

Consumption, Collaboration & Creativity: the 3C's for Innovative Solutions in the Fashion Industry



A seminar on 24th April mediated by HxN representative Tricia Langman consisted of a panel with Caragh Bennet, Katekani Moreku, Alison Heryer, Kiran Sunil and HxN president, Adriana Marina. All of whom are experts within their fields and are part of different production processes in the fashion industry.

The seminar was targeted towards the intersection between consumers, collaboration and creativity for a more sustainable fashion industry which is spearheaded by the consumers.

Caragh, the founder of Zena, a brand that focuses on investing in female entrepreneurs said that consumers are an agent of change and should be invited to be part of the fashion story. She believes that 'Who makes your clothes?' is a powerful question and leads the consumers to have a relationship with the producers. Adriana believes that it is up to the fashion industry to give a voice to small local artisans. They often get stuck in an exploitative system with no way out, and the consumers must call for change to get them out of it. Alison Heryer who teaches at Portland State University teaches students to creatively connect to the consumers by creating sustainable and body-specific designs.

The panellists believed that both the producers and the consumers need to be changemakers. Caragh argued that most of the younger generation would rather shop through a sustainable alternative if made available. Whereas Alison believes that once the consumers understand the craft and the effort that goes into a piece of clothing, they will become attached to it and will begin to think of the inputs that go into the production.

Is a circular economy possible in the fashion industry, and who should the responsibility of the repair and reuse model go to the consumer or the producer? Katekani, a designer popular for creating menswear from waste items, believes a little bit of both needs to be implemented. There needs to be more pressure put on the producer to make the system more circular alongside better consumer education. But the producer should bear the brunt as they have formed the current system of consumerism. Kiran is an industrial designer working in rural India to escalate the standard of living by access to electricity, financial needs and utilization of the environment. He was reserved against a perfectly circular economy; he believed that if consumers were part of every step of the process, they would identify with the clothes more and not get rid of them, eventually consuming less.

When discussing innovation, Allison believes that technology has been useful when producing body-specific clothing, especially for the underrepresented communities. It also helps in creating more sustainable practices through innovation and producing less waste. Adriana believes that technology needs to be used correctly but if done right it can be helpful.

For making a positive impact on the local communities, Kiran believes that technology can impact them by making their livelihoods more productive. It reduces their physical work, thus liberating them. Caragh feels that giving them a small percentage of sales for business opportunities, can lead to self-sufficiency and eventually, poverty alleviation. Katekani believes that access to education and the creation of opportunities can change the lives of individuals as they don't believe that they can get out of their small town.

When asked the one change they believe would make a difference, Kiran said sustainability needs to be considered at every stage of production. Alison believes that a relationship needs to be created between the consumers and producers. For Caragh, labour practices are an important thing to focus upon and Katekani believed education to be essential.

Overall, the seminar was extremely insightful. By hearing the viewpoints of those from every step of the fashion industry, one can form a holistic view of the change that needs to be made. While the producer has to make the production process more sustainable, it is the educated consumers that must demand this change. Furthermore, the production of clothes needs to be done such that consumers begin to form a relationship with each article of clothing.