Google and WWF Sweden unveil fashion sustainability platform

By Gabriella Lacombe - 11 June 2020

Google and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Sweden have partnered to create an environmental data platform set to help members of the fashion industry make more responsible sourcing decisions.

A pilot of the platform was first announced by Google Cloud in collaboration with Stella McCartney, the first fashion brand to use the technology, at the 2019 Copenhagen Fashion Summit. There, Google Cloud and the brand said the technology would be used to provide a more comprehensive view into raw materials of clothing manufacturers’ supply chains.

In 2018, a similar tool was created by WWF Sweden and Ikea, made with a focus on analyzing the risk and impact of various textiles raw materials.

Now, Google and WWF Sweden say the new platform will use all of these data types in order to further increase the accuracy and relevance of raw materials assessments. The platform will include a variety of raw materials, expanding beyond the range of cotton and viscose of previous versions.

"Sustainability is a challenge that crosses industry boundaries, and we firmly believe that solutions require strong partnerships and collaboration," said Kate Brandt, Google sustainability officer.
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“Our ambition is to fill fundamental data gaps by bringing greater accuracy to environmental reporting—ultimately moving toward more sustainable processes.”

According to Google, today's fashion industry accounts for 20% of wastewater and 2 to 8% of greenhouse gas emissions globally, with the potential to rise by as much as 50% by 2030, Google said.

The company found that much of the industry's impact occurs at the raw materials stage in the production process, where supply chains can be highly fragmented, and gathering and assessing data at scale is a challenge.

"This project is an excellent example of how we can take valuable work with a long term partner like Ikea, collaborate with another strong WWF partner like Google to make that work even more powerful, and make it open source so that hopefully it can help with the transformation of a whole industry," said Håkan Wirtén, CEO of WWF Sweden.

In addition to Stella McCartney and Ikea, WWF and Google said they are in talks to bring the tool to a number of other fashion, luxury, denim, and athletic brands and retailers. According to the partners, the eco-friendly platform has the potential to be used on a standalone basis or as a complement to existing efforts.

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