

Fast Fashion is 'fast' as in the rate of change. The pace of production is fast, the rate at which consumers buy it is fast, and the rate at which it is discarded is also fast. Fast fashion is basically producing cheap and trendy clothing at a fast rate for quick and short-termed use by consumers. Brands like Zara, Forever21 and H&M are leading names in the fast fashion retail industry. Fast fashion companies exploit people's urge to be up to date with the latest trends to sell a huge number of clothes. Any outfit once worn by a celebrity can be seen on the shelves of these retail stores soon. And then these trends evaporate as fast as they came into existence. The fast fashion industry has been rising at an unprecedented rate in the last decade, and the consequences of that are dire.

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How it relates to KCES

Fast fashion has significant societal and economic impacts.

It has boosted growth in developing countries by increasing employment opportunities but on the other hand, to meet the short deadlines and low prices, young women hired in this sector are overworked and underpaid. As labourers, fast fashion traps a whole generation of young women into poverty. Fast fashion brands mostly rely on outsourced and often underpaid labor from factory workers overseas. Cheap clothes are made by underage workers entering the industry as young as 14 to work long hard hours (an avg. of 14 hrs per day in sweatshops) for low wages, while dealing with sexual harassment. The work conditions are inhumane, with minimum regulation of safety standards and worker's rights.

From the consumer side, there is an increase in their appetite for the latest styles and an urge to fulfil these instant-gratification desires quickly. Customers are more attracted and clinched towards the low-cost stylish garments. These garments help people to communicate what they really are. It seems to bring confidence and a sense of value. People believe fashion changes too soon so they behave according to the current trend and consequently purchase cheap, trendy clothing frequently. Thus we see an industry-wide movement towards overwhelming amounts of consumption.

What is overconsumption?

On the individual level, we have overconsumption, where people are buying more than they need, they are getting a ton of trends, cycling through a lot of clothing quickly, and not wearing it as long as they can

Fashion changes every season, but is it sustainable to keep up with the trends?

Overconsumption is becoming a problem in fashion, as many fans are buying more than ever to make sure their wardrobes are stocked with the newest styles. This trend is intensified by the numerous fast fashion brands offering clothes at low costs.

With globalization, internet access, and travel, you can order clothes online today and have them sent straight to your front door tomorrow. Decades ago this would have sounded too good to be true, but today it's a reality.

Why is there overconsumption?

The allure of cheap prices and trendy clothes attract the consumer and persuade them to buy. Shoppers now have an option to buy things they want but don't really need. Consider this scenario: you walk into Forever 21 thinking you are there solely for a pair of jeans, but then see huge window displays showing cool, hip, perfectly put together outfits on mannequins, giant signs advertising the clothing, a vast array of different garments and a whole section for things on sale (imagine how affordable fast fashion ON SALE is). How could you not be tempted to pick up something else? Big fast fashion stores are also constantly getting in new things, and their websites add several new items every day. The continuously changing inventory makes it easy for fashionistas on a budget to keep up with the latest trends, but it also causes previously purchased items to be in style for shorter periods of time.

Since certain styles become "unfashionable" quickly, these clothes are now discarded to landfills, or thrift stores if they're lucky, much sooner than they should be. Clothes should be worn for years, however, their lifespan at the moment is mere weeks as a cheaper model will come along in no time.

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Now let us talk about how it impacts the economy. Fast fashion has changed the perception of the customer mindset which promotes them to shop the latest trendy clothes at lower prices. Thus, it plays a major role in the growing textile industries. Consumers also spend more portion of their income on fast fashion apparel than they did before.

It is also terrible for the environment. The quick use and disposal of clothes mean that they find their way into landfills quicker. In 2012, Zara was able to design, produce and deliver a new garment in two weeks; Forever 21 in six weeks and H&M in eight weeks. This results in the fashion industry producing obscene amounts of waste.

Fast fashion companies have little to no policies towards minimising their environmental impact and the ethics of their operation is non-existent.

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Data

Now moving

To understand the experiences of young people, especially women in emerging adulthood, who are the major demographic consuming fast fashion apparel, we conducted a survey through google forms and interviewed a few customers at H&M.

Survey data was collected from around 30 people, out of which 84% were women and 88% were aged between 19 and 22. Almost all of them have shopped from at least 2 of the listed fast fashion brands, thus showing the popularity of fast fashion among youth. For the majority of people, clothes by such brands consisted of more than 40% of their wardrobe. A fraction of people also browses for clothes online daily or every 3 days, implying their desire to keep up to date with the latest trends. It highlights the importance they impart to clothing and their overall appearance. Almost 20% of people stop using the clothes bought in merely a few months because it goes out of style. Most seem to prefer to buy from these brands because they offer good quality and trendy pieces at affordable rates. Some justified their rate of frequent purchase as impulsive and said that "the 'retired' clothes are definitely usable, therefore I don't really have a justification apart from my feelings to look/feel good, and definitely the indirect social pressures from my peers."

Among the two women interviewed, one stated that "There is societal and peer pressure on women to look good." One expressed her desire to follow some of her favorite celebrities and influencers, which is why she shopped regularly at H&M and Zara. Purchasing clothes and putting together an outfit made her happy. These brands offered them the desired clothing at cheap rates. They prefer to buy at H&M than at Chanel, since they get more or less the same product but with an enormous difference in cost. They frequented the stores often and were regular shoppers, wanting to purchase the new trend as soon as possible and not wanting to wear the same clothes too many times. Such frequent disposal of clothing results in rising consumption levels and huge textile wastes.

These high levels of production and consumption are not sustainable.

From the consumer perspective, increased consumption has led to high levels of personal debt. In the US, from 2000 to 2014, the number of garments purchased each year by the average consumer increased by 60%.

These retailers introduce new collections rapidly too. They take 8.3% of the time taken by traditional brands. So we see that these retailers produce new items faster than ever, and also in great quantity.

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H&M's sales reach an average annual growth of 10.61%, ASOS sales are growing at an average of 34.59% per year, and Boohoo sales are at an average annual level of 62.61%.

Although the industry grows fast and in turn creates vast employment opportunities, most of the workers in the force are underpaid. With 80% of the 75 million people working in the garment

sector being women, the majority earn less than \$3 per day. A 2018 US Department of Labor report found evidence of forced and child labour in the fashion industry in Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, and others. Rapid production means that sales and profits supersede human welfare.

Excessive consumption leads to consumerism that negatively affects the environment. The major negative impact in this sector is foreseen in production of CO2 emissions. This industry uses 93 billion tonnes of water yearly for processing, plus raw materials like cotton have huge water expenses too. Fast fashion also has a colossal carbon footprint and is responsible for up to 10% of total global carbon emission.

Conclusion:

Our aim with this presentation is to make you all aware of the disastrous consequences of fast fashion. And to make you all conscious of your clothing choices. People need to realise that while exploring and representing yourself by the means of fashion and clothing is essential, it should not come at the expense of the environment and the well-being of workers. Hence, I would request you all to be more thoughtful about your clothing choices from here on. Try to buy from ethical brands that care about the environment. And always go for reusing/buying old clothes.