

## Preaching sustainability while hawking fast fashion – meet the greenwashing influencers

For brands wanting to get away with greenwashing, one solution has become especially popular: stick an influencer on it. From Boohoo appointing Kourtney Kardashian as its “sustainability ambassador” to Shein’s notorious influencer trip to promote its “innovation centre” in China, using influencers has become a common tactic to gain attention for halfhearted eco initiatives – and to create a cushion between the brand and the public backlash. (...)

It’s easy to find this kind of influencer (in fact, it’s arguably easier to find an influencer nodding to being environmentally focused than one who actually is). One prominent example is US-based influencer Reese Blutstein, who is known to her 353,000 followers on Instagram for her “sustainable wardrobe”, highlighting vintage clothing and repeat outfits. For years, she has spoken to various publications about sustainability and the need to wear what we already have and increase scrutiny around fast fashion practices. However, she has done several collaborations with some of fast fashion’s biggest players, such as Zara, and has written a lengthy, worthy message about her intention to help make the brand more sustainable in the long run (...).

Any time spent on these corners of TikTok and Instagram will reveal an endless string of influencers doing this performative bait-and-switch, collectively reaching tens of millions of followers.

Some of this is in service of fast fashion brands created by influencers themselves. The most obvious example is Tala, owned by the influencer and entrepreneur Grace Beverley (more than a million followers). Originally offering a limited line of leggings, sports bras and tops, the brand now sells a variety of loungewear, outerwear, accessories and athletic clothing that is said to be made of mostly recycled and “natural” materials, made ethically by properly paid workers. (...)

But a closer look shows something rather less green. This autumn, Tala launched several new product lines, one of which sold a million pounds’ worth of stock in a day, moving more than 6,000 units (this pace of new releases is not unusual). It has partnered with fast fashion companies, selling its clothes through Asos and doing a dedicated collaboration with Fila. Its products are also only partly made of recycled materials, and often recycled polyester – the sustainability of which environmental campaigners are keen to emphasise is limited.

(...).

There is an instinct around these green-ish influencers and brands to be defensive of the good stuff they do, particularly in comparison with the wider fast fashion and influencer industries. A brand like Tala is undoubtedly better than one like Shein (...). But that doesn’t make any of this truly green, nor does it make it “sustainable” to profit from products that appear more eco-friendly than they really are.

Being a lifestyle influencer is founded on constantly maintaining your audience’s attention. This means showing them something new and usually – on a daily basis – finding new products and services to keep that attention. This is why fast fashion and influencing have always been such a happy partnership. But true sustainability requires something antithetical: slowing down and being satisfied with what we have and only what we need. It’s hard to see a future where this fundamental truth fits into these two symbiotic industries.

Sarah Manavis, *The Guardian*, Monday 11 December 2023.