HINDSIGHT

2020 PANDEMIC
EDITION

Inside the fashion industry

DOUBLE TAKE?
PG.20

Check Out This weeks story- "balance."

balance.

ANALYZING THE EFFECTS OF THE 2020 PANDEMIC THEN AND NOW

Feng Shui is a practice that originated in ancient China and the phrase directly translates to "wind-water" which refers to the balance of elements in ones surrounding environment. The 2020 Pandemic virtually erased this balance- what we lost, what we learned, and how life as we knew it changed.

We lost a lot during the 2020 Pandemic. We lost people, we lost jobs, and a lot of people lost faith. The disruption was something that no one could foresee and we definitely weren't prepared- but through all of this, we learned. We watched the Republican and Democratic parties learn how to get along, some learned how to cook, and some others learned how to work from home. When our world did a 180 degree turn, we found our -new- balance

This "Loss and Learn Curve" goes for the business world as well; more specifically the fashion industry. The industry, all around the world, just about immediately halted and shuttered. Those companies that elected to stay open, started producing face masks for the healthcare workers on the frontlines working to save those who had been infected by the virus. Chaos surrounded this time in many of our lives- and we lacked the balance that we knew.

30 years later, we can look through an analytical lens to have a more holistic, clear view of what really happened in our world and what has changed since- some we saw coming and others that came as a surprise. Dive into the deep-end with me to evaluate the 'greatest hits' of changes over the past three decades.

Due to Covid-19, the 'shutdown heard around the world,' actually served as the wake-up call that people needed to see what people were doing to the environment. With less production, came exponentially less air pollution all around the globe. In Delhi, India- nitrogen dioxide levels fell 70%.3 Countries like the United States saw a significant decrease all across the board as well with a decrease of NO2 levels by 33% in Los Angeles and 22% in New York City from 2019 to 2020. These drastic changes in NO2 levels were not sustained for long, but with the world watching companies felt the pressure to pull their weight by putting more environmentally sustainable practices at the forefront of their agenda and looking to decrease their footprint. Overall, the NO2 levels have leveled off much lower than they were before the Pandemic at about 10-12% less than they were before. This push for environmental sustainability then has paved the way for continued initiatives for

the future and it has been crucial to the development and preservation of companies since the Pandemic.11
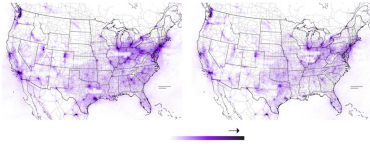
2019 is on the left and 2020 is on the right. The darker the purple coloring, the higher the NO2 levels. New York City is in the upper right of the map and Los Angeles on the lower left, in California. Picture courtesy of National Geographic.

With this global decrease in pollution as a backdrop, the fashion industry was forced to recognize the weight it carried when it came to the lack of sustainable practices that had been exhibited on a daily basis. Companies within the fashion industry put an emphasis on the sustainability aspects of the business by implementing blockchain technology. This technology allowed companies to trace the production of their products all the way back to the origin with ease. The information in the blockchain broke the supply chain down into more specific informational hubs or nodes that cannot be modified after they have been inserted into the blockchain to prevent fraudulent activity. Blockchain is faster than a traditional supply chain while also allowing the end-user or consumer to know exactly where the product has come from.4 This technology increased transparency, traceability, and afforded the consumers knowledge of exactly how and where their clothes came from and also heightened the market for sustainable goods of all kinds- not just within the fashion industry..

Leading the way, along with some luxury brands implementing blockchain technology, many others

have followed suit. In the late 2010s, brands like Louis Vuitton and Dior were ahead of the curve in using blockchain technology to ensure that the consumers were buying legitimate products made by these luxurious, highly sought, brands- and not the counterfeits that had been flooding the market. The technology runs decentrally which means that not all of the power is in one part of the supply chain, but the value is dispersed over the entirety of the blockchain.6 The highest value of the blockchain is the ease of traceability for the retailer and consumer. With the use of blockchain technology, the truth of where materials came from, the conditions under which the materials were obtained, and an in-depth look at the process in which the products are made are now provided to the end-users. This information was used to hold companies in the fashion industry more accountable for using more sustainable materials- such as low carbon and nature-based solutions.7

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Sure we have seen an increase in sustainability initiatives, but why do we care where our shirts come from? Why should we continue to care? What the 2020 Pandemic showed us is that we do and we will continue to do so. We saw a change in the industry and a movement away from the cheap clothes that are produced cheaply and sold cheaply to a more widespread, collective choice to put

conditions above price. We saw glimpses of this in 2013 when H&M, as well as a number of other retailers, signed a legally binding accord to improve working conditions in Bangladesh after a garment factory collapsed8.

Strides have been made ever since within the blockchain advancements, delivering on environmental sustainability and the push that began our goal of a circular economy. It was documented in 2020 that 60% of people were more likely to buy products from companies that have clearly defined sustainability policies9. Companies like Patagonia, with their Worn Wear collaboration, and Allbirds were pioneers in this segment of the market.

The Stories We Wear

The most important thing about this technology is how and what it has to do with our overall reduction of waste. Traditional supply chains ended with the consumer or end-user- hence the name. Blockchain goes beyond this natural 'end' in a supply chain and blocks can, and will, always be added onto the blockchain whenever and wherever the product moves. This has allowed us to see the life of clothes from raw material to recycled material and everything in between. This allowed the industry to be re-thought and transformed to power us towards a world using the circular economy.10

After some time, we are able to zoom out and look at the bigger picture. The 2020 Pandemic proved to be a tough time, but also a learning experience for the world that allowed us to take a step back and recognize ways to build a healthier, and more sustainable future. From experiencing loss to discovering the wisdom that has led us to where we are now and the implementation of technology that is more environmentally friendly. Now, 30 years later, we have found our balance, and we can truly say that hindsight is 2020.

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