

## Distribution policies and strategies for sustainable textile products

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this article is to highlight the complex process of distribution for sustainable textile products. The main objective is to establish the most effective and sustainable distribution policies and strategies used by textile companies in Romania. It can be said that the distribution chain has to be very short and in many cases, conducted by the producer itself, because he has to follow the sustainable product through all its life phases. In conclusion, it can be said that for many companies the distribution process has a great impact on the environment, therefore it is very important to supervise the distribution chain.*

**Key-words:** *sustainable distribution, reverse distribution, textile products.*

### 1. Introduction

The textile industry represents one of the main industrial forces of the world, but through its production processes, has a great negative impact on the environment, due to the activities of textile plants cultivation, dyeing and cleaning goods but also after the product reaches the final consumer, through cleaning and maintaining processes, even when the product ends up in the garbage.

The present paper contains a presentation of sustainable fashion. First, the paper captures the main strategic objectives of the companies from the sustainable textile industry. Then the attention focuses on the distribution policy which is an important process in a sustainable industry. The last part of the paper is an analysis of the specific distribution strategies for sustainable textile products.

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## **2. Sustainable fashion**

Sustainable fashion needs informed and interested consumers, so they can be educated to make responsible decisions concerning the environment and to respect the workforce in the textile industry, and why not, by choosing local textile products, to stimulate responsible production from the economic, social and environmental points of view.

In the textile industry, sustainability is a recent and important problem, because nowadays consumers are more and more interested in the ecological matters and in the world behind the products they buy or consume. The first step regarding the development of sustainability is to develop a sustainable supply chain, using ecological raw materials in the textile industry (Shen 2014, 6236) and ending the life of the textile product by recycling it.

Sustainable fashion can also be called eco fashion, being a part of the sustainable development trend, with the purpose of creating a system that ensures the existence of the human kind and other species in good environmental conditions. This trend cannot be built and maintained on a short term, it has to be developed and adapted in time, so that the responsible consumption of the ecological textile can also be in trend.

The NGO Earth Pledge sustains that at least 8,000 chemicals are used to transform raw textile into the final product, while 25% of the total world pesticides consumption is used in growing non-organic cotton. The organization points out that 70% of the carbon footprint of a product is done after the time of purchase.

Sustainable products are the result of an integrated process, taking into account the sustainability requirements even from the design phases, and then are followed until the product reaches the end customer. Surely, this product is more expensive than a mass product, because it implies additional costs and a more difficult production process, in smaller quantities.

Sustainable products are tracked throughout the entire production process and supply chain of the textile product. The approach should be a complex, unified one, which starts from the moment of shaping the new product concept and ends with the waste and recycling phase.

Lester R. Brown (2006) believes that there is a conflict between industrial civilization and the environment, drawing attention to issues such as the importance of recycling and the reverse distribution.

## **3. Strategic objective**

The strategic objective of the textile, clothing and leather – shoe industry is to increase the competitiveness of the products in the market economy with minimum social and material cost and maximum efficiency and it is based on establishing a

sustainable and stable business environment, simultaneously with applying measures to accelerate structural adjustment, promoting intangible investments, industrial cooperation and on supporting the development of SMEs, the development of industry and business services, higher labor productivity, product advertising and 'clean' technologies, energy saving, expanding the use of indigenous raw materials and the development of an effective regional infrastructure. In this context, the development strategy for the textile, clothing and leather-footwear industries aims to increase the competitiveness of products and on this basis to achieve stable economic growth and the duration of the sub-components, in full consonance with the environment.

Raderbauer (2011) argues that strategic sustainability is the involvement of senior management that goes beyond compliance and efficiency to avoid risks and minimize costs. Townsend (2013) argues that a sustainable strategy should be based on solid pillars, so the company must grow progressively and get in the market dominant position, and should support the sustainability concept in both short- and long-term, and the company's mission is to correlate the company with the environment.

#### **4. Distribution policies and strategies for sustainable textile products**

The marketing mix represents the marketing tool used by companies to achieve marketing objectives in the target market. To achieve their objectives, companies need to consider all variables of the traditional market, such as product, price, distribution and advertising (Stan 2012, 32). The concept of marketing mix was first defined by N. Borden in 1957, but he included 12 elements, such as: product, packaging, price, brand, distribution channels, personal selling, advertising, sales promotion, display, post-sale service, logistics, information gathering and analysis. Carty was the one who managed to summarize the definition into four main directions, the 4P's: product, price, place (distribution) and promotion.

The politics of the distribution process restricts the access of the customers to the textile products. The distribution term defines all operations and means that ensure that the goods or services will be available to users or end consumers (Lefter et al 2006).

The term of "distribution channel" was replaced by the term of "marketing channel" by some authors (Lusch 1979, 12), having the purpose of enlarging the role of the intermediaries in the distribution process (Bălan 2002, 387).

The marketing channels can be defined as a set of independent organizations involved in the process of ensuring product availability for use or consumption (Stern et al 1982).

When it comes to sustainable textile and clothing industry, we talk about a short distribution channel, with a small number of intermediaries, the direct

distribution process being often preferred, by which goods are delivered directly from the producer to the end consumer. This is not possible in most of the cases, but it tries to create a direct link between the producers and the end consumers of sustainable clothing, in order to control the supply chain and reduce unnecessary consumption of fuel, energy and labor.

Channel width for industrial goods is small. It is determined by the number of units that provides the sale of a product. As for the depth distribution channel, the vicinity of the distributor to points of consumption is low. It can be said that within the sustainable industry there are also hybrid distribution systems, meaning there are multiple channels to deliver goods to one or more market segments. By using this hybrid system companies can reach better market penetration, reduce distribution costs through more efficient distribution channels and make customized offers.

For the distribution of sustainable textiles, exclusive distribution is preferred due to the high degree of control, low distribution and consumption costs, but the market coverage is reduced. As a middle solution, we can resort to selective distribution, providing minimum market control, but bigger coverage. Exclusive distribution involves a single intermediary, while within the selective distribution there are a small number of intermediaries.

In order to have a sustainable distribution system, the company should respect the criteria of transport, handling, packing and storage, so that the processes are optimally performed and that it also does not affect the social, environmental and economic policies.

An important aspect in the sustainable logistics is the activity of transport, storage, sorting, handling, which should have minimal effects on the society, the economy and the environment, while ensuring sustainable quality textile products.

Transport is an important pollutant in the textile industry therefore sustainable transport will choose the least polluting transport channels. For example, the transport of goods by ship from China will be preferred instead of air transport.

As shown in its activity report, H&M consumes 50% of the total CO<sub>2</sub> emission of the company only in the activity of transportation between the factory and the store, so the main goal is to reduce this emission. The transport of H&M products between the storage and the stores is made in reusable boxes.

Sustainable distribution is based on two main factors, namely:

- the reduction of waste flows emerged from the distribution processes and waste of packaging from the regular distribution channel;
- the creation and development of reverse channels responsible for the taking over and disposal of waste generated in all the production stages.

Reverse distribution has become a requirement for resource recovery. The marketing dictionary defines the reverse distribution as a contemporary process of reinsertion of reusable materials or components in the economic cycle, which are gained from consumption of goods. The reverse distribution can be carried out on a number of activities like:

- Textile waste returning from the market can be returned to the factory - buy-back campaigns in large clothing stores;
- Using recyclable or reusable packaging;
- Consumption of slightly worn goods - second-hand stores;
- Reusing parts of products used to create new products.
  - For example, H&M launched a campaign to collect textile waste, then sorted them into three categories:
- Reused clothes, which will be resold in the second-hand stores;
- Clothing that can no longer be used and will be transformed into cleaning rags;
- Clothes to be recycled.

Since 2012, the Higgs index is used to auto-evaluate the sustainability of the supply chain in the field of clothing and footwear.

## 5. Conclusions

In the sustainable marketing, the distribution process has to focus on the fair trade principles. This means that the commercial transactions should be based on transparency, fairness and respect for all commercial parties (Cătoiș et al 2010, 121).

The textile consumer's behavior is changing in favor of ecological textile. Nowadays people are starting to be interested in how the product was made, what was its impact on the environment, so the new approach of textile eco conception is connected to the ecology of the human resource, the ecology of production and the ecology of recycling rubbish (Răducanu 2008, 47).

The contribution this work aimed at was to identify the common distribution policies and strategies used in the sustainable textile industry and to find different ways to improve them.

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