc.com/static-files/ec74f4f6-ba44-4819-a1e2-4e1a50fbb44a>
- Gap Inc. 2019b. *Global Sustainability Report 2018*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
<https://www.gapincustainability.com/sites/default/files/Gap%20Inc%20Report%202018.pdf>
- Gap Inc. 2019c. "About." Accessed October 2, 2019.
<https://www.gapinc.com/content/gapinc/html/aboutus.html>
- Ghosh, S., and J. Rajan. 2019. "The Business Case for SDGs: An Analysis of Inclusive Business Models in Emerging Economies." *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology* 26(4): 344-53.
- Haug, Anders, and Jacob Busch. 2016. "Towards an Ethical Fashion Framework." *Fashion Theory* 20(3): 317-39.
- Hira, Anil, and Maureen Benson-Rea. 2017. *Governing Corporate Social Responsibility in the Apparel Industry after Rana Plaza*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Horton, Kathleen. 2018. "Just Use What You Have: Ethical Fashion Discourse and the Feminisation of Responsibility." *Australian Feminist Studies* 33 (98): 515-529.
- Human Rights Watch. 2019. "Paying for a Bus Ticket and Expecting to Fly."
- Inditex. 2014. *Annual Report 2013*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
http://static.inditex.com/annual_report_2013/en/
- Inditex. 2015. *Annual Report 2014*. Accessed December 23, 2019.
http://www.inditex.com/documents/10279/18789/Inditex_Annual_Report_2014_web.pdf/a8323597-3932-4357-9f36-6458f55ac099

- Inditex. 2016. *Annual Report 2015*. Accessed December 23, 2019. https://www.inditex.com/documents/10279/246750/Annual+Report_2015.pdf/b599669d-6512-481f-b9d5-5244885f607a
- Inditex. 2017. *Annual Report 2016*. Accessed December 23, 2019. <https://www.inditex.com/documents/10279/319575/Inditex+Annual+Report+2016/6f8a6f55-ed5b-41f4-b043-6c104a305035>
- Inditex. 2018. *Annual Report 2017*. Accessed December 23, 2019. http://static.inditex.com/annual_report_2017/assets/pdf/memoria_en.pdf
- Inditex. 2019a. *Annual Report 2018*. Accessed December 23, 2019. http://static.inditex.com/annual_report_2018/pdfs/en/Inditex%20Annual%20Report%202018.pdf
- Inditex. 2019b. *Code of Conduct for Manufacturers and Suppliers Inditex Group*. Accessed December 23, 2019. <https://www.inditex.com/documents/10279/241035/Inditex+Code+of+Conduct+for+Manufacturers+and+Suppliers/e23dde6a-4b0e-4e16-a2aa-68911d3032e7>
- Inditex. 2019c. "Who We Are." Accessed October 2, 2019. <https://www.inditex.com/en/about-us/who-we-are>
- Knox, John H. 2015. "Human Rights, Environmental Protection, and the Sustainable Development Goals." *Washington International Law Journal* 24(3): 517-536.
- Kotzé, Louis J. 2018. "The SDGs: An Existential Critique alongside Three New-millennial Analytical Paradigms." In *Sustainable Development Goals: Law, Theory and Implementation*. Edward Elgar Publishing: 41-65.
- Kraak, Menno Jan, Ricker, Britta, Engelhardt, Yuri. 2018. "Challenges of Mapping Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Data." *ISPRS International Journal of Geo-information* 7(12): 1-15.
- Leonard, Matt. 2019. "Textile waste has increased 811% since 1960". *supplychaindive.com*. Accessed November 23, 2019. <https://www.supplychaindive.com/news/textile-waste-increased-811-since-1960/559297/>.
- Li, Yongjian, Zhao, Xiukun, Shi, Dan, and Li, Xiang. 2014. "Governance of Sustainable Supply Chains in the Fast Fashion Industry." *European Management Journal* 32(5): 823-836.
- Lynda M. Collins. 2018. "Sustainable Development Goals and Human Rights: Challenges and Opportunities." In *Sustainable Development Goals: Law, Theory and Implementation*. Edward Elgar Publishing: 66-90.
- LVMH. 2019. "LVMH announces signature of a five-year partnership with UNESCO to support Man and Biosphere (MAB) biodiversity program". *LVMH*. Accessed November 23, 2019. <https://www.lvmh.com/news-documents/news/lvmh-announces-signature-of-a-five-year-partnership-with-unesco-to-support-man-and-biosphere-biodiversity-program/>

Long, Graham. 2018. "Underpinning Commitments of the SDGs: Indivisibility, Universality, Leaving No One Behind." In *Sustainable Development Goals: Law, Theory and Implementation*. Edward Elgar Publishing: 91-116.

MacDonald, Kate. 2014. *The Politics of Global Supply Chains Power and Governance beyond the State*. Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity.

McKinsey & Company. 2018. *The State of Fashion 2019*. McKinsey & Company and Business of Fashion.

Manulak, Michael W. 2015. "Multilateral Solutions to Bilateral Problems: The 1972 Stockholm Conference and Canadian Foreign Environmental Policy." *International Journal* 70(1): 4-22.

Muramatsu, Yohei. 2019. "Southeast Asia tames wage hikes to keep manufacturing thriving." *Nikkei Asian Review*. Accessed December 25, 2019.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Southeast-Asia-tames-wage-hikes-to-keep-manufacturing-thriving>

Nikkei Asian Review. 2019. "Uniqlo operator ties up with ILO to improve Asia working conditions." *Nikkei Asian Review*. Accessed November 23, 2019.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Companies/Uniqlo-operator-ties-up-with-ILO-to-improve-Asia-working-conditions>

Paul, Ruma, and Euan Rocha. 2017. "Factbox: Major Industrial Accidents In Bangladesh In Recent Years". *Reuters*. Accessed September 30, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bangladesh-blast-accidents-factbox/factbox-major-industrial-accidents-in-bangladesh-in-recent-years-idUSKBN19P0JN>.

Pogge, Thomas, and Mitu Sengupta. 2016. "Assessing the Sustainable Development Goals from a Human Rights Perspective." *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy* 32(2): 83-97.

RIS News. 2019. "Gap Continues to Struggle, Announces Aggressive Store Closures." *Retail Info Systems*. Accessed on December 17, 2019.

<https://risnews.com/gap-continues-struggle-announces-aggressive-store-closures>

Roll, Martin. 2019. "The Secret of Zara's Success: A Culture of Customer Co-creation." *martinroll.com*. Accessed December 2, 2019.

<https://martinroll.com/resources/articles/strategy/the-secret-of-zaras-success-a-culture-of-customer-co-creation/>

Scheyvens, Regina, Glenn Banks, and Emma Hughes. 2016. "The Private Sector and the SDGs: The Need to Move Beyond 'Business as Usual'." *Sustainable Development* 24(6): 371-82.

Segran, Elizabeth. 2019. "Zara Built a \$20B Empire on Fast Fashion. Now It Needs to Slow Down." *Fast Company*. Accessed on November 24, 2019.

<https://www.fastcompany.com/90379824/zara-built-a-20b-empire-on-fast-fashion-now-it-needs-to-dismantle-it>

Sustain Your Style. 2019. "Environmental Impacts Of The Fashion Industry". 2019. *Sustainyourstyle.com*. Accessed September 24, 2019. <https://www.sustainyourstyle.org/old-environmental-impacts>.

SDG Knowledge Platform. 2019. "Sustainable Development Goals." Accessed October 30, 2019. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

Siegle, Lucy. 2011. *To Die For: Is Fashion Wearing Out the World?* Harper Collins, UK. The Bangladesh Accord. 2019. "Achievements 2013 Accord". *The Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh*. Accessed December 2, 2019. <https://bangladeshaccord.org/2018/07/20/achievements-2013-accord/>

Tucker, Ian. 2019. "The Five Ways That Fashion Threatens The Planet". *The Guardian*. Accessed October 2, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2019/jun/23/five-ways-fashion-damages-the-planet>.

UNCED. 1992. Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. Accessed October 1, 2019. http://www.unesco.org/education/information/nfsunesco/pdf/RIO_E.PDF

UN Development Group. 2013. *A Million Voices: The World We Want. A Sustainable Future with Dignity for All*. Accessed September 23, 23, 2019. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/mdg/a-million-voices--the-world-we-want.html>

UN General Assembly. 2000. *United Nations Millennium Declaration*. A/RES/55/2. Accessed October 30, 2019. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f4ea3.html>

UN General Assembly. 2015. *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. A/RES/70/1. Accessed September 23, 2019. <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/70/1>

The Sustainable Development Goals. 2020. *The Sustainable Development Agenda*. The United Nations. Accessed January 2, 2020. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>