

Why factories should be sustainability leaders, not followers



MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

THE fashion industry is among the most polluting industries in the world, while demand for inexpensive fast fashion products is increasing the burden on the natural environment. Globally, environmental scientists, researchers, watchdogs and activists are exerting pressure on fast fashion retailers to be more responsible and sustainable while producing clothing. Moreover, sustainability and climate change issues are now at the forefront of all global environmental accords such as the Paris Agreement, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), COP and so on.

It is not surprising, therefore, that all major apparel brands are addressing climate issues at the moment, and rightly so. Many have their own initiatives and targets on these issues, while others have signed up to industry-wide initiatives such as the UN's Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action which, among other things, includes a pledge to reduce 30 percent of greenhouse gas emissions along their value chain by 2030.

In theory, this is positive news. But how will brands meet these commitments? Well, let's put it this way: they won't meet it by turning a few lights off in their retail stores. We all know that the real environmental impact with regard to the fashion industry takes place in the East, not the West. It happens in supply chains, whether that be the coal-fired boilers which power so much of the Chinese textile industry; the excessive water use in textile wet processing; or the often wasteful and inefficient nature of many ready-made garment manufacturers which have been far too slow in implementing technological upgrading to operate more efficiently and sustainably.

Apparel brands have attempted to address these issues in recent years, and there are several exciting and innovative initiatives in Bangladesh, for instance, led by brands and aimed at reducing water, cutting down energy use and generally reducing the carbon



Often manufacturers look for brands to support them on environmental issues due to the high initial capital outlay.

PHOTO: REUTERS

footprint of suppliers. But the question is: why are brands always taking a lead on these issues? Why does it need a brand to come along to encourage suppliers to act? As has been stated, many of these issues lie with manufacturers themselves, and it is they who have the power to act. So what are they waiting for?

There is actually so much that manufacturers can do and, while it might take time, investment in proper resources needs to be seen as something that will be paid back in spades. Operating sustainably is essentially about operating efficiently. It is about good housekeeping which, as any factory owner will tell you, is the essence of good business.

But what can the factory owners do? There

are all manner of actions that manufacturers can take, and none will require any support from brands. Most of these actions are aimed at improving efficiencies by cutting down on the use of water, energy, chemicals and other resources. For instance, a manufacturer can replace low-efficiency boilers with more modern ones, often driving huge efficiency gains in the process. They can look at improving water efficiency by recycling wastewater. There is a wealth of technology options available in this area, and if manufacturers are serious about the sustainability issues, addressing excessive use of water should be a top priority. In many cases, 80 percent or more of wastewater can actually be recycled, leading to huge

environmental savings, and potentially financial savings if the government were to begin charging for water one day, which is surely not out of the question.

There are actions that manufacturers can take in denim effects, for instance, by replacing manual denim processing techniques with laser machines. Technology in this sector is progressing at a rapid pace. And there are actions they can take in the laundry, by switching from traditional washing machines to modern ozone machines, for example. Again, some of the new equipment available on the market is light years away from what large swathes of the industry continue to use.

The question everybody will rightly ask

here is: what about the cost? It is often the case that manufacturers look for brands to support them on these issues due to the high initial capital outlay. While it is true that technological upgrading does not come cheap, manufacturers would do well to think beyond cost and consider numerous potential benefits.

There have been various initiatives carried out within the textile supply chains globally, where mills have partnered with brands to implement energy and resource saving measures. Often, these initiatives have a payback in 12-24 months. This means that the initial investment quickly pays for itself and, after that, all the savings last the business a lifetime. So what's not to like? Greater operational efficiency has serious bottom-line benefits.

There are other factors to consider as well. Many manufacturers have been able to attract new buyers after implementing new sustainability measures, which is understandable. Brands right now are, in many cases, rationalising their supply chains. We know they want to work with factories where employee relations are good, as they can't afford controversy. But increasingly, brands are looking at the green credentials of factories. Put another way, if a brand has to choose between two suppliers with similar offerings but one of them has introduced green and efficient manufacturing methods, we know which factory it will go for.

The world's environmental challenges will not go away, and if anything, they are getting worse. The sources of environmental issues are, in many cases, found in supply chains, and ready-made garment factories are the root cause of many environmental problems. Factory owners can't wait around for brands to come and tell them what to do about these issues. They need to act now, for the future of their own business, and the planet. Sustainability cannot be addressed in a reactive manner. It's time for supplier factories to learn how to integrate sustainable practices within their business. It's for them to take the lead on these issues and be proactive.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

Boris Johnson and the triumph of gullibility?



RAJ PERSAUD

US President Donald Trump has already proclaimed that Boris Johnson, Britain's new prime minister, is popular because he is seen as "Britain Trump" (sic). After all, both politicians are widely seen as having a "populist" style. For cynics, this implies a willingness to tell blindingly obvious untruths if doing so appeals to voters. The populist tag may also refer to such leaders' "disruptive" impact, in the same way that new technologies have shaken up established industries overnight.

More important, some psychologists now suggest that the success of Trump, the Brexit championed by Johnson, and other populist causes might indicate that voters are becoming increasingly gullible. Although it is tempting to blame "fake news" and social media for this trend, recent psychological research suggests a different and perhaps more startling explanation.

Conventional wisdom holds that people vote for disruptive populists such as Johnson largely out of anger and resentment. But in a recent

article, *The Economist* pointed out that populism and support for parties hostile to the status quo are rising at a time when opinion polls suggest that Western electorates have generally never been happier.

According to national surveys of happiness cited by *The Economist*, the proportion of Britons who consider themselves very or fairly satisfied with life rose from 88 percent to 93 percent between 2009 and 2017, while the share of those declaring themselves very satisfied jumped from 31 percent to 45 percent. In the European Union as a whole, the proportion of those claiming to be very or fairly satisfied rose from 77 percent in 1997 to 82 percent two decades later.

The Economist offered various theories to explain the paradox of happy people voting for ostensibly angry parties—including the demographically based argument that older voters are both more reactionary and happier than the rest of the electorate. But new research by Joseph Forgas, a psychology professor at the University of New South Wales in Australia, points to a deeper and more persuasive explanation: happy people are more gullible.

In a series of experiments, Forgas found that negative emotional states made people less gullible, while a



Boris Johnson, Britain's Trump?

positive mood made them more so. Moreover, Forgas argues that voters' openness to simple, populist messages has proved surprisingly important in influencing recent political events, such as Brexit, the ascendancy of Trump, and the election of populist autocrats in countries such as Hungary and Turkey.

Forgas's study was partly inspired by past clinical research into the concept of "depressive realism," which posits that one of the benefits



of negativity is that it may produce a more accurate appraisal of just how unpleasant life, the world, and other people are. In a similar vein, other earlier research had found that people in low moods can more readily detect the linguistic ambiguity at which populists and slippery politicians in general seem to excel.

As part of his study, Forgas investigated the human tendency to infer meaning in vacuous statements by asking participants to rate the meaningfulness of verbal nonsense

texts. These included vacuous "New Age" pronouncements—for example, "Good health imparts reality to subtle creativity"—and meaningless pseudoscientific psychological jargon, such as "subjective instrumental sublimations." Participants in a positive mood saw more "meaning" in these gibberish sentiments.

In another of Forgas's previous experiments, students in a lecture hall first witnessed a staged aggressive incident involving a lecturer and a female intruder. One week later, the eyewitnesses received misleading information about the encounter they had seen. Forgas found that having a positive mood increased the students' gullibility, while a negative disposition almost completely eliminated it.

Finally, when asked to rate the genuineness of a range of facial expressions displayed by professional actors—including happiness, anger, sadness, disgust, and fear—participants in a more positive mood believed the expressions to be more genuine than those in a negative emotional state did.

Forgas's main conclusion is that being somewhat depressed can make us less gullible, particularly when we need to pay close attention to the external world. This may even

be a survival mechanism wired into our brains by our species' evolution. When humans faced predators, danger fuelled anxiety or negative emotional states, making us more vigilant toward environmental threats. Contentment, on the other hand, meant that we could relax and stop watching the bushes for lions.

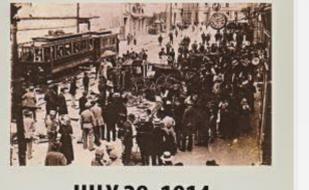
Negative emotions, therefore, function like a mild evolutionary warning signal. They promote more attention and vigilance, which increase our sensitivity to false or misleading information—including in political debate.

Some say that it is impossible not to like Johnson once you have met him. Yet his likeability and talent for inducing a positive mood also conveniently deflect attention away from the more important question of his ability to govern. The affability of populist politicians such as Johnson may be the real secret of their success, but, according to this new research, it might also be the source of the danger they pose.

Raj Persaud is a London-based psychiatrist and the co-author, with Peter Bruggen, of *The Street-wise Guide to Getting the Best Mental Health Care*.

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ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



JULY 28, 1914

Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia leading to the official beginning of the First World War.

On this day, one month after Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife were killed by a Serbian nationalist in Sarajevo, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, effectively beginning the First World War.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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| 1 Like the desert | 34 Mouth mover | 10 Inventor Fulton |
| 5 Shove | 35 Cove | 11 Sediment |
| 9 Stately home | 36 Scottish lord | 16 Device for book lovers |
| 11 Slow tempo | 38 Perfect places | 18 Stance |
| 12 Grand, for one | 39 Burn a bit | 21 Ooze |
| 13 Slip | 40 "Dog-gone!" | 23 Party group |
| 14 Battleship letters | 41 Couplet creator | 24 Oscar winner Jackson |
| 15 Paging gadgets | | 25 Lace's place |
| 17 Eyes, in slang | DOWN | 27 Selena's music |
| 19 Take in | 1 Increase | 28 Marigold color |
| 20 Point count | 2 Poker plays | 29 Aspen aficionado |
| 21 Sow site | 3 "Be right with you" | 30 "West Side Story" gang |
| 22 Theater part | 4 Singer Henley | 31 Lovable |
| 24 "My word!" | 5 Crime doer, to cops | 33 Corral |
| 26 As a result of | 6 Turmoil | 37 Stylish |
| 29 Shrewd | 7 Brit's floor | |
| 30 "Golly!" | | |
| 32 Ones to hang | | |



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

S O F T E N L E A D
E R R A T A O G R E
W E I G H T R O O M S
G A S E S
K E E N V E S T
F I N D T U N E R S
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T H E I R
W A I T I N G R O O M
O V A L I N D O O D L E
K A N E S T R E E T

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott



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