

‘WHO MADE YOUR CLOTHES? SUPPLY CHAIN TRACEABILITY FROM THE ID FACTORY

An article by Chloe Grant

Supply chain traceability – having the ability to truly find out where our clothes are made – is a crucial part of establishing a more transparent and ethical fashion industry. The latest in supply chain innovation comes in the form of digital product passports: a tech creation that has the chance to completely disrupt and transform the fashion industry as we know it. Being able to scan your clothes and find out where they were made, who they were made by, and their textile composition, may seem like something from a science-fiction novel, but with companies like The ID Factory implementing digital product passports into the industry that futuristic vision is becoming a reality.

Digital product passports, or DPPs as they are known, have been recognised as a key game-changer on the journey of creating a more transparent industry, particularly by the EU’s Circular Economy Action Plan, in which they play a major part. They are also a crucial initiative within the Eco-design for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR), and over the next few years, they will become legally required for all products being created under this ESPR. So, in short, it’s time to understand what DPPs are, and how they can benefit us and the world around us, as they are set to be a prominent part of the consumer’s shopping experience in future.

WHAT ARE DIGITAL PRODUCT PASSPORTS?

Digital product passports collect data on a product across its lifetime and digitise it, making it accessible for all those involved: including the end consumer – you!

They are digitally programmed into products, meaning that when you scan the product – whether that’s a pair of jeans, a handbag, or a pair of trainers – a whole host of information about the product’s history will be accessible. The aim of The ID Factory’s DPPs is to provide information from Tier 4 suppliers, such as cotton farmers, through to tanneries and dye factories, production factories and shipping journeys, all the way up to Tier 1, which will document what store it is being sold in. By documenting this data, and making it accessible, their hope is that consumers will become more aware of how many hands a product has passed through before reaching their shopping baskets, and, thus, how much value the item truly holds.

Each and every step of the item’s journey will be recorded and verified through blockchain technology, meaning that it can only be edited by the person who recorded it in the first place, making it secure and reliable. By ensuring that the individual suppliers get their fair chance to record data DPPs place power back into their hands; far too often our fast-fashion Western mindset can almost blank out the number of farmers, textile workers and garment workers that play a crucial part in the making of our clothes. However, by dedicating areas of the DPP to them and their work it ensures that their role in the industry remains a central theme.

THE ROLE OF THE BRAND

Digital product passports are endlessly beneficial to brands; they allow them to easily communicate their supply chains to consumers, encourage them to thoroughly document their dynamic supply chain, and be a part of a new wave of modern digitised products.

In order to create an efficient database of DPPs brands need to commit to successfully tracking their supply chains, from the product arriving at their warehouse, all the way back to where the original textile fibres were sourced. Currently, only 12% of fashion companies share their raw material suppliers, which leaves almost 90% of companies open to maltreatment of their Tier 4

suppliers, as their lack of documentation means there is no way to hold them accountable. By addressing this issue, and implementing a product passport system, brands are taking a bold step towards being an ethical brand that supports all of those involved in their supply chain, no matter what part they play.

THE ROLE OF THE CONSUMER

Digital product passports, once they are widely established, will, hopefully, become a natural part of our shopping process. Whether it's scanning a product in a shop, in order to see the level of sustainable manufacturing, or reading the digital information on the textile make-up of the garment to allow you to correctly recycle it, DPPs are helpful at all different stages of the garment's life cycle.

The goal is for the scanning, understanding, and evaluating of products, to become second nature whilst shopping. The more that consumers surround themselves with information on where their clothes come from, the more that they will be willing to learn, understand, and improve. The DPP will be able to show ratings of factory conditions, any certifications that the suppliers hold, and any other relevant information on the creation of the garment. The consumer's role is to take in this information, and let it guide them towards more ethical shopping choices; opting for products that are certified Fairtrade, or hold OEKO-TEX Standard 100 certifications, over fast-fashion garments that put their workers at risk.

As previously mentioned, DPPs are not only useful at the beginning of the consumer journey. They can be scanned and referenced at any time, which will prove incredibly helpful throughout the usage stage. Having access to the textile make-up of the product makes for better choices regarding laundering, which is actually one of the highest polluting parts of the lifetime of a garment, and will also prove invaluable at the end of a garment's life when it is time to recycle it. Correct disposal of products at recycling plants makes for a more circular fashion industry, that harnesses the energy that already exists within garments, and re-uses waste to make something new.

HOW DPPs WILL CHANGE THE INDUSTRY

In conclusion, digital product passports are set to be industry disruptors. They will open a new world of supply chain visibility and traceability, allowing for more thorough insights into where our clothes come from, what they're made up of, and how we should care for them. In a world where a tag stating what country a garment is made in is the depth of supply chain traceability we have access to, DPPs invite us to delve deeper and truly begin to understand the industry that the majority of us buy into.

The hope is that companies like The ID Factory will ring in a new age of sustainability, not just for suppliers, but for the consumers also; allowing for a more holistic view of where our clothes come from, and bringing home the enormity of how the choices that we make when shopping for items has far-reaching effects that span the whole globe. Providing each item with a fully documented product passport will have us jetting off into a new world of ethical fashion!