



- Textiles
- Qualitative Research
 - Consumers

Main Findings
Incorporating survey results

Context – Influences on Attitudes and Behaviour

Definitions and Knowledge and Engagement – Context

- Consumer Awareness, Knowledge and Consideration of Textiles in relation to their harm to the environment sit within two contextual frameworks
 - The Environmental context
 - The Fashion context
- These contexts do not always sit well together; they run on parallel paths or maybe in conflict with each other depending on the circumstances
- The perceived rules of engagement for textiles and the environment can be entirely different
- Moreover, the majority of the general public interviewed for this research were unaware of the issues surrounding Textiles and the environment and found it difficult therefore to make linkages between the two
- The exception to this was when people were engaging in appropriate behaviour in respect of dealing with clothing but were doing so for reasons other than the environment (more later)

The Environmental Context

- Within any audience, there are psychographic profiles which drive people to hold certain beliefs, attitudes and to engage in particular behaviours in relation to the environment – these were identified in the single use plastic research
- Emotional environmentalists (minority)
 - They are not experts but are emotionally engaged - heartfelt concern for many aspects of the environment
 - Feel they do whatever they can to help but also feel limited
 - Never litter
 - Joiners v Go it Alone – the former have taken part in community based clean ups whereas the latter eschew groups and prefer to do their own thing
 - Most aware of textiles in relation to harming the environment – however can place it further down the hierarchy

The Environmental Context

- Practical environmentalists
 - Understand that there is an issue with the environment and that it is partly our responsibility to sort it out
 - Respond to environmental concerns if there is something in it for them or if they are under pressure to do so; an example of this might be a school running an environmental awareness campaign/project where parents feel the need to engage. Community projects can also have this effect
 - Appropriate behaviour is at a higher level if it can be amalgamated with their busy schedules – e.g. kerbside recycling
 - For this cohort, textiles are low on their hierarchy of concerns if known at all
- Defaulters
 - Typically, as noted, these are people who are engaging in environmentally appropriate behaviour without realizing it
 - Textiles are low on their radar
- Careless Contaminators
 - Understand there is an issue but do not subscribe to any form of involvement
 - Self proclaimed nihilists
 - Will require a reasonable degree of carrot and stick to move them to awareness and behaviour

The Fashion Context

- Clothing is critically important to us as individuals
- Many studies showing how choosing the right type of clothing is a form of social communication and also a behaviour changer
- Some of the responses we received from research participants in relation to the importance of clothes are as follows:

I feel different when I am dressed up

I behave differently when I am power dressed, I am more confident

If I don't have a new top every week there is no point in my going out

If you are meeting someone new, it is really important to dress in the right way

I have a coat that I bought 20 years ago, it was really expensive then but I still have it and wear it.

It is part of me know

I would never think of getting rid of my favourite t-shirt

- The importance of clothing is so deeply embedded in our psyche that changes in attitudes and behaviour can be challenging

The Fashion Context

- Huge pressure on people to conform to fashion trends/norms – this is weighted towards the younger population and within this, there appears to be more pressure on younger women in this regard
 - For many the acquisition of clothes is thought to be highly gratifying on a short-term basis.
 - Some enjoy the shopping process but, for many, buying clothing is a distress purchase; the need to make quick decisions under pressure can result in over purchasing or buying clothes that are not taken back(online buying especially for sampling different items)
 - Fast fashion is a known and importantly, accepted term; a new social norm *“it just that its all fast fashion these days, everyone is doing it “*.
 - The quality context is important here
 - Perception that men are better served here with better quality fabrics
 - Gentrification of charity shops – no longer serving the poorer in our society; middle class buying up clothes to sell on.
 - Perception that trend cycles are shorter – dialing up purchasing pressure

The Fashion Context

- Anecdotal evidence of changes here amongst the younger cohort;
 - A luxury to afford sustainable clothing
 - Obscure
 - Expensive brand are accessible
 - Getting a good deal
- Movements away from fast fashion for some; social media influences in terms of making do; buying more expensive brands but planning to keep them longer, upcycling secondhand fashion items (require the skills)
- Some brands (e.g. heritage brands) encourage quality and long term.
- De-pop – identified as an eBay for younger people however no guarantee of quality; has become a trend now; almost a luxury in certain circles – exclusivity!
- Vintage is a replacement term for second hand and also sounds more exclusive
- Inexplicable Trends - JDSPORTS skirts becoming popular (cheap)

The Fashion Context

- New trends emerging in Fashion encouraging young people to combine elements to achieve a distinct look –lots of opportunities here for purchasing second-hand clothing
 - Grunge – seems to making an appearance again
 - E-Girl
 - VSO Girl
 - Soft Girl
 - Cottage Core
 - Norm Core
 - Art Hoe
 - Baddie
 - Dark Academia
 - Light Academia

**Textiles - Barriers to Consideration as an
Environmental Concern**

Textiles as an Environmental Concern - Barriers to Consideration

- Textiles (mainly talked about as clothing” in the groups) are very low on the list of environmental concerns currently
 - **Salience** – textiles do not jump to mind when people are asked in the groups for a list of the top 10 issues that affect the environment; most in fact struggle to provide 3 or 4 responses here
 - Low levels of **awareness** - even when prompted Textiles are low on the pecking order and only mentioned by a small proportion as being an issue for the environment
 - **Knowledge** is fragmented and low – there is very little knowledge of the big picture here in terms of how textiles affect the environment
 - Causes are not clear
 - Effects are vaguely known
 - Consequences, both short medium and long term are not considered

These elements are critical in achieving share of mind, trust and eventual attitude change

Textiles as an Environmental Concern - Barriers to Consideration

Saliency

- Lack of willingness to consider as people feel that they are drowning in issues at the moment – an audible sigh of frustration when asked to take on board “yet another thing we are doing wrong or that we have to put right” – within this there are lots of defence mechanisms people utilize to protect themselves from having to take any responsibility for the issue: two of many examples here
- Sublimation (a form of) – other `more important issues replace concerns over textiles
- Disengagement from the subject and denial that it is `a' or `my' problem
- Blame culture
 - Younger people feel that they are having to pay for the `mistakes that our parents' generation made'
 - Older people feel that they were never made aware of the issues when they were younger and blame the `government(s)' for this

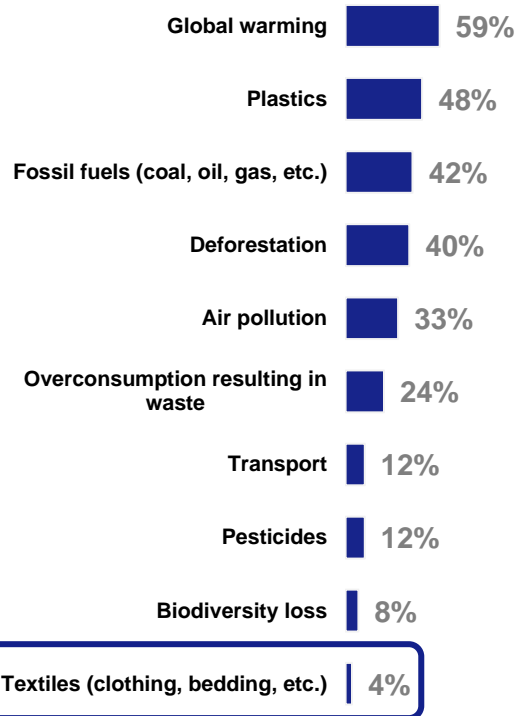
Textiles as an Environmental Concern - Barriers to Consideration

Awareness

- Low awareness
 - Lack of publicity surrounding the issue of textiles – there were significant levels of surprise when people were faced with the statistics surrounding the effects of textiles on the environment
 - Word of mouth is weak – this is not a subject that garners much interest currently
 - For those who were partially aware, there was a feeling that the issue has not been fully developed for public consumption – it remains a technical subject area (this also allows people to displace the need to be aware)
 - For a small minority textiles are part of an overall concern for the environment; self educate on the subject; change behaviours either radically or moderately to be more compliant

Textiles as an Environmental Concern - Barriers to Consideration

Awareness



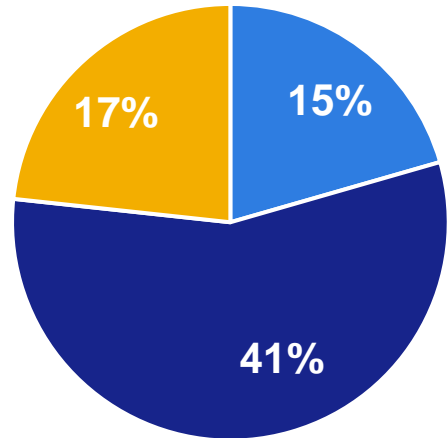
- The population survey would bear this out
- For most textiles are low down the hierarchy of environmental issues – only 4% of this sample choose it as harmful to the environment
- Global warming and plastics are the most well known
 - Focus groups would point to a perception of higher levels of media coverage for plastics recently
 - Global warming has been on the agenda for many years now – not all aware of the precise causes of the problem; fossil fuels mentioned by some – usually as a cause of global warming but also in relation to using the Earth’s natural resources
- There is some evidence that consideration is higher amongst some groups (4% rises to 9% amongst the 25-24 year olds) but there remain fundamental barriers to understanding how textiles can physically harm the environment

Textiles as an Environmental Concern - Barriers to Consideration

Knowledge

- Low levels of knowledge – issue, rationales, consequences, solutions
- Low levels of empowerment – “big issues/little people” “What can I do” “Whatever I do, it will never be enough”

“Up to now, if I am being honest, I wouldn't have really seen **how** clothing can harm the environment”

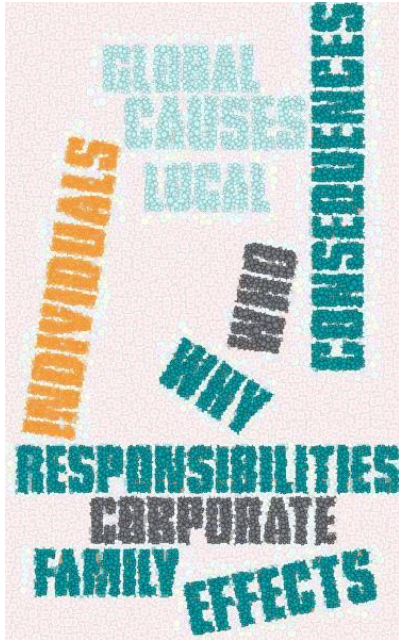


- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

73%

Textiles as an Environmental Concern - Barriers to Consideration

Knowledge



- Knowledge is as noted sporadic, fragmented and based on pieces of information picked up from different sources
- Many questions arose from the groups
 - What is the definition of textiles?
 - Why do they harm the environment?
 - Why have I not heard about this before? Or “I have heard a bit about this but it can’t be as important because there isn’t much in the news about it.”
 - Where do I get information on this?
 - What do I do with my textiles/am I doing the right thing?

Textiles as an Environmental Concern - Barriers to Consideration

Knowledge

Two overarching questions?

- What is the definition of textiles? - clothes and bedding appear to be most salient here
- Why do they harm the environment?
 - People struggle with this; current perceptions are that anything that does not naturally degrade is harmful to the environment; subsequently there also struggle with the idea that clothes are not bio-degradable; this correlates with very low knowledge of plastics in textiles (see next chart)
- Consequently, people draw on their existing experience and knowledge of other best practices to try to understand (however this itself is an imperfect medium)
 - Reduce Reuse Recycle are the main areas recalled – other `Rs' are less likely to be recalled – *“they keep changing them, adding new ones”*
 - Reducing and Reusing are the most challenging for people
 - Disposal is the main tool for the majority – though there is evidence to suggest a slowly shifting mindset here
 - Existing (non textiles)practices tend to incorporate kerbside collections with additional waste being disposed of in recycling centres
 - Covers people for most waste; Textiles fall into the *“additional waste I can’t put out for the bins category”*

Textiles as an Environmental Concern - Barriers to Consideration

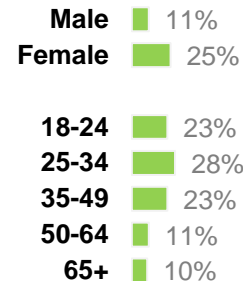
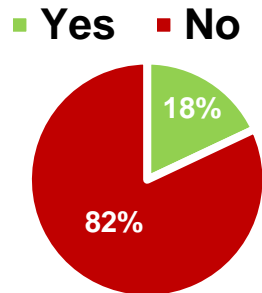
Knowledge - Plastics in clothes

- This aspect is significant in changing people attitudes and providing one of the key rationales for not throwing clothes away
- Currently, most people only have a vague awareness of the materials that are used to manufacture their clothes
- Most of this sample are not aware that terms like polyester, nylon, acrylic and polyamide. Where there is awareness there is also fragmented knowledge of what these terms mean.
- There is a cohort of people who believe that plastic in clothing makes for less comfort and is aesthetically unattractive; they try to choose 100% natural fibres; they are suspicious of terms such as 'cotton rich', 'wool mix' etc.
- Whether people wanted or liked the idea of more information on the composition of the clothes, there is an argument to suggest that, in order to change people's attitudes to and go some way to alter their behaviours for the better it will be necessary or make them aware of the role plastic plays in the manufacture of clothing.

Textiles as an Environmental Concern - Barriers to Consideration

Knowledge – Reduce?

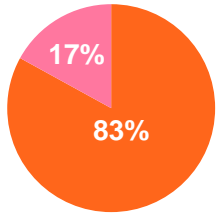
- Reducing the amount of textiles purchased is less often/rarely influenced by environmental concerns for the majority
 - more likely to be due to a dislike of the purchasing process – *“I just hate buying clothes”*
 - or a tendency to hoard
 - Or procrastination
- Wear once and throw away tended to be more prevalent amongst the younger respondents. Although 18% admitted to this behaviour (higher amongst women and the younger age groups) the groups would indicate that this behaviour is not easily admitted to and so this figure is likely to be higher



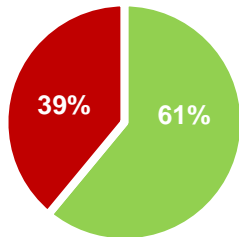
Textiles as an Environmental Concern - Barriers to Consideration

Knowledge – Re-use?

- New
- Second hand/pre-loved



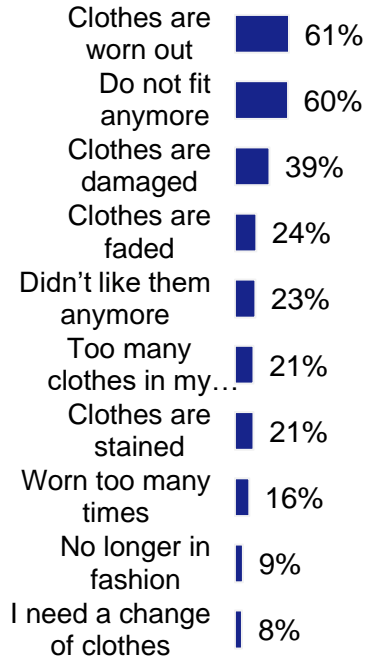
- Consider buying more second hand?
- Yes
 - No



- Re-use as a term is thought to describe a natural part of the process of wearing clothes – *“It’s not that I re-use them, I just keep wearing them over and over again.”* – easy to do in many situations but much harder in others (fast fashion)
- Reusing other people’s clothes - the link between buying second-hand clothes and reducing the harmful effects of textiles on the environment is not clear to most at first
- Those who purchase second-hand clothes were in the minority and again were rarely doing it for the environment
 - Saving money
 - Following a trend
 - Demand for higher quality second hand; designer brands etc..
 - A minority doing it to help the environment – understand that reducing the amount of new clothes purchased will help the environment but not necessarily how
- The idea however that they might be helping the environment was seen as a positive

Textiles as an Environmental Concern - Barriers to Consideration

Disposal/Re-cycle



- Reasons for disposing of old clothes tend to be either because they are worn out or do not fit anymore – the groups tell us that the latter can be due to the age of clothes and/or people putting on weight
- Damaged or stained clothes are also contenders for black bin disposal – the focus groups would suggest that reasons here are highly subjective
- For 1 in 4, the fact that clothes are just `not liked' any more can prompt disposal; 16% worn too many times, for 9% no longer in fashion
- The yearly `clear out' has been prompted for many by the recent pandemic especially. Normally it is difficult to predict when this might happen so this causes spikes in the system at different times of the year.

Textiles as an Environmental Concern - Barriers to Consideration

Disposal/Re-cycle



- Two thirds of the sample opted for the charity shop whilst at the other end of the continuum 13% opted for a “straight to the general bin” for their clothes
- However, the focus groups tell us that these are often not influenced by environmental concerns
 - In home disposal – back of a cupboard etc.. Temporary but durations can top 5 years and one or two incidents of 20+ years
 - Family - Passed down from generation to generation
 - Charitable - Giving to local charity shops, filling the charity bag that comes through the door at home
 - Straight to bin – usually only clothes which are “not fit for anything” – the groups would suggest that many people are not willing to admit to this behaviour which in itself is indicative of knowledge that such behaviour is inappropriate (and therefore a starting point in attitude and behaviour change)

Textiles as an Environmental Concern - Barriers to Consideration

Other methods..(spontaneous reactions)

- Very few engaging in any other form of environmentally friendly methods of treating textiles
 - Repairing is perceived as something “*my mother used to do*” and as such very few of the younger members of this sample would have the skill to do much more than sew a button. Middle age to older people might stretch to darning a sock or hand sewing items
 - Buying sustainably is not actively being thought about by the majority. Indeed, many will require a more precise definition of what it means to buy sustainably.
 - Re-Imagining is not a term that most people are aware of. Logically, people assume it incorporated the use of existing clothes in different ways, such as swapping garments to come up with a new (ish) overall look

(prompted reactions to some of the stimulus material covering these methods are outlined later in this document)

Textiles as an Environmental Concern

Knowledge - Reactions to Facts.

81% of people surveyed would like the Government to mandate labelling showing whether there is plastic in **clothing and accessories**.

Approximately half of the clothes sold by large online fashion brands such as Boohoo and Asos are made entirely from virgin plastic materials such as polyester, despite a push to reduce the huge environmental impact of the fashion industry.

As clothes are washed, they shed plastic synthetic fibres which then enter the environment. More than one-third of all microplastics released into the ocean are estimated to derive from these synthetic fibres. Laundry alone causes half a million tonnes of these microfibrils to be released into the seas every year, whilst 70 million barrels of oil are used annually in order to make polyester for garments, with its production releasing up to three times more carbon than natural materials.

- This was a surprising statistic for people given that awareness of plastic in clothes was so low.
- Most people in the focus groups were amazed firstly, by the fact that there was plastic in clothes and then the amount
- The focus would appear to be on the producers of fashion “hiding” the fact that there are plastics in clothes
- The idea of releasing plastic into the ocean through washing was shocking and placed the textile environmental issue side by side with Single Use Plastics
- The idea of manufacturers being much clearer on the amount and type of plastic in clothes

Textiles as an Environmental Concern

Knowledge - Reactions to Facts.

fast fashion

fast fashion is when clothing brands and businesses mass produce items at breakneck speed - often at a low cost and with harsh worker conditions - in order to meet the demand of consumers.

we, as a society, now own 5 times more clothing than our grandparents ever did.

The production of "Fast Fashion" has had a direct effect on our environment, creating carbon emissions, as well as water, chemical and plastic pollution. Many of the clothes we buy are now produced 1000s of miles away in Asian markets, including China and Bangladesh. Many have low labour costs and poor environmental governance.

- These facts were shown to all respondents
- All were aware of 'fast fashion' – having read this information they felt more informed as to exactly why it is an issue
- Difficult for people to understand what they would see as the more indirect effects on the environment such as water usage and carbon emissions.
- The idea of plastic pollution was not understood by the majority, mainly due to the low levels of awareness that plastics are part of the materials used to manufacture clothes
- The descriptor 'fast fashion' is thought by some to have diluted the importance of the issue – trendy name gives permission; certainly the social norm for fast fashion is strong but the name belies the seriousness of the issue. The most serious aspect of this is thought to be the harm that the fashion industry is doing to the environment

Textiles as an Environmental Concern

Knowledge - Reactions to Facts.



- One of the biggest gaps in people’s knowledge – and this applies to all environmental concerns is the significantly low awareness of the bigger picture in relation to the textiles and the environment
- End to end knowledge of the issues are very low
- Even given the extent of the publicity surrounding plastics there remains very low awareness of the “circular economy” as it relates to textiles and how it might work
- There is interest in this as it provides one solution and importantly where the consumer sits in the process in terms of their responsibility
- It also addresses one of the opt outs consumers provide by showing that there is a collaborative approach
- Some question how the recycling of clothes works. They have a vague idea here in relation to plastics (some process of breaking down the plastics and reconstituting them in another form) but how that might work in relation to textiles remained unknown

Textiles as an Environmental Concern

Knowledge - Reactions to Facts.

CLOTHING PRODUCTION
ACCOUNTS FOR
10% OF
GLOBAL CARBON EMISSIONS

GARMENT PRODUCTION FROM 1994 - 2014
↑ 400%
TO
80 BILLION GARMENTS PER YEAR

FASHION IS THE
2ND LARGEST POLLUTER
(AFTER OIL)

- These three facts were quite shocking
 - 10% was thought to be very high indeed and a real surprise to everyone
 - 80 billion garments was described as “suffocating” to think about – such a huge figure is difficult to see a solution for
 - The fact that Fashion is the 2nd largest polluter and is up there with Oil is felt to be very worrying
- Having seen all of these facts, people were beginning to get a bigger picture and were more able to combine elements of production, miles, plastics to understand the effect that plastics was having

Textiles as an Environmental Concern

Changing behaviours - Overall

- Behaviours are generally preceded by an intention
- To have an intention you need to have a:
- Positive/Proactive Attitude – awareness, information, rationale, consequences - Currently there is no sense of positivity surrounding dealing with textiles in an appropriate manner
 - Not reward for good behaviour - no enforcement either (we know that enforcement can, perhaps paradoxically, increase levels of positivity around actions)
- Subjective Norm – know that others are doing it (Social Capital) – at this time the social norm is not really established in the minds of the public; yes, people are recycling clothes but it is important that they know why and that they are part of a broader initiative

Textiles as an Environmental Concern

Changing behaviours – Behavioural Control

- Convenience quotient is at a low level
 - Ongoing recycling versus Occasion recycling – more likely to be the latter – facilities not in place to encourage frequent recycling
 - Travelling to and finding parking
 - Stressful dealing with charity shops, Amenity site personnel can be tricky
 - Not seen as a donation, rather a means of disposal
 - Awareness of what can be brought to charity shops and what cannot is fragmented
 - It is assumed that it has to be of a reasonable quality
 - Many would stop short of giving undergarments
 - Also depends on the quality control procedures of the charity shop – dropping off a black back of clothes or the need to show the clothes in store

Textiles as an Environmental Concern

Potential Solutions

- Very low awareness of the kerbside collections – nearly everyone said that this was the way forward
 - Sounds like a positive
 - Would there need to be another bin?
 - Information and education needed on what can you discard and what has to go into the black bin
- The producers and retailers – there was a suggestion here that some form of tax should be placed on producers in order to encourage them to reduce amount of textiles they produce and especially the number of plastic based materials
 - Within this reactions to an `extended responsibility scheme` received considerable positive feedback from consumers; partly because it reduced the responsibility on the individual to take action but also partly because it then became a shared responsibility
- A tax similar to the plastic bag levy was also spontaneously suggested – a sense amongst individuals that this will be required to prompt change here and to *“hit us in our pockets, it’s not what I want but maybe if everyone is in the same boat we can get off this merry-go-round of being slaves to fashion”*

Textiles as an Environmental Concern

Potential Solutions

- A ban of clothing or textiles ending up in Landfill or incinerated? – this was more difficult for people to understand. On the face of it the `ban' looked interesting but it was wondered what direct effect it would have on the consumer.
- Clothing rental – this was difficult for people to see working efficiently; the men in the sample had had experience of hiring clothes for special occasions however, female respondents had more difficulty in envisaging themselves “wearing someone else’s clothes. Moreover it was felt that renting clothes for weekly more wearing someone frequent occasions, when a quick trip tot eh shops for something fast and new seemed more efficient.
- Selling online has some reward in the form of payment but not always easy to list, troublesome customers, returns etc.

Textiles as an Environmental Concern

Potential Solutions

•**Reuse:** One person's trash is another's treasure. Donating unwanted items to friends and family or charity shops, or shopping and selling preloved fashion through NI's growing network of vintage shops or online through sites such Depop and Vinted, is a great way to avoid binning textiles while potentially making some money in the process. It's also worth remembering that style always comes back around so hanging onto a few choice pieces could be a fashion-forward choice.

•**Repair:** Wear and tear doesn't automatically mean the bin. Simple repairs to clothing like popping on a new button, removing or covering a stain, or mending a hole can prolong their life and bring many months if not years more enjoyment.

- Re-use is usefully re-defined in the context of textiles here
 - Information on reduce and recycle would also be helpful
- The idea of repairing is something that requires skills – many people do not have the basic skills here
- Re-imagining and upcycling also something new for many – but this requires skills and most do not have this or access to a someone who does
- One respondent pointed to the fact that waiting was also a good way of being environmentally friendly (as she was now wearing her mother's jeans which had come back into fashion after over 30 years).

Textiles as an Environmental Concern

Potential Solutions

Removing stains– Taking care of clothes helps them stay in good condition and last longer.

Buy sustainably– All of this doesn't mean you can't treat yourself every now and again, but there are more sustainable options around, and they might save you money too. Try browsing your local charity shop or vintage clothes shops when they reopen for some bargains, or even sites like Depop, Ebay, Gumtree or Freecycle for good value or freebies.

Textile recycling– When clothes and other textiles cannot be repaired, they can be reused or recycled. It's always best to try to repurpose these in the first instance, such as using them as dust cloths.

- Removing stains and buying sustainably were felt to be quite challenging
 - The idea of removing stains was felt to be a little personal and as such alienating
 - There was more interest in buying sustainably but there were also concerns that this could see an increase in prices if many of the high street retailers were to follow this trend (this research was conducted before the Primark sustainability announcement in September 2021)
- Recycling is clearly a comfort zone for people and one that they feel they can turn to if necessary. As noted, recycling included taking old clothes to the local charity shops as well as to local council run recycling centres. As noted, there was no real knowledge of or interest in what happens to the clothes after this

Textiles as an Environmental Concern

Potential Solutions- Communications Campaigns

- In addition, evidence from research conducted would point to the importance of creating a narrative around the subject matter – stories remain one of the, if not the most important elements in changing attitudes and behaviours
- We know from many communications' studies that issues require an injection of an amalgam of elements in order to increase awareness, change attitudes and eventually shift behaviours
- We measure these “effectiveness drivers” when testing and evaluating communications campaigns and they remain an important target in engaging people.
- Currently the subject of textiles is scoring low on all of the effectiveness drivers; not surprising given that information is thought to be fragmented, low key, difficult to find and infrequent.

Textiles as an Environmental Concern

Potential Solutions – Effectiveness drivers

- **Impact** – the extent to which the subject matter impacts on the minds of the public
- **Engagement/involvement** – the extent which the subject matter connects with people, draws them in and involves them in the subject matter
- **Emotional collateral** – the importance of engaging with people at an emotional level cannot be underestimated
- **Informational** – appealing also to the pragmatic part of our brains; fact and figures, proofs etc. are all important for us to be secure that we are dealing with real issues; language should be simple
- **Relevance** – creating a message that is clear and present in our everyday lives, that leverages our need to engage with subjects that will be relevant to us
- **Clarity** – discombobulation creates feelings of self-doubt/low intellect and should be avoided wherever possible; this is an area with considerable amount of jargon = marginalising people
- **Tone of Voice** – loud or soft; urgent or laid back; funny or sad; imperative or discretionary
- **Credibility** – believable or not and if so why not; endorsements; provenance etc.
- **Call to action** – attitudinal and behavioural; requested actions

Textiles as an Environmental Concern

Potential Solutions

*never put your
unwanted clothing
in the bin*

- Positive responses to the Fashion Forever campaign
- In terms of effectiveness drivers the campaign creates awareness and impact, it involves young people in what is seen to be a `movement`.
- The line “never put unwanted clothing in the bin” is thought to be excellent
 - A simple, credible immediately understandable call to action
- Radio `spots` lively fun short and to the point – creates an upbeat mood and brings people in to what is perceived to be a movement that is ongoing
- Reference to selling clothes on Vintd and Depop is perfectly targeted at the younger audience approx. up to early 30s (?)
- Older respondents looking for something to help them deal with unwanted clothes but will require more convincing

Conclusions

- There is no doubt from the evidence presented in both the survey and the group work conducted here, that Textiles and their effect on the environment, is not a salient issue for the vast majority of people. Whilst the Qualitative research points to some differences here, namely emerging trends in second-hand clothes usage amongst the younger cohorts and also a greater likelihood of “Emotional Environmentalists” to be more engaged with Textiles, there remains a job to do in terms of creating interest in this subject area
- The narrative surrounding Textiles is unclear. Unlike Single Use Plastics where there have been many media reports serving to increase awareness of the problem whilst also moving a proportion of the population towards taking appropriate action, there is perceived to have been relatively little information on Textiles and the environment.
- The first issue is that many people are unaware that there is a problem at all. They find it difficult to logically reason how textiles might be harmful to the environment. From their perspective, clothes are soft and made of material that is biodegradable. Awareness of plastic in clothing is growing but by no means widespread; this knowledge is required in order to make the basic connection between clothing and non-biodegradability.
- Once this connection has been made, then it has the potential to throw the issue into sharper relief, thereby giving people the basis for exploring the area in more detail. In other words, there is a need to a) establish the issue of textiles and b) increase its importance quotient in respect of the environment, in order to galvanise people into consideration.

Textiles as an Environmental Concern

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 - Travelling to and finding parking
 - Stressful dealing with charity shops, Amenity site personnel can be tricky
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 - Would there need to be another bin?
 - Information and education needed on what can you discard and what has to go into the black bin
- The producers and retailers – there was a suggestion here that some form of tax should be placed on producers in order to encourage them to reduce amount of textiles they produce and especially the number of plastic based materials
 - Within this reactions to an `extended responsibility scheme` received considerable positive feedback from consumers; partly because it reduced the responsibility on the individual to take action but also partly because it then became a shared responsibility
- A tax similar to the plastic bag levy was also spontaneously suggested – a sense amongst individuals that this will be required to prompt change here and to *“hit us in our pockets, it’s not what I want but maybe if everyone is in the same boat we can get off this merry-go-round of being slaves to fashion”*

Textiles as an Environmental Concern

Potential Solutions

- A ban of clothing or textiles ending up in Landfill or incinerated? – this was more difficult for people to understand. On the face of it the `ban' looked interesting but it was wondered what direct effect it would have on the consumer.
- Clothing rental – this was difficult for people to see working efficiently; the men in the sample had had experience of hiring clothes for special occasions however, female respondents had more difficulty in envisaging themselves “wearing someone else’s clothes. Moreover it was felt that renting clothes for weekly more wearing someone frequent occasions, when a quick trip tot eh shops for something fast and new seemed more efficient.
- Selling online has some reward in the form of payment but not always easy to list, troublesome customers, returns etc.

Conclusions

- There is no doubt from the evidence presented in both the survey and the group work conducted here, that Textiles and their effect on the environment, is not a salient issue for the vast majority of people. Whilst the Qualitative research points to some differences here, namely emerging trends in second-hand clothes usage amongst the younger cohorts and also a greater likelihood of “Emotional Environmentalists” to be more engaged with Textiles, there remains a job to do in terms of creating interest in this subject area
- The narrative surrounding Textiles is unclear. Unlike Single Use Plastics where there have been many media reports serving to increase awareness of the problem whilst also moving a proportion of the population towards taking appropriate action, there is perceived to have been relatively little information on Textiles and the environment.
- The first issue is that many people are unaware that there is a problem at all. They find it difficult to logically reason how textiles might be harmful to the environment. From their perspective, clothes are soft and made of material that is biodegradable. Awareness of plastic in clothing is growing but by no means widespread; this knowledge is required in order to make the basic connection between clothing and non-biodegradability.
- Once this connection has been made, then it has the potential to throw the issue into sharper relief, thereby giving people the basis for exploring the area in more detail. In other words, there is a need to a) establish the issue of textiles and b) increase its importance quotient in respect of the environment, in order to galvanise people into consideration.

Conclusions

- The second issue is that knowledge around the subject matter is very low. Indeed, it is only the autodidacts in the sample, and these were mainly those pragmatic environmentalists, who were able to formulate a more cohesive framework of what issues exist in relation to textiles and the environment; even then, there is room for further education here for this group.
- One of the significant issues that arose during discussions with the general public was the emotional importance of textiles to human beings. We are bound to our clothing, not just physically and pragmatically as a means of covering, for warmth and survival but also as a means of self-expression. Within this, there are hugely complex sets of social paradigms, archetypes, patterns of behaviour etc. that govern our use of clothes and allow us to present to the world our sense of self (or at least the 'self' that we wish to portray).
- There is evidence from this research to suggest that prompting a change in behaviour will be less about shock tactics and more about congratulating people on what they are doing already (by default) and asking people to, in the simplest of terms, a) change the way in which they look at the acquisition of clothing b) look again at their existing clothing and consider reducing disposal amounts and c) actively consider how they dispose of the clothing.
- At one end of the spectrum this will be an easier 'ask'. For the older members of the sample, who are, by default, disposing of their clothing in an appropriate manner, it may be a matter of recognizing that their existing good behaviour whilst at the same time furnishing them with additional information and guidelines for ongoing improvements here.
- At the other end of the spectrum, there were the harder to convince younger audiences; this cohort were more likely to be fashion conscious, purchasing more clothes and more likely to take advantage of fast fashion. As noted however, they were also more likely to be aware of the movement away from fast fashion to heritage brands, online secondhand (vintage) purchasing and sustainable brands. The main barriers to considering these options were cost and the difficulty of accessing some of these new options

Conclusions

- Interestingly, for the younger and also the older age groups, campaigns such as Forever Fashion are perceived to be the only real attempt so far at coalescing the information surrounding textiles in one memorable line “never put your unwanted clothing in the bin”. The line itself is short sharp memorable and prompts the debate by posing the question “why?”. It was seen to be the only campaign that was showing people how they could ‘relatively easily’ change their behaviours to benefit the environment. The challenge for this campaign, however, was thought to be that it had (courageously in the words of some respondents) targeted some of the most difficult to reach audiences through advertising on Cool FM, namely the younger generation. There is a need now to roll out the messages from this campaign on a wider basis to a broader section of the population
- The information required revolves around addressing the following questions:
 - i. Why should I care about this issue? – facts and figures showing the amount of textiles disposed of and the effect it has on the environment; importantly this can be linked back to plastics (a subject that everyone understands).
 - ii. How can I reduce the amount I purchase? – this was a very personal question. It will prompt an internal debate which, in turn, will be enhanced by seeing the evidence of textiles and their effect on the environment.
 - iii. What should I do with my existing clothes? Re-use, Repair and Reimagine were thought to be challenging but nonetheless important goals to promote here.
 - iv. If I need to dispose of my existing clothes what is the process and hierarchy of methods here.

Conclusions

- Other information around the subject area relates to the bigger picture. People have become used to being educated about the global effects of environmental issues, to the extent that this is expected now, encouraging people to qualify the issue as a clear and present problem. It was wondered whether the effects of textiles on the environment would be as stark as that which people have become used to seeing from Single Use Plastics. There was also little knowledge of how the circular economy might work both in general and in terms of textiles. There were also few in the sample who were aware of the global effects of textiles on the environment especially in terms of how the influx of textiles affects local markets and what the production of textiles does to local labour forces.
- There were also calls for more information on what other organisations are doing to redress the balance in terms of textiles and their effect on the environment. The tendency to displace the blame for environmental disasters on to the big companies and Government is perhaps understandable for three reasons:
 1. Over the years, there have been a number of examples showing how large organisations have caused natural disasters. People talk here, in general, about oil spills and plastics pollution and how producers of aerosols have impacted on global warming.
 2. Governments are generally thought to be quite slow to catch up with public opinion on these types of issues; legislation is perceived to be slow and cumbersome.
 3. There is cynicism surrounding the power of 'the one' to make a difference to global issues. It is difficult, even in these days of the collective consciousness created by social media to see how individuals can make a difference to the big issues. There is a tendency therefore to look the authorities to have an eye on and take responsibility for the bigger picture here.

Conclusions

4. There was a self awareness amongst many respondents that human nature and survival instinct will always prompt a certain level of third party blame. Interestingly, there was a good deal of self awareness here which, in turn, prompted people to suggest that enforcement may be necessary to encourage the general public to change their behaviour. Specifically, there were also calls for a plastic bag type tax on those who purchase `fast fashion`; paradoxically it was those who were most reliant on fast fashion who were most enthusiastic here.
- In order to balance things, there were also spontaneous calls for legislation to encourage textiles' producers and retailers to take action here. Quite how this would be achieved or what the law would look like was unknown. What people were looking for was a sense that the issue was being dealt with by those in authority and that any changes that individuals were to make in respect of their own behaviour would have the positive effect further down the line.
 - Finally, there was a reasonably strong opinion that one of the best ways of encouraging good behaviour in disposing of clothes was the provision of a kerbside textiles collection service. Whilst it was not thought to be a total solution, sorting waste for recycling is an established behaviour and one which people have become accustomed to. Kerbside collection also establishes the issue as "important" in the minds of the public; in the final analysis, if it is important enough to be part of the bin collection protocol it must, it is thought be important enough to be considered as a serious issue.

Cognisense

Any Questions?

