The benevolent future of fashion: A framework for business partnerships with a social purpose

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Abstract

Consumers are increasingly buying from brands they believe in, and, therefore, fashion businesses increasingly need to align their operations with their customers' values. With this in mind, this paper reports on a research project aimed at demonstrating ways in which the fashion system can begin to benefit society, consumers and businesses more. Recommendations are distilled from desk research and primary data collected through a consumer survey and interviews with fashion industry experts. The findings from the research reveal how collaborations can be used as a multidimensional tool and expose the tangible advantages of communicating ethics and engaging audiences by aligning with consumers' desires. The research findings were used to inform the development of a framework which paves the way for a more socially conscious fashion industry by providing businesses with a checklist to follow to create partnerships and projects with a social purpose. To conclude, this paper advocates for how the fashion industry should begin to create more positive social impact and lays the foundations for further research on the benevolent future of fashion.

Keywords: Fashion, Strategic Partnerships, Activism, Social impact, Charity

Introduction

The fashion industry causes a negative impact on society and the planet in many ways, including abuse of labour rights, compromise of workers' health in a fast fashion production system, non-inclusive fashion media, anxiety related to over-consumption and a sort of 'waste colonialism' (i.e. communities in the global South face the impacts of fast fashion trends in the global North). Within this context, there is a lack of insight into how the fashion industry can create positive social change. Contemporary research on how businesses can be benevolent to society often refers to the concept of the 'triple bottom line' or the 'three Ps' (i.e. people, profit and the planet) (Stoddard, 2017). Within the scope of this paper, this means that businesses can help wider society through new approaches like collaborations designed to have a social impact. Building networks and business partnerships can be one way to address complex societal issues, develop a social purpose and therefore contribute to social justice.

This paper addresses the rise in popularity of collaborations in the fashion sector and discusses how they can be harnessed to improve businesses' actions and therefore reputations. The research presented in this paper intends to address a knowledge gap about how brands can take small steps towards being more socially inclusive and impactful. Particularly in a post-COVID world, many businesses may not be ready to make substantial changes, but smaller one-off projects and collaborations can act as a gateway towards new ways of doing business with a social purpose. Collaborations in fashion have always existed, and in recent years their popularity has exploded, as they are used for marketing campaigns, new concept development and acquiring new markets, as well as developing more systemic responses to complex issues. Aziz and Jones (2018) track the increasingly benevolent trajectory of contemporary business and marketing strategy in their book series *Good is the New Cool*. Their work has been influential in shaping a potential benevolent future of marketing, one in which "a great CEO should have the brain of a CFO, the heart of a storyteller, and the soul of an activist" (Aziz & Jones, 2021, p.7).

The theories reviewed in this paper were applied to a mental wellness platform called 'HelpingYourself', set up by the first author of this paper. Strategic partnerships are at the heart of 'HelpingYourself', which aims to work with others to grow faster and benefit from collaborators in terms of credibility, authority and audience. This approach has been beneficial. Similarly, other industries have been analysed for this project to find out if their approaches could inform benevolent fashion collaborations. However, there is limited literature that analyses the topics of business, society and consumer wellness together. With this in mind, the overall aim of the research project presented in this paper was to develop a framework for fashion-related collaborations enabling consumer wellness and social enterprise creation. The framework was then applied to 'HelpingYourself' to validate its effectiveness.

Literature review

The following sections discuss the key findings from the literature review concerning consumer wellness, business collaborations and social entrepreneurship – to identify a knowledge gap and inform the development of a framework.

Consumer wellness, values-led fashion and emotional bonds

Consumer wellness has become increasingly prominent as a marketing concept and business approach. Discussing the make-up brand L'Oréal, Martin and Shackleford (2021) state that the company is now focusing its marketing less on the product and more on the feelings that consumers wish to feel, saying the brand is now selling a "sense of belonging, self-realization and self-confidence" (para. 1). This builds on Cartner-Morley's (2019) argument that wellness does what fashion used to do by selling consumers an ideal vision of themselves. Vogue Business (2021) uses the new term 'comfort consumerism' to reflect consumers' new prioritisation of wellbeing alongside luxury. Hilton (2007) suggests that consumerism was typically a cause of societal ills; however, now consumer culture moves towards catering to society's needs.

Given the urgency to address sustainability challenges, brands face increasing pressures to show that they are not supporting relentless consumerism. Gaffney (2020) points out that Generation Z (Gen Z) customers are facing unprecedented stress and that they expect brands to authentically engage with their needs and aspirations. Businesses which show they care about societal challenges create for themselves the opportunity to bond with their customers as a consequence of a shared value system. According to Chitrakorn (2021), consumers expect that brands have a purpose in society and are consistent in their messaging or they suffer the consequences of not following through on the values they espouse. On the other hand, companies may be reluctant to take a strong stance on societal issues due to fear of losing customers in case their positioning or messaging does not please everyone. However, brands that speak up about issues in a heartfelt honest way can develop an emotional bond with customers, resulting in increased brand loyalty. When customers develop an emotional connection with a brand's purpose, they become brand advocates (Moore, 2015). Younger shoppers want to buy from brands that align with their values, including 33% of baby boomers and 60% of millennials surveyed as part of a study by Deloitte (2020).

Brands that act on their values are not going 'above and beyond', but are merely meeting customers' expectations (Thomas, 2020). According to Aziz and Jones (2021), a customer is 83.7% more likely to support a brand that they believe in. This change in consumer behaviour affects how fashion is perceived and purchased (Hilton, 2007); this consumer agency contributes to shaping a more sustainable world in which we want to live. Conscious fashion consumers now see shopping as a moral choice. Accordingly, there is now a marketing need to think about people as citizens as well as consumers (Hilton, 2007.).

Collaborations, compatible values and catering vs. pandering to consumers

Collaborations across the fashion industry have become hugely popular, featuring multifaceted objectives. Mondalek (2021) states that the best collaborations are financially beneficial, bridge audience gaps and 'reinforce existing consumer bases'. They are proving a valuable contemporary instrument in resolving business challenges and allow organisations to co-create solutions. Collaborations are so advantageous to brands that their future seems assured as a strategy within the fashion industry. Table 1 summarises and categorises the applications and objectives of collaborative projects.

Table 1: Objectives of collaborations.

Customer approaches	Marketing approaches	Bridging gaps
Cross-pollination of audiences.	Seeking media attention through novel content.	Harnessing design skills or technical expertise from another company.
Reinforcing the brands' beliefs by partnering with an ethical organisation.	Receiving social media engagement.	Gaining credibility or authority in a new area.
Benefiting from another brand's influence and authority. For example, a brand considered new/cool/fresh or representing Gen Z ideals.	Using marketing & PR to create and contribute to a new brand narrative; can introduce a brand to new audiences and hopefully increase sales.	Strategising for gaining market share and customer acquisition.
Creating good 'karma'/benefiting brands' reputations.	Positioning a brand differently in the marketplace.	Reliable introduction of benevolent marketing that can avoid appearing self-serving.

Companies often adopt multidisciplinary approaches to address complex challenges; these can include partnerships with other organisations having different skill sets or audiences (Aftab & Bailey, 2013). Moreover, companies often start with low-risk experimentation and small steps before developing large innovations. Collaborations can be a way of experimenting by adding value for existing customers, while also opening up new markets.

Previously, companies' marketing efforts aimed to interrupt customers. In contract, now the aim is for brands to become part of contemporary culture. Increasingly marketing activations show a trend of including messaging with a community feel and social impact. For campaigns to have legitimacy, brands that collaborate need to ensure they have shared values. Deeley and Sergison (2021) suggest direct questions that a business can ask itself to ensure alignment with its collaborators: for instance, 'Is the collaboration going to damage or support the brand messaging?' and 'Is the collaboration going to support change?'. Collaborations involving people in the public sphere have been described as utilising 'reliable idols'. However, without shared values or clear communication of the reason behind them, campaigns featuring reliable idols can appear vague or even inauthentic. For instance, H&M's 'Role Models' marketing campaign (Figure 1) highlights young people who are making progress on causes including social equality, sustainability, etc. Yet the poster does not show a connection to the brand or charitable efforts the company is making; it lacks social impact.
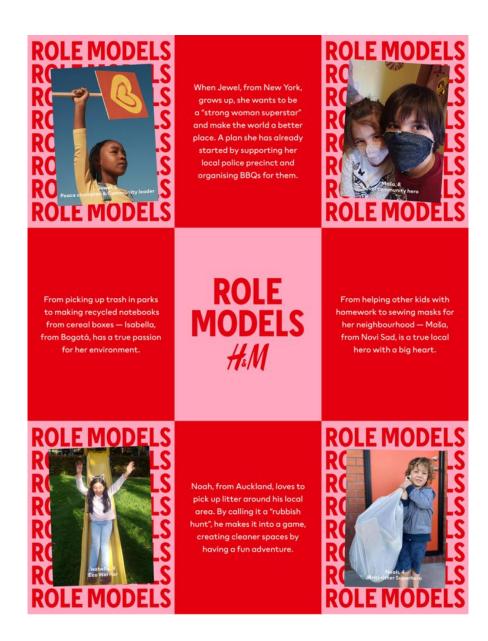
Figure 1: Poster of role models campaign (Source: H&M).

Gaffney (2021) advises that companies need to strike a balance between pandering to and catering to consumers by showing sensitivity and respect in order to build successful collaborations. Benevolent campaigns in the right tone can 'cater' to consumers as well as benefit companies by increasing customer engagement and sales. Within this context, Paulins and Hillery (2020) refer to the need for 'socially responsible' communication and advertising. Approaches like donations and long-term plans help communicate that the brand intends to make a positive contribution to society and that the project has integrity. Consumers' expectations mean that companies must be careful in managing their collaborations and be considered in their approach to crafting a message that is going to be well received, otherwise they risk seeming 'self-serving'. When communication is not received as intended, it can seem that companies lack sensitivity and are merely 'pandering' to a consumer trend. Therefore, careful consideration of the correct approach to support a 'good cause' is crucial. The wrong tone can risk a company missing the mark, facing criticism or, in extreme cases, exposing the brand to 'cancel culture' -type conversations.

Cancel culture began with observations of commercial communication missteps highlighted in the media. Companies face the risk that the public sometimes ridicules brands that miscommunicate about important topics (Meyer, 2021). The atmosphere of blame has been described by some critics as inflexible and stifling. Others renounce the humiliating effect cancel culture can have, questioning its fairness. Mishan (2020) points to the consumerist nature of cancel culture, which means that businesses must pay attention to this new critique of their products, services and people. An atmosphere of social responsibility for communicating in a politically correct way has become part of the business. Romano (2021) describes how confusion about cancel culture has not prevented it from becoming 'culturally and politically entrenched'. Insensitive messaging is now usually noticed by society, and companies have to face the consequences of getting their communications wrong.

Careful messaging is important for consumers but also for a business's reputation; it affects wh cichompanies will collaborate with them and even its future workforce. Research shows that Gen Z employees want to work at companies that have a social purpose. Figure 2 depicts Apple's job advertisements based on working somewhere that aligns with employees' values, which is good for both recruitment and PR.

Figure 2. Apple's advertisements to future employees (Source: LinkedIn).

From fashion as the 'business of inequality' to socially conscious companies
Benevolent collaborations help charities fundraise, build social credibility for brands and help brands offer aspirational allure while sharing inclusive messaging. D'Agostino (as cited in Girod, 2020) discusses the fine line between fashion's aspirational, exclusive nature and the new trend of social inclusivity, highlighting the contemporary challenge of balancing community feel with aspirational allure.

Within this context, we are witnessing the rise of socially conscious companies that intend to activate positive social change and develop charitable projects as profitable business opportunities embedded in corporate culture (Stoddard, 2017). Pallotta (2013) discusses innovative ways in which social causes are tackled through business partnerships and charity projects instead of through donations. These contemporary approaches provide shared responsibility and generate larger financial contributions towards charitable causes, creating a social impact. Aziz

(2018) echoes this, endorsing partnerships with non-profits as the new combination of commerce, conscience and culture. Research shows that positive social impact also positively affects the bottom line. According to Kantar (2020), brands with high perceived positive impact are outperforming value growth by more than double of those with low impact. Another stark statistic is that 95% of millennials would switch brands if a company supports a good cause in an authentic and meaningful way (Kantar, 2020). For businesses trying to increase market share, these data offer enough evidence for adopting new socially active approaches both for socially impactful campaigns and for developing a long-term social purpose.

Overall, the literature review shows that the market and cultural trend for doing 'good' is undeniable. However, there is scope for further research to better understand what incremental steps businesses can take to build collaborations that bring about positive social change. Figure 3 illustrates the key learnings from the literature review, which informed the primary research discussed in the following sections of this paper.

Figure 3: Key learnings emerging from the literature review.

Methodology

The project presented in this paper was conducted by adopting grounded theory as the research strategy to create a framework that could be tested and used in the future. This implied the development of a theory through multiple stages of data collection and identifying interrelationships between categories of information to refine the theory (Creswell, 2013). The project entailed a cross-sectional study investigating a phenomenon within a particular time. An inductive research approach was used, and multiple data collection methods and thematic analysis contributed to building from particulars to general themes (Creswell, 2013.). Figure 4 illustrates the research design, consisting of three main consecutive steps, incrementally contributing to addressing the aim and objectives of the project discussed in this paper.

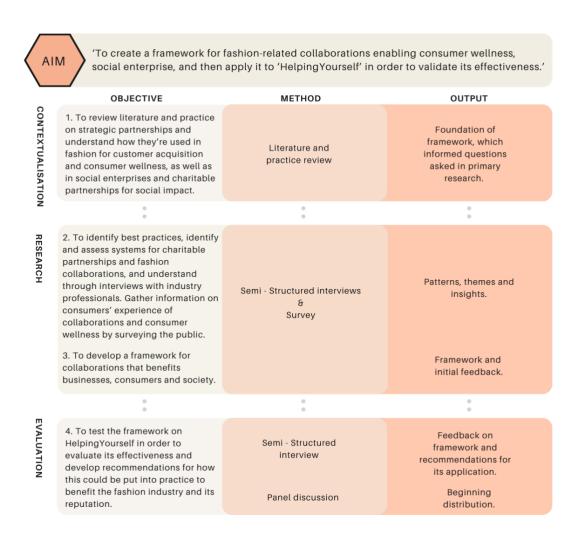|	OBJECTIVE	METHOD	OUTPUT
AIM	'To create a framework for fashion-related collaborations enabling consumer wellness, social enterprise, and then apply it to 'HelpingYourself' in order to validate its effectiveness.'		
CONTEXTUALISATION	1. To review literature and practice on strategic partnerships and understand how they're used in fashion for customer acquisition and consumer wellness, as well as in social enterprises and charitable partnerships for social impact.	Literature and practice review	Foundation of framework, which informed questions asked in primary research.
RESEARCH	2. To identify best practices, identify and assess systems for charitable partnerships and fashion collaborations, and understand through interviews with industry professionals. Gather information on consumers' experience of collaborations and consumer wellness by surveying the public. 3. To develop a framework for collaborations that benefits businesses, consumers and society.	Semi - Structured interviews & Survey	Patterns, themes and insights. Framework and initial feedback.
EVALUATION	4. To test the framework on HelpingYourself in order to evaluate its effectiveness and develop recommendations for how this could be put into practice to benefit the fashion industry and its reputation.	Semi - Structured interview Panel discussion	Feedback on framework and recommendations for its application. Beginning distribution.

Figure 4: Research design.

Considering the project's timeline and scale, as well as the available resources, an online survey and semi-structured interviews were chosen to collect the data and inform the development of the intended framework.

Based on insights from the literature review, the survey comprised 8 questions, mostly multiple-choice and Likert scale questions. The survey was filled in by 100 participants from 14 countries, providing insight into the public's perception of fashion brands and consumer wellness. The survey mostly provided quantitative data but also included one open question, which allowed for qualitative data collection too.

Qualitative research was fundamental in gathering opinions for this project. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven fashion sector professionals, each sharing their specific knowledge, providing feedback and advice on the project and contributing to a rich in-depth understanding of how collaborations are built. The interviewees had diverse expertise, including fashion education, social enterprise development, multidisciplinary collaborations, charity and retail. The interviewees were selected on the basis of professional background. While no interviewee had exact expertise on this research, each had relevant knowledge and made a unique contribution to the body of research presented in this paper.Table 2 details the varied perspectives of each interviewee and how each participant contributed to inform a multi-faceted body of knowledge. In the final interview, Simone Parchment reviewed the framework draft and reinforced its legitimacy, stating that she had seen all of the benefits of collaborations described in action in the industry. This began the evaluation process.

Following this, a panel discussion on the topic allowed for evaluation of the research in an open unstructured way. The panel consisted of a fashion designer, a fashion psychologist, an entrepreneur and a researcher, who each contributed their experience of industry norms and innovations and consented to be quoted.

Table 2: Industry interviewees, with their roles and perspectives.

Interviewee	Role	Perspective
Farah Liz Pallaro	Business advisor and lecturer. Author of *Fashion, Business and Spirituality*	Fashion business trends and change drivers
Shehan Perera	Communications Officer at Social Enterprise UK	Socially enterprising business development
Jonathan Chippindale	CEO of Holition, cutting-edge luxury retail technology services company	Expert in multidisciplinary collaborative approach, knowledgeable about fashion collaborations and projects
Sarah Burns MBE	Chair of Operations for fashion charity Smartworks	Knowledgeable about how charities work with fashion brands
Jo Tutchener-Sharp	CEO of Scamp&Dude fashion brand that engages in charitable collaborations	Knowledgeable about how fashion brands work with charities
Ruby Wight	Creative Lead: Campaigns and Partnerships at Burberry	Retailer running collaborations with the goal of brand marketing
Simone Parchment	Head of Strategic Partnerships at Matches Fashion	Retailer running collaborations with the goal of customer acquisition

Thematic analysis (Saunders et al., 2019) was conducted to extract themes and patterns and draw meaning from the raw data collected in the form of the survey responses and interview transcripts. The data analysis was iterative, with each stage informing the subsequent one. Software (CodePen, Otter.ai and EdWordle) was used to identify duplicate words and phrases from the data and to flag key concepts. Quantitative data were categorised according to how they related to each key theme that emerged from the analysis. The themes were used to develop questions that were asked at the panel discussion, informing the development of the framework.

Findings

The following sections discuss the thematically clustered findings from the data analysis, revealing where relationships and contradictions arose.

The survey results evidenced consumers' perceptions of fashion brands. Figure 5 is a word cloud illustrating the values and qualities the survey respondents believe fashion brands should have for consumers to feel more emotionally connected to them. Larger words indicate more popular concepts and consumers' priorities. Consumers communicated a general sense of disappointment, as evidenced through words like 'disillusioned',

as well as a call to action – 'transparency'.

Figure 5: Word cloud representing values consumers want to see embodied in fashion brands.

The data collected through interviews with fashion industry professionals were analysed to identify recurring concepts and cross-checked to see which key points and perspectives were shared amongst the interviewees. A word cloud (Figure 6) was developed to represent fashion industry professionals' needs, aspirations, priorities and opinions about collaborations. Subsequently, the framework was developed based on the common ground between the consumer and industry perspectives.

Figure 6: Word cloud representing key concepts that emerged across all the industry professionals interviewed.

Overall themes were established using a variety of approaches to compare and contrast the data. Figure 7 illustrates the key themes which emerged from the primary research (survey and interviews); this means concerns that were common to both consumers and fashion industry professionals. They are discussed in the following sections alongside the key themes emerging from the secondary research. These areas of common

ground formed the foundation of the framework.

Figure 7: Key themes recurring in both the consumer survey and the interviews with fashion industry experts.

The fashion industry needs to change

Both the consumers and the industry experts argued that the fashion system needs to change. The survey respondents criticised the myriad of negative effects that the fashion industry – underpinned by a capitalistic system – produces. They questioned the consumeristic culture that the fashion industry contributes to, as highlighted by the following quotes: 'I'm interested in why the owners created the brand to begin with when there are so many brands out there. What is their clear and honest brand objective?' and 'It's getting to the point where it is unacceptable for brands not to make any effort'. These qualitative insights from consumers were accompanied by quantitative data with stark results: 86% of the survey respondents said that they felt let down by a brand or felt it did something that does not align with their values. Additionally, the interviewees expressed concerns about the industry's negative impacts; for instance, Jonathan Chippindale argued the following:

> "*The big piece of the pie is still toxic. I'm so sad to say that because I've worked for so many years to contribute to changing that. But it is what it is. So, the only way that you can change that industry is when we all – every one of us – take responsibility individually and, as a collective, we do things*".

Interviewee Shehan Perera said that employees want to work at companies that care about social issues and aim to make positive contributions to the world, stating 'People expect their employers to give a damn about the planet […] like about changing how capitalism works and taking the steps to get to that point'. Perera works for Social Enterprise UK and described how he has seen companies grow fiscally while also developing their connections with communities and making significant contributions to a fairer and more just world. This comment reflected the secondary research, which shows that the public wants to shop and work at companies that espouse values that align with their own.

Putting the customer first

Another theme emerging from the survey was a sense amongst consumers that their needs and aspirations are currently not heard. Two-thirds of the respondents said that they had participated in cancel culture in some way. Based on the findings from the survey, Figure 8 shows the values that consumers want to hear brands speak about. Ethical employment practices and sustainability were the two most prominent values. This echoes the point from the literature review that emphasised the benefit of advertising company values to attract employees and establish a reputation as an ethical company.

Keywords like 'transparency', 'community', 'accessible' and 'tone of voice' came up in the survey responses. However, surprisingly, they did not come up in the interviews with thefashion industry professionals. Interviewee Sarah Burns from the charity Smartworks was the only professional who emphasised that brands need to listen to consumers more, making insightful comments about market gaps, such as the lack of workwear for transgender people. She advised that brands should focus on one clear message to begin to play a more supportive role in society.
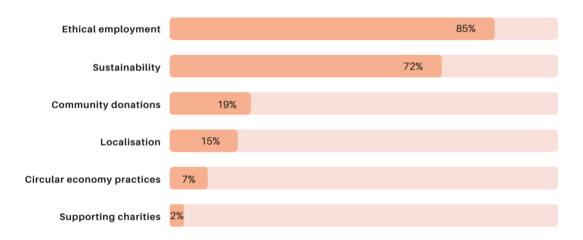

Figure 8: Brand values that consumers would choose to support.

Collaborations can be harnessed to 'walk the talk'

One consumer described fashion as one of the most popular industries and therefore that fashion should use its power 'to help improve the world we live in'. Others expressed the need for brands to be less self-serving, stating that they want to see them 'doing good for the world and not just for themselves - giving back'. Such comments reinforce Aziz and Jones's (2021) argument that brands should think of their customers as citizens, following a trend in which future consumers (such as Gen Z) are merging their morals with their shopping habits. Consumers are voting for socially impactful businesses with their purchasing power. In line with research showing that younger consumers want to know why a brand is doing a project, interviewee Jonathan Chippindale described how a 'fight [is] going on inside consumers' brains between the need to be a citizen of the planet and […] consumerism'. Additionally, Shehan Perera argued that 'responsible business' is 'the strongest kind of business model'. Ruby Wight discussed her work in building partnerships and collaborations at Burberry (exemplified in Figure 9) as contributing to creating a more benevolent fashion industry:

> *"We're always making sure our community, our campaigns and our content reflect both the truths and dreams of the world we live in and inspire people to imagine their possibility. Because we create so much, so regularly, we have the opportunity to put our values and ambition for even greater diversity and inclusion at deeper levels, into practice and act on it"*.

Overall, the findings from the primary research indicate participants' recognition that collaborations and charitable projects can provide a stepping stone for brands and organisations to work together to make benevolent work become an everyday part of the business.
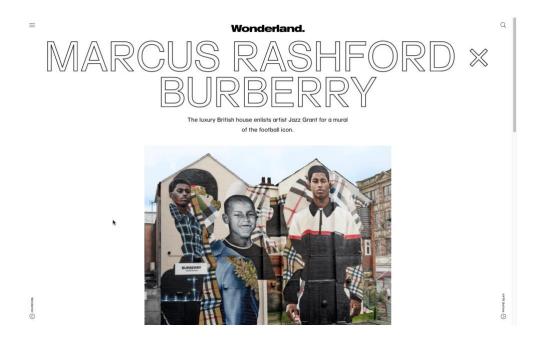

Figure 9: Burberry collaboration featuring footballer Marcus Rashford, who received racist abuse following missing a penalty in the European final and has since been defended and celebrated (Source: Wonderland magazine).

Importance of ethics and values

The findings from the secondary research establish that it is important that collaborations are mindful and considerate of sensitive topics and avoid tokenistic attitudes. In line with this, one consumer participating in the survey explained that 'clear communication of ethos and practices is what we need most in the industry; anything else feels like pandering to a consumer looking for change'. Several survey respondents mentioned that they prefer shopping from brands whose beliefs they 'buy' into. As interviewee Shehan Perera put it, 'It's very easy for a brand to pretend to be doing the right things'. Discussing the ethics of collaborations, Jo Tutchener-Sharp highlighted the need for researching whether potential collaborators have the same ethics in all areas of their business, ensuring that nothing is hidden. She added that any bad press brands receive could have a knock-on effect on the company's reputation. For instance, Ruby Wight mentioned Burberry's 'brand guardians', who help guide the partnership process and ensure that the content is in line with the brand's character. On the other hand, when brands cannot find an alignment of values and vision, they should not be afraid to say no to potential collaborations.

Authenticity

Good ethics require integrity to feel authentic. A lack of alignment can risk compromising a brand's reputation. Consumers participating in the survey commented that they can 'see through' campaigns or communication that are greenwashing or 'hopping on a bandwagon'. They want to know why a business is supporting a cause and require clear communication. Brands need to build trust and meaningful connections with their customers; otherwise, efforts can appear tokenistic. This speaks to Sinek's well-known hypothesis that people 'don't buy what you do, but they buy why you do it' (ROI Group, 2016). Sharing a 'why' through a personal story can be authentic, which may be easier for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in fashion.

Value of collaborations for venturing into new sectors

The value of collaborations was consistently mentioned in the interviews. Jonathan Chippindale stated that collaborations can help brands align themselves with 'another cooler organisation' or lean on it. He referred to some collaborations that connect similar brands such as 'Hermes x Rolls Royce' versus other partnerships between two very different brands such as 'Dolce & Gabbana x Smeg'. Interviewee Ruby Wight (working at Burberry) highlighted that collaborations can be useful to 'venture' into new sectors. For instance, to create the first sneaker collection for the brand and make sure it reached its full potential, the brand 'worked with Hypebeast to bring their perspective to that collection, as they have a lot of authority in this streetwear field, so could bring this new era for us to their community in a credible way'. Here, Wight refers to collaborations activated by brands to benefit from another company's credibility. Cross-pollination of audiences or skill sets is a popular reason why brands decide to collaborate and bridge market gaps.

New ideas through partnerships

The foundation of a successful partnership involves celebrating individual perspectives while creating new content. Interviewee Jonathan Chippindale argued that progress happens when two people collaborate and develop 'a third idea that they wouldn't have had individually'. Collaborations can be used in guiding creative content that gives both parties a chance to highlight their work as well as create opportunities for new combined perspectives. To exemplify this, Ruby Wight shared her experience in building collaborations at Burberry:

> *"Through that process, our role is one of commissioners, as the brand guardians that guide the content, to make sure it feels connected to our broader brand narrative, and something that our audience can associate with. That is where the magic and mystery of the collaboration comes together, because you have to make space for both of you as creative teams to exercise your individual perspectives and find a way to spot the synergies, the frictions, the contrast and contradictions, and bring them together to make something that may not have existed otherwise".*

Such collaborative processes can create unique outcomes and innovative ideas and lead to customer acquisition through increased engagement. The hope for a successful collaboration is that it can increase sales and make a beneficial addition to the brand narrative which will last for the long term.

A framework for business partnerships with a social purpose

The findings from the primary and secondary research discussed in the previous sections informed the development of a framework for building business partnerships with a social purpose. The research findings informed the outline of questions which were used at the panel entitled 'Fashion and Wellbeing' that was held in September 2021 as a collaboration between 'HelpingYourself' and 'The Fashion Clinic'. The latter was created in conjunction with the MA Fashion Entrepreneurship and Innovation course at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London (UAL) to be a hub connecting creatives in the fashion industry. This was deemed an appropriate audience for disseminating this research and its output, since members of The Fashion Clinic are interested in fashion entrepreneurship. In doing so, the collaboration between HelpingYourself and The Fashion Clinic adopted principles drawn from the framework such as cross-pollination of audiences. The panel discussion was publicised on social media and then published as a podcast on Spotify. The panel led to plans being made for two more collaborations.

Drawing from the findings from the primary and secondary research, the framework includes a checklist of things that brands could consider when creating collaborations and charitable projects. Moreover, the framework so far

was presented by the first author of this paper to students in the BSc in Psychology of Fashion course at London College of Fashion, UAL to disseminate the research and begin to nurture the next generation of professionals who could create positive social change in and through fashion.

Figure 10 illustrates the key headings and insights from the 'Benevolent Future of Fashion Framework'. The framework summarises the benefits of benevolent collaborations and provides a guide to using 8 key principles to create a successful benevolent collaboration. In this context, success is measured by longevity, as, ideally, socially impactful projects benefit everyone involved, leading businesses to commit to a social purpose. As more businesses discover the multifaceted benefits of these projects and adopt these practices, there is an opportunity for large-scale change in consumer culture as it moves towards benefiting businesses, consumers and society. To make the framework accessible, the content of the framework is written in an accessible 'newspaper' tone of voice. The framework is distributed as a 'read-only' website link which can be easily accessed by the public (https://rebrand.ly/ecwldzl). The online document is editable by the researcher and first author of this paper. Embedded into the framework is a request for readers who have adopted the framework to contribute feedback and suggestions via email. The feedback will be evaluated and amendments made, fulfilling the intention of sustaining an ongoing project that can continue to develop and widen its scope, contribution, and impact. This resource constitutes a legacy of the project presented in this paper.
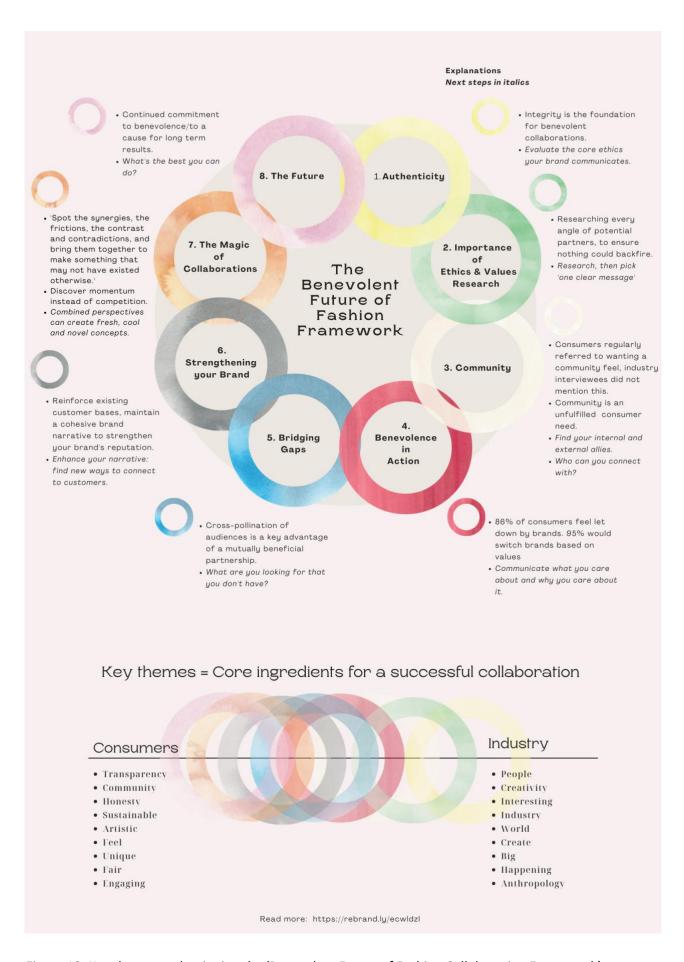
- Continued commitment to benevolence/to a cause for long term results.
- *What's the best you can do?*

- Integrity is the foundation for benevolent collaborations.
- *Evaluate the core ethics your brand communicates.*

- 'Spot the synergies, the frictions, the contrast and contradictions, and bring them together to make something that may not have existed otherwise.'
- Discover momentum instead of competition.
- *Combined perspectives can create fresh, cool and novel concepts.*

- Researching every angle of potential partners, to ensure nothing could backfire.
- *Research, then pick 'one clear message'*

8. The Future

1. Authenticity

7. The Magic of Collaborations

The Benevolent Future of Fashion Framework

2. Importance of Ethics & Values Research

6. Strengthening your Brand

3. Community

5. Bridging Gaps

4. Benevolence in Action

- Consumers regularly referred to wanting a community feel, industry interviewees did not mention this.
- Community is an unfulfilled consumer need.
- *Find your internal and external allies.*
- *Who can you connect with?*

- Reinforce existing customer bases, maintain a cohesive brand narrative to strengthen your brand's reputation.
- *Enhance your narrative: find new ways to connect to customers.*

- Cross-pollination of audiences is a key advantage of a mutually beneficial partnership.
- *What are you looking for that you don't have?*

- 86% of consumers feel let down by brands. 95% would switch brands based on values
- *Communicate what you care about and why you care about it.*

Key themes = Core ingredients for a successful collaboration

Consumers

- Transparency
- Community
- Honesty
- Sustainable
- Artistic
- Feel
- Unique
- Fair
- Engaging

Industry

- People
- Creativity
- Interesting
- Industry
- World
- Create
- Big
- Happening
- Anthropology

Read more: https://rebrand.ly/ecwldzl

Figure 10: Key themes underpinning the 'Benevolent Future of Fashion Collaboration Framework'.

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Conclusions

This paper discussed a research project aimed at demonstrating ways in which the fashion system can begin to benefit society, consumers and businesses more. This is driven by a desire to address the needs and aspirations of contemporary societies and to counter the lack of critical disclosure in the past of the negative impacts caused by the fashion industry. The research was fuelled by a desire to change the fashion system, and this was highlighted by the theme of disillusionment that recured across all the data collected (from the consumer survey to the interviews with industry experts). With this in mind, the project presented in this paper was developed at the intersection of fashion, collaborations/partnerships and non-profit development. Perspectives from the public and fashion sector experts were collected and cross-referenced, providing valuable insights that point towards strategies to shape a benevolent future for fashion.

Findings from the research indicate that when businesses take action to help society, the benefits can also lead to commercial growth. Fashion brands can contribute to addressing societal needs by partnering with charities and non-profit organisations and developing aspirational and benevolent projects. Building on findings from primary and secondary research, a framework was developed to guide fashion brands and non-profits in creating collaborative ventures that provide societal and commercial advantages. Following on from the successful launch of the framework at a panel discussion, the first author of this paper is gathering ongoing feedback and will continually amend this resource to actively contribute to shaping a benevolent future of fashion.

Building on the successful presentation of the framework to students from the London College of Fashion, there is an opportunity to continue to use it not only in business settings but also as an educational resource to prime the next generation of professionals who could make a positive impact on consumerism and society. Considering the limitations of the project presented in this paper in terms of the timeframe and sampling strategy, it is recommended to expand the research by including more global perspectives from international participants and involving people from a variety of socio-economic and educational backgrounds.

A natural next stage of the project would be to further apply the framework and evaluate its effectiveness, for instance through interviews with the industry experts already involved in this project, as well as with other professionals to gather more feedback. Other recommendations for the next steps include further developing the framework into a more comprehensive guidebook and developing business collaborations and charitable projects to scale up its impact. For instance, an opportunity was identified by the two authors of this paper to collaborate with ReGo, a project using fashion activism to address societal issues (such as youth violence) and offer educational and employment opportunities for young people in fashion.

In conclusion, it is envisaged that thanks to an alignment of values and continued engagement in collaborative ventures and charitable projects, this paper can inspire readers in shaping a more collaborative and socially benevolent approach to business practices in the fashion industry, perhaps using and contributing to the framework here presented as a step in the right direction.

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