



Is Sustainable Denim Really Accessible?



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Why Sustainable Denim is Important

In recent years, and continuing to gain traction post-pandemic, sustainability has been referred to as a trend of sorts. People are researching and “getting smart” about the products they’re buying. What we purchase has a direct impact on what gets made and what gets brought to market. Companies are driven by consumer demand, meaning that product is designed to fulfill consumer needs above all else. This suggests that it is up to the consumer to put their money where their mouth is and buy what they believe in. However, to meet certain needs like price, the expense has been at the cost of the environment. This image is an example of the many rivers in Asia that has been polluted by denim manufacturing. The devastating facts on the right show us the level of havoc denim is creating.



1,00,00
indigo denim
microfibers are
released into waste
water
per day

70%
of Asia's lake's
& rivers
contaminated
by dyes

2.5
billion gallons of
wastewater
produced
from dye
pollution

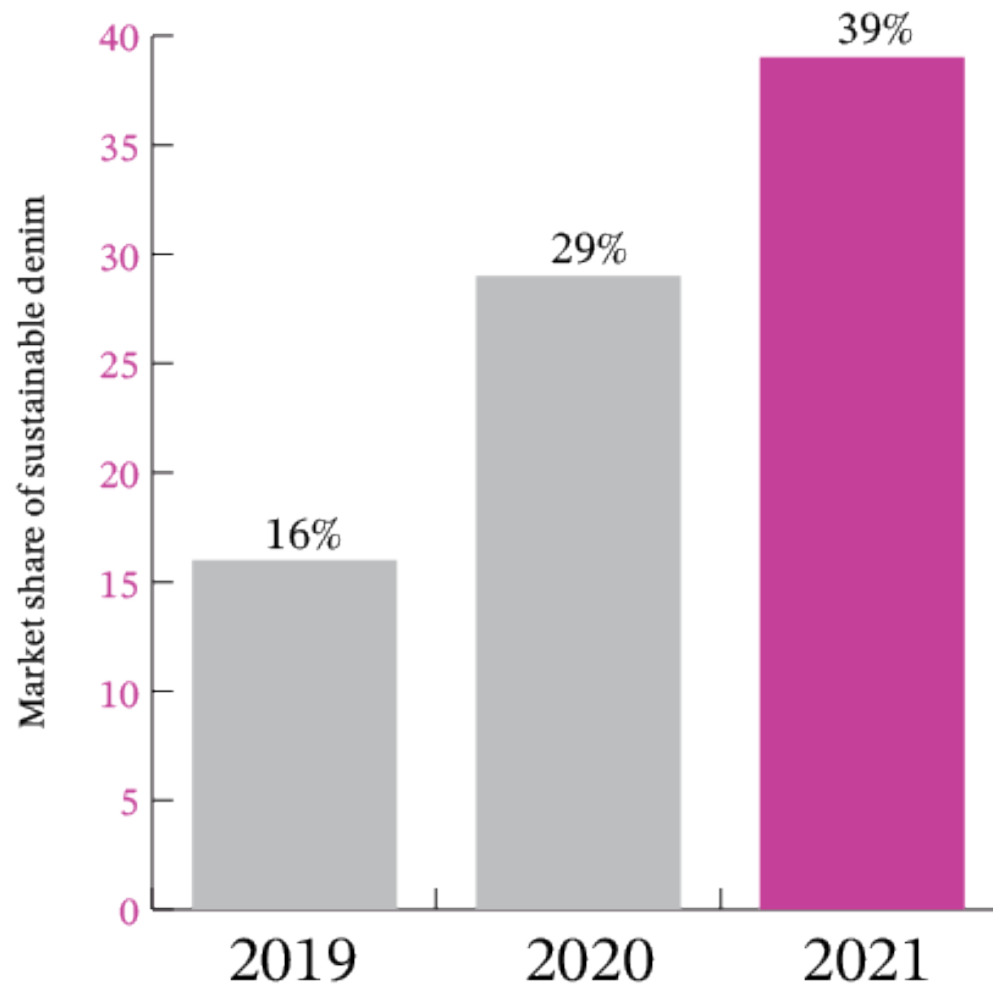
Market Research: Who Cares? We Care.

81% of Consumers Care

According to a market survey conducted by NRF, their data stated that 81% of consumers prioritize value and purpose above all else. Meaning that people are making conscious decisions beyond an elite brand and considering even more than the product itself. These results theoretically hold companies to a higher standard to satisfy the drive to commit to something good--to make purchases from company's they stand for and missions they can get behind. Consumers are now actually dissecting those "About" pages, and researching the ins and outs of their most beloved brands in an attempt to do good. As we explore different product assortments from for difference brands, we will decide if this conjecture is true and if it really is top priority.



Sustainability is Trending:



According to Statista, almost 40% of all manufactured denim is considered sustainable. Theoretically, nearly half of the market should leave consumers with a lot of options to shop sustainably. But consumers have other values besides saving the environment. Let's see what else they prioritize.

This is What the Customer Needs:



High Waist Ripped Cut Out Jeans

\$18.00 ~~\$22.00~~



1. Sustainability

As we have established, sustainability is important to the customer. They have seen the rivers and the devastation to the environment that unsustainable denim has caused. Consumers claim they want to do something about it and make a true difference in their purchasing behaviors.

2. Size Inclusivity

For sustainable denim practices to really make a difference, everyone has to be able to participate. It doesn't matter how much someone wants to help--they cannot buy the clothing if they cannot fit into it. With the average size in the US being a 16/18 they are isolating half the population by going without a proper range.

3. Price

Similarly to size, sustainable clothing cannot just be a hot commodity to the rich. The cheapest clothing is often made the poorest because natural fibers and ethical workplace behavior is expensive and frequently hard to come by. Let's explore different companies with different sets of values and see who comes out on top.

Companies to Consider

VENIM



Venim is an edgy upcycled denim brand that features products with expert craftsmanship and unique foiling designs. Their about section claims that they only use vegan, nontoxic, recycled materials. They have limited stock and made to order options to reduce excess. Their prices range from \$195-1,650 and size range is XS-3X making them somewhat size inclusive. For this report, we are going to define size inclusive as XXS-6X. Venim is making an effort.

EVERLANE



Everlane is a sustainable fashion brand that promises radical transparency, high quality products, and ethical practices. Their website truly reveals every in and out of their process from materials to the work place to the consumer. They have a heavy focus on paying their workers a fair wage--which helps the consumer understand what, beyond the materials, is factoring into the price point. Their prices range from \$70-140 and their sizes range is an XXS-XL.

More Companies to Consider

GOOD AMERICAN



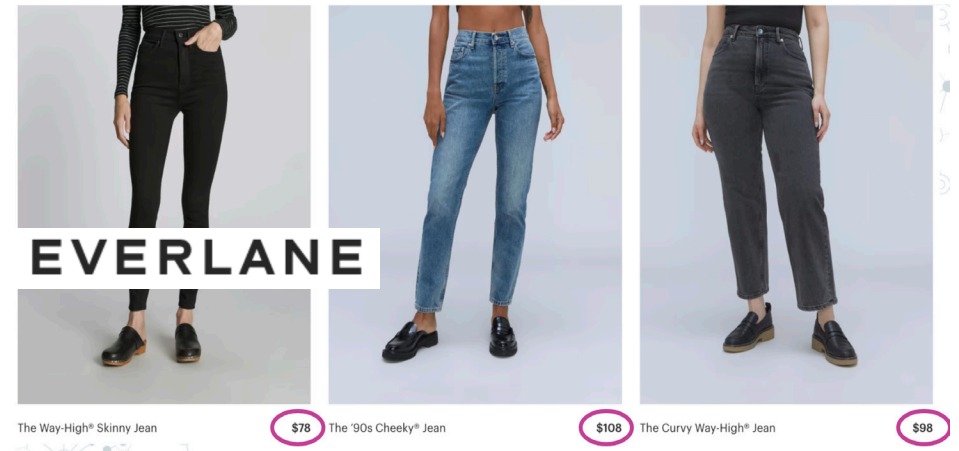
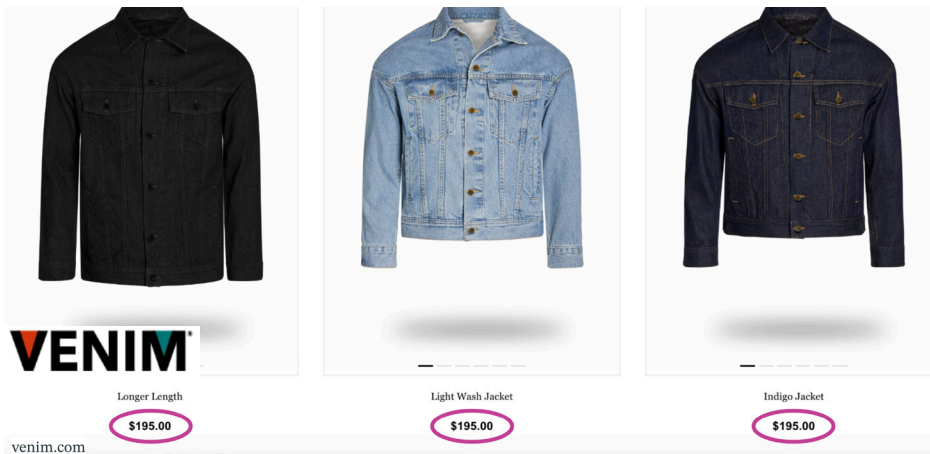
Good American is a female owned brand that is dedicated to size inclusivity and high quality. Their mission is focused on breaking the stigma around plus-sizing and making women feel seen and beautiful. While this mission is admirable, they are the antithesis of Everlane because of their utter lack of transparency. According to Good On You, the company does zero reporting on its manufacturing, sustainability efforts, or worker conditions. Their prices range from \$99-195 and the size range is 00-26

SHEIN



Shein is an international fast fashion company. Their mission is to make stylish fashionable clothing accessible to everyone. However admirable, they have been known to use cheap toxic materials--and while one of their goals is job creating, there is evidence of workers sending messages for help on clothing tags, hoping to reach voices who can do something about it. Their price range is \$1-70 and the size range is 00-30

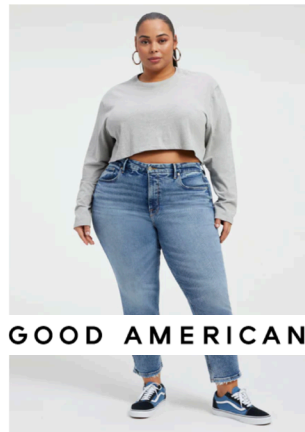
Price and Assortment Comparison



Here we can compare three styles and three different price points from each company. We can see that Venim has the highest price range, and the least styles. They only feature variations of jean jackets on their website. There are five different denim washes for the majority of their products and the more expensive items are few of a kind and utilize the metallic embellishments that we took note of in the brand pictures on page 7. The price point is higher because, for sustainability purposes, their products are made to order and make a living wage for their workers.

The average cost for a pair of jeans is about \$70 at Everlane. This is on par with industry standards set by brands like Levi's and Gap with similar price points. As mentioned before, paying a living wage is a huge priority for their brand, and they prove this by researching every factory they utilize and require the score of a 90 or above on their compliance audit, ensuring good conditions. Their prized materials that go into their clothing are claimed to be the finest of the source, enabling them to claim quality that will last years, making them more than worthy of the cost.

Price and Assortment Comparison



GOOD AMERICAN

GOOD ICON CROP JEANS

\$139.00



GOOD LEGS FLARE JEANS

\$145.00



GOOD LEGS STRAIGHT JEANS

\$99.00



SHEIN

High Waisted Straight Leg Jeans

\$23.49



SHEIN Flap Pocket Cargo Jeans

\$24.49



Ripped Raw Cut Straight Leg Jeans

\$27.00

Good American is high quality like Venim and Everlane, but is more size inclusive, giving it a larger customer base. One of the biggest issues to note with Good American is that they are not transparent. This brand's cofounder is Khloe Kardashian, which leads us to believe that part of the pricepoint goes heavily into paying for the inflated label itself. Because of their lack of public information, there is no evidence to refute this point and makes us question their labor and sustainability practices.

If you cannot afford Good American, and still need a larger size, then Shein allows you to buy three pairs for the price of one in sizes 00-30, making them the most affordable and size inclusive brand by far. There are no claims to sustainable practices on their website and no claims to good labor practices--however they do angle themselves as job creators. Other entities have conducted investigative research on the brand and their is proof of general mistreatment, 70+ hour work weeks, and pay below the minimum wage (in their respective countries, normally China). So let's summarize where we're at:

The True Priority

	VENIM	EVERLANE	GOOD AMERICAN	SHEIN
Transparency	✓	✓		
Sustainable	✓	✓		
High Quality	✓	✓	✓	
Size inclusive			✓	✓
Conscious Fitting			✓	✓
Financial Accessibility				✓

Looking at this chart, we can collectively consider our three priorities of 1. sustainability 2. size inclusivity and 3. affordability. We can see that Venim and Everlane take the cake for idealism. If you like it, can afford it, fit into it, then Venim or Everlane are the clear brands to select. Both are working hard to consider the planet and their employees with respect and dignity while Shein and Good American are silent on the subject. If we still can't fit or afford, we have to move to our second priority: size.

Good American is a third great contender for high quality clothing and they they will most likely have your size. But over \$100 is still too high a price point for most people. All roads lead back to Shein considering our third point: affordability. Shein's prices are unmatched. And ultimately, money is always going to be the consumer's toughest roadblock and most common reason to say no. Almost anyone can reach the \$1 pricepoint of their sale section and fit into a size 00-30.

Shein's Big Win

\$15,700,000,000

Shein's 2021 Revenue

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Best of 2022: How did Shein become the world's biggest fashion retailer?

As 2022 draws to a close, we look back at some of Retail Gazette's best bits. Today we explore how, despite awful Trustpilot reviews, claims of labour law violations and design theft, Shein has become the biggest fashion retailer in the world?

DAZED

Depressing! Shein named the most popular fashion brand of 2022

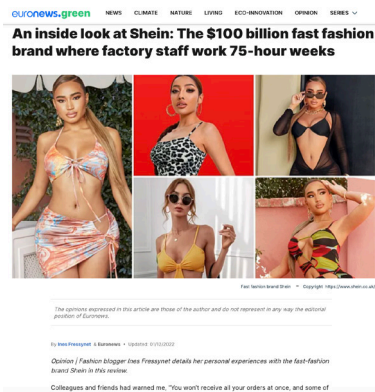
FASHION - NEWS

The controversial brand beat giants such as Nike and Zara to claim the top spot

7th December 2022
Text Louis Merrion

Shein has been named as 2022's most popular fashion brand, following a report compiled by [Money.co.uk](#). The company, formed in Nanjing in 2008, was named as the most Googled clothing brand in 113 countries, overtaking Zara and finding itself ahead of other clothing giants such as Nike and adidas by quite some margin. Only a matter of hours after that news broke, Shein also admitted working hour breaches where some employees were working 75 hour weeks and only taking two-to-three days off a month. The news unravelled as a succession of events which perfectly sums up the majority of fast fashion: low prices, high human cost. So that's great!

At a time when sustainability seems to be the word on many business lips, it begs the question as to why Shein still remains the fashion giant that it is. Its track record against workers rights is damning, as is the information about its unsustainable environmental model, where it produces around 700-1,000 new pieces a day, on top of all other orders that need fulfilling – leaving in its trail 6.3 million tons of carbon



Because of Shein's reach, accessibility, and affordability, they quickly became one of the biggest names in fashion usurping even Nike and Zara. It has become the world's biggest fashion player with zero disregard for their employees and the environment.

On the left, we can see some angry headlines, questioning how these malicious practices could make the leader board. Reviewing the information I've analysed so far, we can see that the answer is **Shein doesn't give the people just what they want, but also what they need.**

Until Venim and Everlane meet Shein at its price point and size range, people are going to continue to shop for cute items they can post on Instagram once and throw away.

If we want sustainability to prevail, if we want to help the earth, we are going to have to change consumer attitudes. Ask of them to put their money where their mouth is. Only purchase from brands they stand for even if it means buying one pair of jeans instead of three. Embrace capsule collections. Demand a wider size range. Stop giving money to companies that are actively participating in methods counter to sustainability and ethical workplace practices.

As Design and Merchandising students, **it is up to us** to make a difference in the industry. To obliterate fast fashion trends. To create companies that treat their employees with care and respect. To source materials sustainably.

It's up to us to create a new industry standard of clothes that look good on you and the earth too.

FASHION'S FORMIDABLE FUTURE



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