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FASHION INDUSTRY: CURRENT PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The fashion industry is at a crossroads, struggling with a multitude of challenges that threaten its traditional practices and structures. From the growing demand for sustainable and ethical fashion to the rise of fast fashion and its environmental impact, the industry is being forced to reassess its priorities. In this paper, we will examine some of the most common problems facing the fashion industry and consider potential solutions.

The well-known fact that the fashion industry ranks as the second most polluting sector [1] globally underscores the urgent need for sustainability as its primary challenge. The production of clothing significantly depletes natural resources and generates substantial quantities of hazardous waste discharged into water sources. Furthermore, the consumption of fast fashion, with its emphasis on treating clothing as fast-moving consumer goods, aggravate environmental issues by generating significant waste.

The pressing need for change has brought several opportunities that revolve around establishing new, sustainable business models. These models are centered on the principles of reducing, reusing, and recycling, paving the way for a more environmentally conscious approach to commerce [2]. The escalating demand for sustainably produced goods has led to a notable surge in the emergence of new fashion brands that prioritize sustainability. Concurrently, consumer movements advocating for zero waste and the principles of reducing, reusing, and recycling are gaining momentum. As awareness of the environmental impact of human consumption grows, consumers are increasingly scrutinizing their consumption habits and the value chains of companies.

Another concern with no simple solution in sight, are the poor working conditions of garment workers in developing countries. Even more hidden than other issues, forced and trafficked labor form a significant portion of the fashion supply chain, primarily concentrated in the second and third tiers of the supply chain [1]. The pathways to overcoming this problem include awareness campaigns, strengthening legislation, providing support for victims, and international cooperation.

Without a doubt, the issue of product counterfeiting presents another significant challenge for fashion brands in the current era. Selling original high-value products becomes a daunting task in a market saturated with a fervent desire for cheap knock-offs. After a fake product enters the market, distinguishing its authenticity from the genuine item can be very difficult for consumers. Using NFT-based product passports to create unique digital tokens linked to a specific product, implementing holographic labels and watermarks, encouraging your consumers to buy authentic items directly from you, using software programs that can help you detect when someone is using your images or content without permission on the Internet could be a few ways to solve this issue [3].

The constant struggle to secure competent personnel has been a persistent difficulty for the fashion industry and it is anticipated to remain a critical challenge in the nearest future. In order to attract skilled individuals, the sector must consider elevating the minimum wage, eliminating the practice of unpaid internships, and diversifying its recruitment efforts to encompass a wider spectrum of backgrounds [2]. Moreover, the shift towards automation raises fundamental inquiries regarding the trajectory of the labor force. With machines increasingly taking on tasks customarily performed by human workers, a redefined approach to workforce management becomes imperative.

Finally, the fashion industry's complex supply chain is facing unprecedented obstacles, ranging from shortages of materials and employees to delays in transportation and the energy crisis. These factors are collectively increasing the expenses associated with production and distribution, affecting the bottom line of many clothing brands. In response, companies are reassessing their procurement approaches and introducing greater adaptability into their supply chains. Collaborating with suppliers, brands are enhancing nearshoring efforts by relocating manufacturing facilities in closer proximity to customers, aiming to avoid material supply issues, cut shipping costs, and uphold speedy delivery services. The problem can potentially be addressed by utilizing technology such as PLM and ERP, which provides real-time visibility into the complete product lifecycle. By consolidating all information in a centralized location, these management platforms enhance collaboration among departments and teams, facilitating the efficient sharing of data and ideas [3].

In conclusion, the fashion industry is undergoing a period of significant transformation, with a multitude of challenges influencing its operations and profitability. The negative environmental and social impact of fashion detrmines a shift towards sustainable and ethical practices. Simultaneously, the rise of copycats and product counterfeiting poses a significant threat to brand authenticity and consumer trust, underscoring the need for robust anti-counterfeiting measures and innovative solutions. The inefficiencies of distributed and global supply chains can be alleviated with the appropriate technology tools.

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