

## Content analysis on sustainable fashion content on YouTube

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**Research background.** Social media offers limitless opportunities to attract the attention of fashion consumers. Video content especially helps to build ‘human’ side personalities, evoke emotions, and make learning convenient and interesting due to its highly visual and narrative feature (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). Due to such advantages, in fashion industry, SNS video platforms have been widely utilized to promote sustainable fashion trends (Borboni, 2019). As SNS video platforms not only include mainstream fashion brands but also other stakeholders including NGOs, individual activists, or start-up companies, the way and the content each actor uses to communicate on sustainability with consumers are varied. For example, the content can range from informative content created by producers to more entertainment-focused content created by consumers such as demonstration of sustainable fashion shopping hauls. In effect, viewers are not only informed but are wildly enthused to the topic of the content (Manko, 2023). Therefore, to understand how SNS video content can be used to promote diffusion of sustainable fashion trend among consumers, it should be scrutinized from an exploratory perspective.

This study aims to conduct an exploratory content analysis on social media video content on sustainable fashion currently broadcasted on YouTube. This study particularly focuses on South Korean shows given that South Korea is one of the leading countries in social media content creation and consumption (Statista, 2023) while none of the few studies that examined the current state and performance of sustainable fashion discourse on social media channels (Haines et al., 2023; Orminski, 2021) considered Korean shows. Based on this, two research questions are raised: RQ (1) What are the characteristics of sustainable fashion show content currently available in South Korea? RQ (2) How do the characteristics of the show content affect show performance?

**Method.** A quantitative content analysis was conducted to capture the current state of sustainable fashion content on social media. First, using keywords including ‘sustainable fashion’ and ‘eco-friendly fashion’, a set of YouTube shows containing sustainable fashion content was selected and stored before coding in May of 2023. The unit of analysis was a long-form YouTube video post. Then, a coding guide was developed based on the previous qualitative research on social commerce (Wongkitrungrueng et al., 2020) and sustainable fashion discourse on Twitter (Haines et al., 2023; Orminski, 2021). The final coding guide included 5 dimensions of characteristics of sustainable fashion content shows (e.g., narrative approaches and the specific strategies, themes related to sustainable fashion, content category of the show, characteristics of show hosts, and view counts). The availability of information was coded on a

nominal scale of (1) present vs. (0) non-present, depending on whether the information is available or not. Last, view counts were also recorded as a measure of the performance of show.

A total of 40 video shows were identified from the search process. As for the coding process, four coders watched and independently coded 10 shows each, which is a quarter of the total sample. The coders were then paired into groups of two, checked the reliability (the average inter-coder reliability calculated by dividing the number of agreements by that of disagreements was .88), and finalized the coding by discussing until the consensus is reached. The data were analyzed quantitatively to examine the frequencies of narrative approaches and sustainable messages, and the effect of show content on sustainable fashion on show performance.

**Results.** First, frequency analyses were conducted. For the type of hosts, influencers were most common (40%), followed by NGOs (35%) and brands (17.5%). For gender, female (52.5%) than male hosts (37.5%) were more common. For the persona of the host, the expert was the most common (60%), compared to celebrity (30%) and peer type (10%). For the type of content, the majority were informative (72.5%) than commercial (27.4%).

For the narrative approaches, the content-focused approach was most often used (n=35, 87.5%), followed by relationship-focused (n=27, 67.5%), product-focused (n=22, 55%), and persuasion-focused (n=16, 40%). In terms of the strategies used for each narrative approach, as for the product-focused approach, shows used product demonstration (n=21) most often, while seldom using simple description (n=3) or urgency (n=1). For the persuasion-focused approach, show (n=11) was more frequently used as opposed to the character (n=6) or game/prize (n=5). For the relationship-focused approach, sharing personal life (n=12) and sharing feelings or experiences (n=14) were most often used, followed by encouraging community activities (n=15). Finally, for the content-focused approach, content related to the products either directly (n=26) or indirectly (n=21) were important sources, while service (n=4) was the least important.

Various types of combined approaches were observed in this study, with 11 shows using all four approaches. The common combined modes included a combination of product-focused and content-focused approaches (n=12) and a combination of persuasion-focused, relationship-focused, and content-focused approaches (n=7).

In terms of the themes of sustainable fashion, as a single topic, producing (n=28, 70%), selecting (n=25, 62.5%), and recycling (n=19, 47.5%) were most frequently featured in the shows. When combined, however, the consumption side (selecting n=25, 62.5%; using n=20, 50%; disposing of n=16, 40%) appeared more commonly than the production side (producing n=28, 70%; creating n=17, 42.5%) or post-consumption side (recycling n=19, 47.5%; reusing n=13, 32.5%; donating n=5, 12.5%).

To further examine the effect of attributes of the content on view performance, a regression analysis and an ANOVA were used. First, shows hosted by influencers had significantly more view counts than those by NGOs or fashion brands [ $F(3, 36) = 5.04, p < .001$ ]. Next, only the content-focused approach positively influenced show performance ( $\beta = .32, t = 2.068, p < .05$ ). When persuasion-focused and relationship-focused approaches are taken together, however, these combined strategies could be as effective as content-focused approaches ( $\beta = .33, t = 2.043, p < .05$ ).

**Conclusions and implications.** The present study explored the current state of sustainable fashion content on YouTube by conducting a mixed content analysis. Findings revealed that YouTube carries highly diversified topics related to sustainable fashion and allows various forms of narrative styles. Among them, content-focused approach was most commonly used, and this approach can have a positive influence on consumers' viewing intention. The second effective strategy was a combined mode of persuasion- and relationship-focused approaches.

The findings suggest that show content on sustainable fashion should be informative and entertaining to acquire attention from consumers. To be informative, shows can include not only informative content on products (e.g., behind-the-scenes look of product development) but also additional useful content which can bring viewers' attention although not directly related to the product (e.g., beauty tips or make-up demo). To make shows entertaining, various engagement strategies such as employing games and prizes, or inviting consumers to community activities (e.g., donations or charities) can be used. This study provides theoretical contributions to the literature by exploring narrative approach in social media communication. As well, it brings practical implications for creating effective social media video content by using narrative approaches on SNS platforms.

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