

Who has to take action in order to reach fashion sustainability: an interdisciplinary analysis of digital activism concerning the #FashionRevolution

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The collapse of Rana Plaza in 2013 brought the unsustainability of fashion production processes to the public attention and gave rise to the creation of the Fashion Revolution movement. Online campaigns such as #FashionRevolution are described as examples of connective action in digital activism, different from collective action in social movements Bennett and Segerberg (2012). Highfield (2016: 103) notes that, in connective action, “political engagement is also personalized and digitally mediated, as social media and other digital technologies offer additional means for organization.”

In this study, we adopt an interdisciplinary perspective combining linguistics, argumentation studies and communication studies, through which we analyze the calls for action in a multilingual corpus of tweets with the hashtag #FashionRevolution, published in 2020 in view of and during the Fashion Revolution week.

In our analysis, we want to answer the question how the call for action to change the fashion sector is formulated as well as which actors are being presented as responsible for the problems related to fashion sustainability as well as for possible solutions, and whether a distinction is being made between environmental and social sustainability in this context. At a broader level, we then also want to show which mechanisms underlie digital activism related to sustainability.

We have collected tweets containing the relevant hashtag in the period before and during the 2020 fashion week. This were annotated for different parameters related to our research questions, which were constructed bottom-up by bringing together the expertise of the different researchers involved. This has allowed us to adopt a more interdisciplinary approach, taking into account argumentative, linguistic and communicational aspects. Thus, in addition to overarching information such as the type of action called for and the person presented as responsible, we included communicational information such as who posted the tweet, linguistic information such as the linguistic structure used to incite to action, and an argumentative analyses of whether arguments were given to take this action and of which type these were.

Our analysis leads us to showing that a variety of actors call for action through a positive imperative but also through various other deontic structures (such as *we need to*, *it is important to*). However, those responsible for carrying out the actions towards a fashion revolution are often left vague, in line with overall campaigning strategies. The calls for action are most frequently formulated as prescriptive standpoints, sometimes accompanied by an argument. While Fashion Revolution started out of a concern for social sustainability, environmental issues are increasingly represented in these calls for action, and are more often represented as calling the individual to act, whereas tweets concerning social sustainability call more for systemic changes. Through this case study, we have contributed to an interdisciplinary analysis

of digital activism and connective action concerning sustainability in the field of fashion production and consumption.