

Candidate 1 evidence

Fast fashion and the consequences of over consumption

According to Zainab Mahmood¹ in an article from The Guardian, "Fashion, especially the cheap kind, is addictive". The glamorised issue of modern day overconsumption, often known as fast fashion, is one of the fastest growing problems of today's society. Consumers and manufacturers are both to blame for issues associated with growing unsustainability, waste, mistreatment and exploitation of garment workers and the deadly climate impact of the clothing industry. Is it really necessary to have a new wardrobe every month? Brands no longer put out two collections a year, but often up to twenty-four!² It is key that, as consumers, we step away and educate ourselves on the consequences of buying into temporary trends and hold corrupt fast fashion brands accountable.

The Guardian's view from an editorial states that: "Fashion shouldn't cost the earth."³ It is no secret that the world is currently unsuccessfully tackling a major climate crisis. The fashion industry is currently responsible for more annual carbon emissions than all international flights and marine shipping combined. A further increase of 50% in greenhouse gas emissions is expected within a decade. It takes a staggering 2700 litres to make just one t-shirt, which is enough water for one person to drink for 900 days! ⁴Nowadays, lots of clothes are made with cheaper alternative materials like polyester or nylon (which are all plastics), which has a detrimental effect on the environment and makes it easier for fast fashion brands to create huge amounts of outrageously cheap and low-quality clothes that are made to be worn once and subsequently disposed of. Our addiction to fashion has led to an alarming trend, which in turn is having devastating impacts on our environment.

Another consequence of fast fashion and overconsumption is the poor and inhumane working conditions that garment workers are subjected to. When we

¹ Zain Mahmood, *The Guardian*, (article from April 2022)

² Jennifer Oakfor, *trvst*, (article from July 2022)

³ *The Guardian*, (article from March 2022)

⁴ Ngan Le, *Princeton University*, (article from July 2022)

purchase clothes, whether online or in store, it's easy to not think or ask who made this? What is it made from? Have the workers been paid enough? Why is this item so cheap? It's odd to think that your favourite shirt was most likely made thousands of miles away by someone sitting in a factory in unsafe, overworked conditions. There are currently 60-million garment workers worldwide⁵ and a substantial amount of them are treated horrifically. Disasters like the Rana Plaza disaster, which saw the Dhaka Garment factory in Bangladesh collapse on the 24th of April 2013, killing 1132 workers and injuring more than 2500 others⁶, are not uncommon. The only goal for the big bosses of brands and companies is get rich whilst not caring if they exploit lives, morals and the climate for money. Another newspaper article from The Guardian highlights the alarming international scale of the abuse suffered by workers in the fast fashion industry: "The reports claim that these allegations, recorded between January and May this year in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, are a direct result of pressure for quick turnarounds and low overheads. The report in question examined factories that supply H & M and GAP are two well known international companies that are very popular⁷. Were the average high street shopper to be aware of this, then would they still be rushing to snap up the supposed bargains?

Garment workers are crucial for the creation of clothes, and their mistreatment and exploitation is despicable. The irony is that these impoverished garment workers often can't even afford the super cheap clothes that they have made as their pay is so low and unfair. They can often not even afford food. Recently another example of the mistreatment of workers was revealed as Misguided (a popular fast fashion brand) was bought by Fraser group (who own many brands that highly contribute to overconsumption) for £20 million. They have refused to pay the workers who had already made the garments. This clearly shows deep corruption and an alarming level of callous immorality directed to

⁵ 16 Days Campaign, *Center for Women's Global Leadership*

⁶ *International Labour Organisation*

⁷ Kate Holan, *The Guardian*, (article from June 2018)

people who are already vulnerable. Similarly, a recent report by an undercover journalist for Channel 4 news found that garment workers in the factory for the fast fashion giant Shein were being paid 3p per item and forced to work 18 hour shifts.⁸ There were also reports of women washing their hair during their lunch break as they have to work such long inhumane shifts. They only get one day off a month and if employees make a single mistake during the manufacturing process they are fined two thirds of their daily wage. These appalling working conditions in this Shein factory are deemed illegal by the Chinese government. An article reporting on Channel 4s findings stated "I have been doing investigative stories in China for 15, 16 years – still [they] exploit workers like dogs. Basically it's worse than years ago."⁹

The fashion world has only recently acknowledged and realised how big a problem fast fashion is, and are trying to come up with ethical and sustainable solutions. Some Designer brands are introducing archive and vintage pieces to be resold which is setting an example to the rest of the fashion industry to use fashion sustainably. Although the fast fashion brands do not have any ambitions to be sustainable, there has been a surge in greenwashing, which is when unsustainable brands that promote waste and overconsumption try to conceal this by lying about how green they are. For example, Pretty Little Thing launched a resale app which you may believe is a good thing, but Pretty Little Thing, along with their parent company brands, make 207 million items a year¹⁰ and have made no commitment to slowing it down. This is greenwashing: fast fashion brands portraying a false narrative of sustainability, almost as if sustainability is a "trend".

On the other hand Douche and Gabbana spring season 2023, titled Ciao Kim, was a collaboration between a highly influential celebrity Kim K and D&G, where together they re-imagined previous collection and used archive and vintage

⁸George Iddenden, *Charged Tech News* (article report of channel 4s findings Oct 2022)

⁹ George Iddenden, *Charged Tech News* (article report of channel 4s findings Oct 2022)

¹⁰Venetia Lamanna, *@venetialamanna*

pieces to create a whole new collection. This is impactful as such an influential and highly regarded brand in the fashion industry, alongside a hugely influential celebrity, are taking the first steps in sustainability in the high fashion industry. Sustainable ways of shopping have been increasing as awareness increased through social media. Thrift/charity shopping, small ethical brands and resale apps such as Depop and Vinted have become a widely used way of shopping sustainably whilst being able to create your own personal style. Charity shopping works on both sides of the problem; it means people can donate their clothes that they no longer wear and have no use for, then someone else can buy it and relove and wear the piece whilst the money made is given to charitable organisations. The options of sustainable ways of shopping adds hope for the fashion industry to move to a more sustainable and ethical industry that will ultimately greatly help the current climate issues. Sustainability is the responsibility of both consumers and creators/sellers.

Fast fashion is a real and dangerous problem, resulting in overconsumption, waste and then consequently mistreatment of garment workers in the fashion industry. The main objective for many fast fashion brands is to make the CEOs richer and richer with barely any morals as to how that is done. They treat workers like machines. Glamorise the truth. Fast fashion brands seem to have the world under a false narrative. But there is a small amount of hope with opportunities to fix and change the ever-growing problem to move to a more sustainable industry. We need to collectively stand in solidarity with the garment worker for their rights and be conscious consumers, which will then in return make big fast fashion brands stop and change their ways.

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Intro

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p.4 own knowledge

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