

Social Marketing and Sustainable Designer Brands in Digital Environments: A Case Study of Four Fingers

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes through a case study how Social Marketing practices are structured by sustainable designer fashion brands and how they influence product acquisition in digital environments. The study is grounded in discussions on sustainable consumption and the role of digital platforms in shaping purchasing behavior. The research is qualitative and descriptive, combining bibliographic research with a case study approach of Four Fingers, a sustainable designer fashion brand located in Florianópolis, Brazil. Findings indicate that the integration of Social Marketing and Digital Marketing practices can significantly influence the acquisition of sustainable designer fashion products online. Key strategies include maintaining a consistent digital presence to foster engagement and strengthen brand community; creating shared experiences, such as the Traveling Skirt (Saia Viajante) initiative, which promotes personalization, belonging, and emotional connection; transparent communication about materials and production processes; and the production of authentic, educational content reinforcing sustainability and authorship values.

Keywords: Social Marketing; Sustainable Designer Brands; Digital Environments; Sustainability; Sustainable Fashion.

INTRODUCTION

In the first two decades of the 21st century, sustainable fashion consolidated itself as a central theme in both academia and industry, driven by growing awareness of the environmental and social impacts of the fashion production chain. In this context, designers began adopting approaches that prioritize nature and integrate social, cultural, and economic dimensions into the creative process (Williams, 2019). This orientation materializes in practices that value recycled materials, manual techniques, and artisanal knowledge, contributing to the construction of unique brand identities aligned with socio-environmental responsibility (Pinheiro et al., 2015; Noronha, 2017).

At the same time, digital marketing has become a strategic element for brands seeking not only to expand their visibility but also to strengthen relationships with an increasingly conscious and demanding audience. Unlike traditional approaches, the digital environment enables direct, personalized, and continuous interactions, creating spaces for dialogue in which brands can

communicate purpose, values, and positioning (Magalhães, 2021).

Social media further intensifies this scenario by functioning as privileged environments for the exchange of information, experiences, and perceptions among consumers (Sousa et al., 2018). Fashion consumption thus comes to be understood as a relational and collaborative process, in which narratives, meanings, and symbolic identifications play a central role. For designer brands, this dynamic is even more significant, as their consolidation depends on authentic storytelling and the construction of an engaged community (Noronha, 2017).

Considering this context, this article aims to analyze, through a case study, how Social Marketing practices are structured by sustainable designer brands and how they influence the acquisition of products in digital environments. The relevance of this research is justified by the growing socio-environmental awareness among consumers, who increasingly value products aligned with sustainability and purpose. This movement demands the development of integrated social and digital marketing strategies that, beyond promoting products, educate, raise awareness, and strengthen audience engagement.

By articulating communication strategies, brand purpose, and education for conscious consumption, this study contributes to understanding how sustainable designer brands can consolidate their identity and positioning in digital environments, transforming consumption into a meaningful experience, and the meaningful experience into a competitive advantage. The theoretical framework addresses the following axes: Consumption on Social Media, Digital Marketing, Social Marketing, and Sustainable Designer Brands.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Sustainability became an increasingly prominent theme in fashion scholarship and industry practice during the early decades of the 21st century. This shift has been driven by growing awareness of fashion's negative impacts on natural systems, biodiversity, and practices related to modern slavery. In response, designers have explored approaches that prioritize nature and integrate social, cultural, and economic factors (Williams, 2019).

Atik and Ertekin (2023) argue that the fashion industry faces the challenge of aligning consumers' constant desire for newness with the urgency of adopting more sustainable practices. As accelerated consumption is encouraged by low prices and wide availability of clothing, even among conscious consumers, fast fashion remains dominant, supported by marketing strategies that stimulate accelerated disposal. This tension between sustainable production and accelerated consumption, driven in large part by the central role that aesthetic and cultural aspects play in the industry's social, economic, and environmental impact (Dourado, Llovet, & Fernández, 2025), shows that discussions about fashion cannot be separated from a broader understanding of contemporary consumption dynamics. Beyond the industry itself, it is necessary to examine the symbolic and cultural aspects that sustain this behavior.

In this sense, Sant'Anna (2007) states that consumption, as desire, goes beyond rationality and is driven by emotions, such as satisfaction and pleasure. This desire creates a continuous cycle in which the search for fulfillment feeds on itself, generating endless wants that sustain ongoing consumption. From this perspective, this author argues that consumption can be understood as integration into a system for interpreting the world, forming the webs of meaning that support the modern subject. In this view, consuming is not merely an economic act but also a symbolic practice and a way of constructing meaning in social life. At the same time, within this culture of consumption, not only are individuals redefined as consumers, but power itself is reconfigured, becoming fragmented, fluid, and subject to the dynamics of purchasing (Sant'Anna, 2007).

Thus, consumption choices help shape how individuals understand and relate to reality, and power no longer resides exclusively in institutions or specific figures; instead, it becomes dispersed and constantly redefined through consumption patterns and consumer choices. This panorama of contemporary consumption is closely linked to the role of social media in shaping meaning, as these platforms provide spaces where individuals share and validate their consumption experiences.

Social network sites, as defined by Boyd and Ellison (2007), are online services that allow individuals to create a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, connect with other users, and navigate their own connections as well as those of others. As a result, the Internet has removed barriers that once limited the sharing of information, expanding opportunities for interaction and exchange of experiences. With social media, the line between the physical and digital worlds has become increasingly blurred, influencing new ways of producing and consuming and transforming users from passive receivers into active agents in the creation and circulation of content and values online (Sousa et al., 2018; Souza et al., 2020).

According to a survey conducted by Capterra in 2022 with 1,024 participants aged 18 to 75 across different regions of Brazil, 62% of Brazilian consumers have made purchases through social media, and 60% were influenced by paid advertisements. Instagram is the preferred platform for shopping (70%), followed by Facebook (67%) and WhatsApp (56%). However, concerns about cybersecurity remain, especially among those who have not yet made purchases, with 53% reporting concerns about online safety. Virtual communities function as spaces for exchanging opinions and experiences, and many consumers base their purchase decisions on information obtained through social media (Sousa et al., 2018). The same Capterra (2022) survey shows that different types of content vary in their influence: paid advertising by brands impacts 60% of consumers, sponsored influencer partnerships influence 46%, unpaid content such as recommendations from friends affects 42%, and paid live events influence 26%.

With technological advances and the consolidation of the Internet as the main communication channel, Digital Marketing has become central to organizational strategies, enabling actions from pre-sale to post-sale and expanding interactions between companies and consumers. In this context, organizations have increasingly directed their strategies toward behavior on social

media, prioritizing positive experiences throughout the online customer journey, since satisfied customers strengthen brand visibility and reputation. Thus, Digital Marketing has become an essential tool for increasing brand presence and strengthening relationships with audiences (Meng, 2009; Magalhães, 2021).

In 2024, Brazil's social media landscape showed both consolidated platforms and others experiencing rapid growth. Reports from We Are Social and Meltwater indicate that Brazil has 144 million social media users, representing 66.3% of the population. The most popular platforms include YouTube (144 million users), Facebook (111.3 million), and Instagram (134.6 million). Daily social media use averages 3 hours and 37 minutes, placing Brazil among the world's most active social media users.

Given this intense digital presence and the strong influence of social media on purchasing behavior, it becomes relevant to discuss how these tools can be used not only for commercial purposes but also to promote behavioral and social change through Social Marketing.

According to Ribeiro et al. (2023), Social Marketing acts as a strategy that encourages sustainable behaviors among consumers, especially in the textile sector, promoting reuse and responsible disposal of products. Suggested practices include awareness campaigns, rewards to encourage recycling, and greater transparency regarding production conditions and material sourcing. The authors also argue that Social Marketing campaigns can challenge negative perceptions of sustainable practices, such as buying second-hand clothing, sharing, or renting garments. Providing accurate information helps overcome perceptions of low quality and social bias that exclude these practices from the spirit of time (or *zeitgeist*).

However, despite their transformative potential, the effectiveness of these actions and the consolidation of sustainable consumption depend on structural and communication challenges that remain in the market. Bonini and Oppenheim (2008) identify five main barriers: lack of knowledge about what makes a product sustainable; negative perceptions; lack of trust in product quality and sustainability claims; higher prices compared to conventional products; and limited availability. Recognizing these barriers allows companies to develop more effective strategies and assume an educational role.

Ribeiro et al. (2023, p. 3) further state that consumers need to be open to reuse habits, whether remanufactured or repaired products, while the industry must make additional efforts to promote these products and educate consumers, for example, through Social Marketing. Within this context of reconfigured production and communication practices, it becomes relevant to examine how certain segments incorporate these principles into their creative logic and positioning. Sustainable designer fashion emerges as a creative and responsible approach that combines originality in design with environmentally and socially conscious practices.

Designer fashion is characterized by unique creative processes in which garments are not intended for large-scale reproduction but rather conceived as exclusive expressions. It values

unconventional materials, manual techniques, craftsmanship, local labor, and cultural heritage. In this context, it distances itself from mass production and places sustainability at its core, reinforcing a distinct visual identity. Thus, the individuality and expression of both creator and wearer become central in the creator, garment–body relationship, positioning designer fashion as a symbolic system that privileges authenticity, identity, and meaning (Pinheiro et al., 2015; Noronha, 2017).

Attributes commonly associated with designer fashion, widely used in the Portuguese language (“*moda autoral*” or “*roupa de autor*”) and in Spanish (“*roupa de autor*” or “*indumentária de autor*”), such as durability, creativity, and aesthetics, allow this segment to position itself at the forefront of sustainable fashion (Noronha, 2017).

It is important to distinguish sustainable designer fashion from sustainable fashion research more broadly. Mukendi et al. (2020, p. 2874) offer a still-evolving definition of sustainable fashion as encompassing “the variety of means by which a fashion item or behavior could be perceived to be more sustainable, including (but not limited to) environmental, social, slow fashion, reuse, recycling, cruelty-free and anti-consumption and production practices” a definition broad enough to accommodate designer fashion practices without being limited to them, and applicable to companies across different sizes and production scales.

Sustainable designer fashion, by contrast, is defined less by scale of production and more by its symbolic and relational logic. As Zou, Abdullah, and Jalil (2026) argue, the essence of independent designer fashion brands lies in uniqueness and authenticity: garments exist as an authentic, singular form of creation that directly reflects the designer's own aesthetics and will to innovate, typically achieved through superior craftsmanship. This distinction matters theoretically because it shifts the locus of social marketing from persuading consumers to adopt broad, large-scale sustainable consumption habits toward cultivating meaning, belonging, and authenticity around a smaller, more intentional set of purchases.

Monteiro (2023, p. 11) highlights the relationship between fashion design and art, stating that “The fusion between art and fashion creates a subjective language whose characteristics are embedded in the context of contemporary fashion.” According to the author, both designers and artists are influenced by emotional states and motivations, and both fashion and art allow multiple interpretations beyond mere functionality.

Therefore, if sustainable designer brands carries symbolic, artistic, and emotional attributes, its consolidation in the market depends on effectively communicating these values to the public. As Berlim (2009, p. 29, author’s translation) states, “the values attributed to material and immaterial objects go beyond themselves, and motivations for fashion consumption extend beyond the classic explanation of status seeking”. In this sense, Svendsen (2010, p. 138) argues that the difference is symbolic, not functional: “The difference in economic value cannot be explained based on utility value. Not only have all commodities been transformed into symbols, but all symbols have also been transformed into commodities”. Today’s consumer is also

guided, perhaps more than expected, by individual, emotional, and psychological values.

In the context of fashion brand communication, Rech and Rech (2017) claim that the emotional relationship with the customer constitutes the brand's primary asset, that is, the strategy consists of shifting attention away from rational considerations toward the sensory and emotional perception that the brand establishes.

Given this panorama, sustainable fashion cannot be analyzed solely from a production perspective but must also consider the symbolic dynamics of consumption and the central role of social media in shaping meaning. Digital Marketing and Social Marketing emerge as strategic tools to promote more responsible practices, even in the face of structural and perceptual barriers. In this context, sustainable designer fashion stands out as an alternative that integrates creativity, identity, and socio-environmental responsibility, whose consolidation depends largely on effectively communicating its symbolic and emotional values to a consumer increasingly oriented towards meaning and experience.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Based on the methodological classification proposed by Gil (2008), this article is characterized as: (I) qualitative research, regarding the research approach; (II) descriptive, in terms of its objective; and (III), in terms of technical procedures, it draws on bibliographic research and a case study.

To develop the study, the following methods were adopted: first, practices related to Social Marketing were identified in the literature; second, an open-ended questionnaire was developed based on the theoretical findings. This data collection instrument was chosen due to the participant's limited availability, as conducting an interview was not feasible at that time. For this reason, an open-ended questionnaire was chosen instead of a closed one, allowing the founder to better express her ideas, perceptions, and experiences. In open-ended questions, the questions are presented and a blank space is left for the respondent to write their answer without any restriction (Gil, 2008); finally, the instrument was applied to a company operating in the sustainable designer brand segment in order to analyze the presence and application of these practices in the studied context. As a complementary step, a search was conducted in the Scopus database to identify existing gaps in the literature on designer fashion and sustainability.

The case study was conducted with the brand Four Fingers, a designer fashion company located in Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil. The brand stands out for its strong authorial identity, visual communication, and production aligned with the principles of sustainability in its broad sense (environmental, social, and economic), creating crochet and knitwear pieces that are available for immediate purchase as well as made to order. The product mix includes bags, blouses, dresses, head pieces, scarves, hair ties, shorts, skirts, and more (Figure 1). According to Yin (2010), a case study is an empirical research method that investigates phenomena within their real-life context, especially when the researcher has little control over events and when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined.

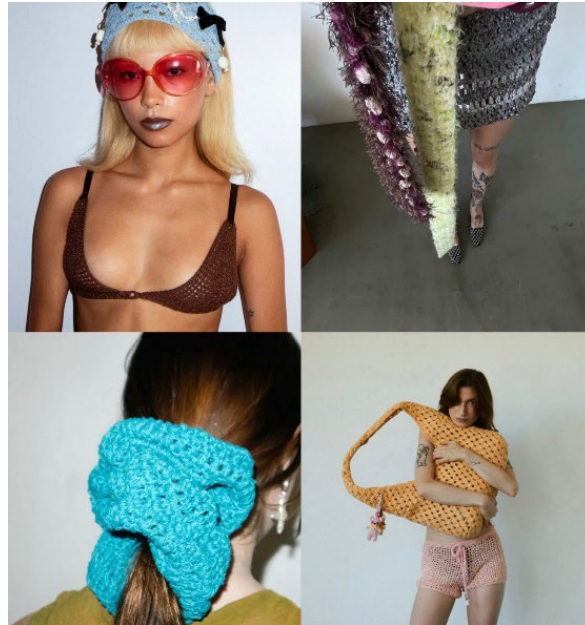


Figure 1. Four Fingers product mix

For data collection the application of an open-ended questionnaire. The instrument was developed and applied to the brand's owner through the Google Forms platform between October 21 and October 31, 2024. Table 1 presents the questions used in the research.

Table 1. Open-ended questionnaire applied to the Four Fingers brand owner

Designer fashion and Sustainability	How is authorship incorporated into the production and creative process?
	How is sustainability incorporated into the products or services offered?
Target Audience and Consumer Behavior	How does the target audience engage with issues related to sustainability and responsible consumption?
	How does the brand adapt to changes in consumer trends and digital platforms?
Digital Marketing	Which digital platforms does the brand use to communicate with its audience?
	What metrics does the brand use to measure the success of its digital marketing campaigns?
	How do you use digital marketing to support your social marketing initiatives?
	Do you believe that digital marketing facilitates the dissemination of information about the importance of sustainable textile products?
Social Marketing	What social marketing strategies are you currently using?
	What metrics do you use to measure the success of your social marketing initiatives?
	What opportunities do you identify in the market for the development of social marketing?
Results and Impact	Are there examples of campaigns that had a significant impact on sales or brand recognition?

The data obtained were analyzed using the content analysis technique. According to Bardin (2011), this technique can be defined as a set of communication analysis procedures that employ objective and systematic methods to describe the content of messages. The questionnaire responses were coded and organized into five thematic categories corresponding to the questionnaire's structure: Designer Fashion and Sustainability, Target Audience and Consumer Behavior, Digital Marketing, Social Marketing, and Results and Impact. The analytical procedure adopted was Categorical Analysis (Bardin, 2011). This technique involves breaking the text into recording units, which are subsequently grouped into thematic categories according to semantic criteria. The analysis followed the three stages proposed by the author: pre-analysis, material exploration, and treatment and interpretation of the results.

In addition to the questionnaire, posts published on the brand's Instagram account were analyzed, covering the period from April 19, 2021, when the first available post was published, to October 31, 2024, the date of the most recent publication at the time of data collection, totaling 210 posts. Given the visual nature of the material, the posts were examined manually and classified into categories that emerged inductively from the data: product photographs (stills); inspirational phrases conveying the brand's identity and mood; inspirational images featuring similar products, materials, and textures; photographs of "FF Girls" wearing the brand's designs; model photographs; fashion editorials; artists and influencers wearing the brand's designs; records of the Traveling Skirt initiative; memes and trends; and sketches and production processes, including editorial preparation. Fashion editorials and photographs of "FF Girls" were the most frequent categories identified.

It is acknowledged that data collection relied on a single respondent, the brand's founder, which constitutes a limitation regarding the diversity of perspectives captured. This choice is consistent with the single-case study design, and the findings should therefore be interpreted within this context rather than generalized.

Furthermore, to better understand what has been discussed in the literature regarding the articulation between designer fashion and sustainability, as well as its contributions, a search was conducted in the Scopus database, accessed through the *Portal de Periódicos CAPES*, on August 20, 2026. The keywords used were ("*moda autoral*" OR "*moda de autor*" OR "designer fashion" OR "designer fashion brands" OR "authorial fashion") AND ("sustainability" OR "sustainable fashion" OR "*sustentabilidade*" OR "*moda sustentável*" OR "*sostenibilidad*" OR "*moda sostenible*"). The search returned 14 articles, and, given the small number of retrieved works, no additional filters were applied. A dynamic reading of each work's title, abstract, and keywords was then performed. Following this stage, four studies were considered relevant and selected for full reading. The choice of terms in Portuguese, English, and Spanish is justified by the fact that authorial fashion is a phenomenon discussed both in Ibero-American literature (in Portuguese and Spanish) and in international literature indexed in English, the primary language of publication in the Scopus database. This multilingual approach aimed to broaden the search coverage and reduce the risk of excluding relevant studies published outside the

English language, particularly considering that the terms "moda autoral" and "moda de autor" do not have a single translation in the international literature (designer fashion; designer fashion brands; authorial fashion).

The gaps identified, as well as the results of this analysis, are presented and discussed below.

RESULTS PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that the integration of social marketing and digital marketing practices contributes significantly to the consolidation of sustainable designer brands. In the case of Four Fingers, this integration goes beyond commercial promotion, guiding communication to highlight the brand's purpose and fostering closer connections between the audience and its values.

Among the initiatives identified in the case study, the "Traveling Skirt" (*Saia Viajante*) campaign (Figure 2) stands out. This initiative was identified as one of the content categories coded in the Instagram analysis (records of the Traveling Skirt initiative), confirming its relevance as a recurring and deliberate communication strategy rather than an isolated event. The campaign consists of sending a crochet skirt, adorned with multiple charms, to selected members of the brand's community, initially its most loyal customers and later also friends, content creators, and consumers aligned with the brand's sustainable purpose. For one week, the participant wears the piece, documents her experience, adds a new charm to the skirt, and shares her narrative through photos and short reports. At the end of the process, the skirt returns to the brand, which creates an exclusive post presenting that participant's experience.



Figure 2. Traveling Skirt (*Saia Viajante*)

The initiative generated engagement on social media, expanded the brand's reach, and contributed to attracting new customers and increasing sales. More than a promotional strategy, it reframes consumption by transforming it into a shared experience. The skirt becomes not merely a product but a symbolic artifact, carrying accumulated stories and meanings. This dynamic reflects what Schneider and Pereira (2025) describe as User-Generated Content (UGC), material such as photos, reports, or narratives spontaneously created and shared by consumers, without direct brand mediation. According to the authors, this type of content presents the product within real and diverse contexts, strengthening audience identification and the sense of community around the brand, and positions the consumer as an active agent in the brand's storytelling rather than a passive recipient. In documenting her own experience with the skirt, each participant assumes precisely this role. The sense of belonging fostered by the campaign encourages other consumers to participate, strengthening engagement and organically increasing brand visibility.

The strategy reinforces the perspective brought by Berlim (2009), that the value attributed to products transcends status-seeking and is driven by emotional, individual, and symbolic dimensions. At Four Fingers, consumption is associated with identification with a purpose, appreciation of craftsmanship, and relationship-building. The founder herself defines the brand as an extension of her personal identity, reinforcing authorship and authenticity as central elements of communication. This fusion between creative identity and business management is characteristic of independent designer fashion brands: as Zou, Abdullah, and Jalil (2026, p. 57) note, "designers are often multi-taskers, shaping the creative soul of the brand as well as being the core decision makers of the business operations." In the case of Four Fingers, this is reflected in the founder's dual role as both the brand's authorial voice and its primary strategic decision-maker.

Community-building emerges as the brand's main strategy. The so-called "FF Girls" represent more than customers; they form a network of women who share values related to sustainable fashion, craftsmanship, and creative expression. Its centrality is corroborated by the Instagram content analysis, in which photographs of "FF Girls" wearing the brand's designs were, together with fashion editorials, the most frequently identified category among the 210 posts analyzed, empirically reinforcing community-building as the brand's dominant communication strategy. This community strengthening functions as a competitive advantage, since, according to Palakshappa, Bulmer, and Dodds (2024), brands with an active and engaged audience benefit from a loyal follower base capable of generating transformation through positive, purpose-driven brand management.

According to Berger and Milkman (2012), the emotions evoked by a piece of content influence its likelihood of being shared, with content that evokes amusement, surprise, and admiration more likely to be shared on social media; this affective experience contributes to the formation of virtual communities and reinforces the perception of authenticity and exclusivity, elements essential to strengthening the brand in the digital environment (Schneider & Pereira, 2025). This shift toward a participatory brand model highlights the growing importance of authenticity and connection in contemporary fashion marketing, as users increasingly seek relatable narratives over traditional advertising campaigns (Schneider & Pereira, 2025, p. 62).

In terms of digital marketing, Instagram serves as the brand's primary communication channel. The company invests in high-quality visual content, photography, videos, documentation of the production process, and occasionally sponsored posts, even with limited financial resources. Accordingly, the Instagram content analysis identified fashion editorials, model photographs, and sketches of production processes among the most recurrent categories, reflecting the brand's emphasis on polished imagery and transparency alike. Communication emphasizes transparency regarding materials, artisanal processes, and the exclusivity of collections, often produced from reclaimed yarns and natural dyes. Unsold pieces are unraveled and transformed into new products, reinforcing the zero-waste philosophy described by the founder, in her questionnaire response, the founder stated:

We always make a very low number of each piece, because what we learned from the collection presented at New York Fashion Week was that we made the whole collection, not on a large scale, but a decent number of pieces, and honestly, we sold very little, especially because those pieces had a much higher price, since there was also the cost of the other brand, leather pieces and everything else, so they were much more expensive pieces, and we practically couldn't sell almost anything. So today we make a much smaller quantity, and what we don't sell, we unravel and turn into other pieces (Founder, questionnaire response, October 2024, author's translation).

The way the brand structures its production and communication align with Williams (2019), who argues that sustainable fashion develops through the integration of natural, cultural, and social aspects, in response to growing environmental awareness. By sharing its production practices and values on social media, Four Fingers also assumes an educational role, in line with the formative dimension of social marketing (Ribeiro et al., 2023).

Another important milestone in the brand's consolidation was a collaboration with a New York leather bag brand, whose resulting collection was presented at New York Fashion Week in 2023. This represented a turning point, allowing the brand to reach a new audience, reposition its perceived value, and adjust pricing more consistently with the artisanal labor involved. It also contributed to educating consumers about the complexity and time-intensive nature of crochet as a handmade technique. The founder described this as a turning point:

It was a real shift, because we managed to reach a different audience and also educate our customers and price our product better. We know that crochet is manual work that takes a lot of time, any other crochet brand charges even higher prices than ours. So this whole process was very important for us to be able to price our product correctly and reach our target audience (Founder, questionnaire response, October 2024, author's translation).

Despite these advances, the brand faces significant structural challenges. Limited financial resources restrict broader investments in marketing strategies, while the high cost of sustainable materials and consumer perceptions of elevated prices remain barriers to conversion. The founder acknowledges that the main challenge is reaching consumers willing to pay for the product, even though a loyal base already invests not only in the pieces but also in the brand's

purpose. As the founder wrote in her response:

We got here by investing in material for Instagram (photos, videos). [...] Our main concern has always been Instagram, keeping the feed attractive and boosting our posts. [...] Everything is very organic. Most people already see Four Fingers as a consolidated brand, but it's still very small, and we make do with what we have, our growth is very organic. We have a thousand strategies we'd like to put into practice, but unfortunately, we can't do it all; in what's possible, we invest a lot in digital and graphic material, and we like to spoil our customers. "We have a little welcome card, a thank-you card for the purchase, stickers... (Founder, questionnaire response, October 2024, author's translation).

Taken together, these findings can be situated within the broader landscape of recent research on designer fashion and sustainability. Table 2 summarizes the gaps identified in this literature and outlines how the present study addresses each of them.

Table 2. Future Research Suggestions Identified in Literature (Designer Fashion and Sustainability)

Authors	Context (Country)	Future Research Suggestions
Dourado (2024)	To understand the degree of emphasis designer fashion places on sustainability within its digital communicative practices. (Portugal)	The observation of reduced interest in communicating the sustainability factor within authorial work raises questions that can be pointed out as future lines of research. Accordingly, it is worth highlighting the relevance of conducting a longitudinal study that would allow this scenario, examined within this specific time window, to be compared with a scenario from a similar period, both before and after 2022/2023. It is therefore worthwhile to understand whether interest in sustainability-related themes keeps pace with the media coverage associated with it or whether, conversely, there is a divergence between this popularization and the communication practices of Portuguese designer fashion.
Dourado, Llovet & Fernández (2025)	Explore the emphasis given to sustainability in the digital communication of Portuguese and Spanish's authorial fashion. (Portugal – Spain)	Dourado, Llovet, and Ortega Fernández's (2025) comparative study of Portuguese and Spanish authorial fashion brands' Instagram communication found that sustainability-related content remains limited in both markets, pointing to several directions for future research: conducting a longitudinal study to assess whether emphasis on sustainability increases or diminishes over time; replicating the study in other cultural contexts beyond the Iberian Peninsula; interviewing designers to understand the reasons behind the observed communication gap; examining company websites for additional sustainability information not present on Instagram; analyzing other, more content-based platforms such as YouTube or TikTok; and investigating consumer expectations of transparency across the

		value chain, including material provenance, costs, and labor practices.
Dourado, Llovet & Polaino (2026)	To examine designer fashion brands' sustainable communication strategies on social media and their effects on digital customer engagement, comparing audience interests between Portuguese and Spanish brands. (Portugal – Spain)	Future research could benefit from longitudinal approaches that track changes in sustainability engagement over time, particularly in response to policy shifts or global events related to climate action. Studies could also investigate the internal motivations and barriers faced by designer fashion brands when deciding whether and how to communicate sustainability messages, as well as how a corporate sustainability strategy that addresses the needs of multiple stakeholders (manufacturers, workers, customers, and non-profit organizations) can shape a more holistic perception of sustainability. Another valuable avenue would be to explore how different stakeholder groups respond to sustainability narratives in fashion communication, moving beyond a consumer-centric lens. Finally, comparative studies between independent designer brands and large fashion conglomerates could shed light on differences in sustainability messaging strategies, capacities, and outcomes.
Zou, Abdullah & Jalil (2026)	To understand how design leaders and team members of independent fashion designer brands perceive and apply sustainable fashion within circular economy practices, in order to define sustainable design strategies. (Beijing, China)	In future practice, how to reduce the marginal cost of each link through digital tools, and how to translate cultural narratives into sustainable value, will be key points in validating the framework's effectiveness.

The Four Fingers case study addresses several of these gaps. First, by focusing on a Brazilian brand, this research diversifies the geographic and cultural scope of the field, directly responding to Dourado, Llovet, and Ortega Fernández's (2025) call to replicate similar studies "beyond the Iberian Peninsula", a relevant contribution given that three of the four studies reviewed are situated in the European context (Portugal and Spain) and the remaining one in China (Zou, Abdullah, & Jalil, 2026). Second, the incorporation of the founder's own perspective, through an open-ended questionnaire, responds to the calls made by Dourado, Llovet, and Ortega Fernández (2025) and Dourado, Llovet, and Polaino (2026) to interview designers and investigate the internal motivations and barriers shaping sustainability communication decisions. Third, whereas Dourado's (2024) and Dourado, Llovet, and Ortega

Fernández's (2025) findings point to a general scarcity of sustainability-related communication among designer fashion brands, the Four Fingers case offers a contrasting perspective by examining a brand that actively and consistently communicates sustainability, thereby contributing insight into what effective sustainability communication in authorial fashion can look like in practice.

In this context, the integration of social and digital marketing proves essential. As Adolpho (2011) notes, precise segmentation and targeted communication facilitate understanding and adoption of value propositions. In the case of Four Fingers, this integration is expressed through the combination of authorial storytelling, production transparency, community-building, and shared experiences.

The brand's practices encourage conscious consumption and appreciation of craftsmanship, aligning with the educational function of social marketing (Ribeiro et al., 2023). At the same time, the strategic use of Instagram expands reach, engagement, and relationships with the audience, highlighting the advantages of digital marketing in brand consolidation (Meng, 2009; Magalhães, 2021). Even in the face of structural barriers identified by Bonini and Oppenheim (2008), value-driven communication emerges as a viable path to strengthening sustainable designer brands in digital environments.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, it can be concluded that integrated social marketing and digital marketing practices can significantly influence the acquisition of sustainable designer brands products in digital environments. Among the strategies identified are: a consistent digital presence capable of generating engagement and strengthening a brand community; the creation of shared experiences, such as the "Traveling Skirt" initiative, which fosters personalization, a sense of belonging, and emotional connection; transparent communication about materials and production processes; and the production of authentic and informative content that educates the audience and reinforces values of sustainability and authorship.

It is observed that a clear brand identity and well-defined positioning are central elements in aligning communication with purpose, enabling the attraction of consumers who identify with these values. In this context, consumption is no longer oriented solely toward the product but increasingly incorporates experience, meaning, and symbolic connection with the brand.

The results therefore indicate that the consolidation of sustainable designer brands in digital environments depends not only on the quality of the pieces but also on the ability to build relationships, educate consumers, and strengthen engaged communities.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study presents some limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the research was based on a single case study, the brand Four Fingers, which allows for

an in-depth, contextualized understanding of the phenomenon but restricts the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other sustainable designer fashion brands or market contexts.

Second, primary data collection relied on a single respondent, the brand's founder, whose perspective, while central to understanding the brand's identity and strategic intentions, is inherently subjective and may not fully capture how the brand's practices are perceived by other internal stakeholders or by the market itself. This concentration of the data source in a single informant represents a limitation regarding the diversity of perspectives captured, and findings should be interpreted within this scope rather than generalized.

Third, the study did not include data collected directly from consumers. Although the analysis of Instagram content provided an indirect view of audience engagement (e.g., through comments, interactions, and visual patterns), it does not substitute for direct investigation of consumer perceptions, motivations, or purchasing behavior. Future research could address this gap through interviews, surveys, or focus groups with the brand's consumer base, particularly the "FF Girls" community identified in this study.

Finally, the findings are contextually bound to the specific characteristics of the Brazilian sustainable designer fashion market and to the particular digital communication strategies adopted by Four Fingers during the analyzed period. Different market conditions, cultural contexts, or brand positioning strategies may lead to different dynamics between social marketing practices and consumer engagement. Future studies employing multiple case comparisons or quantitative approaches could help assess the broader applicability of the patterns identified here.

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