

UBC X THREADING CHANGE

WHAT IS FAST FASHION?



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What is Fast Fashion?



The Miriam Webster Definition, an approach to the design, creation, and marketing of clothing fashions that emphasizes making fashion trends quickly and cheaply available to consumers¹

Until the 1980s brands would mass produce standard styles of clothing and would forecast consumer demand ahead of time, planning to be trendy ahead of time. However, as competition increased, fast fashion arose. By responding faster to market trends and consumer demands, companies were able to get “on trend” quicker and became more popular. As such, there was an economic motivation to produce more clothing at a faster pace.³

Economist Excerpt: trendy clothes at astonishingly low prices. The result is a new and even faster kind of fast fashion, which encourages consumers to buy heaps of items, discard them after a few wears and then come back for another batch of new outfits.²

CHARACTERISTICS



OF THE

• FAST
FASHION
INDUSTRY:
3,4



1. Increase in “seasons” creates a constant need to be on trend, creating shorter lifespans for clothing.
2. A wide range of choices at low prices encourages frequent store visits.
3. Products sell out quickly so buy them while they are available; “Here today gone tomorrow” approach.





Why should we care?



As will be explored throughout this collection, the fast fashion industry is reliant on an unjust and unsustainable system, but is inherent in our culture. However, one's relationship to the global fashion industry is drastically different depending on where in the world you are situated. In the Global South, fast fashion has created a system of exploitation, pollution and resource drainage. This is vastly different from the Global North, where fashion is mainly viewed as a form of self expression; From where we choose to shop, to what we choose to wear in the morning, fashion is a large part of everyday life. However, as explored further in the following pages, this is a privileged system, affecting global populations and creating negative humanitarian and environmental impacts. As such, it is our responsibility to be aware of the underlying forces which enables the fashion industry to exist.



What is the Global South/North?⁶ The concept of the Global South/North separates all the countries in the world by factors of development such as their economic and political systems, demographics, technological advancements, and wealth levels. Typically, countries in the Global North tend to direct international trade, policy and trajectory, causing a system of economic and political dependance on the Global North by the Global South.



The Fast Fashion Business Model: Why is Fast Fashion so Profitable?



In the ever-evolving world of fashion, trends come and go at a pace quicker than ever before. The younger generation, always on the lookout for the latest styles, might find themselves caught up in the whirlwind of fast fashion without realizing the complex and intriguing business model that lies beneath the surface.

Have you ever wondered how your favourite fast fashion brands manage to stay on top of the latest trends and offer affordable clothing at such a rapid pace? The answer lies in a carefully crafted strategy that has both financial benefits and hidden environmental costs.

A recent study revealed that the average piece of clothing is worn just seven times before being discarded, highlighting the disposability associated with the fast fashion phenomenon. Surprisingly, financial comparisons showed mixed conclusions about the profitability of fast fashion retailers.

While some suggested higher profits, the analysis didn't reveal significantly higher gross margins, contrary to expectations 4.

Digging deeper, it became evident that the success of fast fashion doesn't necessarily lie in higher margins but in the speed at which inventory turnover occurs. The strategy focuses on replicating trends quickly, shortening manufacturing processes, and speeding up trend cycles. This approach results in reduced markdowns and lower inventory costs, providing a key competitive advantage 8.





As such, fast fashion companies pursue the following objectives in creating their business structures 7:

- An Increase in sales, both online and in person
- Quickly replicating fashion trends
- Shortening manufacturing processes
- Speeding up trend cycles
- Lowering the cost of goods
- Increasing cash flow
- Decrease stock levels



These strategies allow for a thriving industry and strong economic model⁹. However, there's a darker side to this fashion frenzy. Fast fashion is now synonymous with disposable fashion, creating a demand for cheap clothing that, in turn, generates a massive amount of textile waste. This rapid turnover contributes to carbon emissions and global warming, raising concerns about the sustainability of this high-speed industry.

Despite the environmental drawbacks, fast fashion companies continue to pursue objectives such as increasing sales, replicating trends swiftly, shortening manufacturing processes, and maintaining low-cost goods. The lure of affordable prices and constantly changing styles has consumers hooked, making it essential for the youth of today to be aware of the hidden costs associated with their fashion choices.

INJUSTICE AND INTERSECTIONALITY IN FAST FASHION





Beneath the glitz and glamor of the fashion industry lies a web of injustice that is often overlooked. To understand the gravity of the issue, let's start by defining two crucial concepts - systemic injustice and intersectionality. Systemic injustice refers to the perpetuation of an unjust structure within a complex system. In the context of fast fashion, this refers to a self-reinforcing cycle of exploitation, environmental degradation, and inequality that sustains the industry.



Intersectional injustice delves into how a person's various social and political identities intersect to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. In the world of fast fashion, these identities include but are not limited to race, gender, class, and geographical location. Understanding intersectionality is crucial to unraveling the multifaceted layers of injustice present in the industry. Some ways Intersectionality is present in Fast Fashion...

Race and Labor Exploitation:

Workers in the fast fashion industry, especially in developing countries, often belong to marginalized racial and ethnic groups. This intersectionality intensifies the exploitation they face, as they grapple not only with economic challenges but also racial discrimination.

Gender and Exploitative Practices:

Women make up a significant portion of the garment industry workforce. Intersectionality compounds their challenges, as they face both gender-based discrimination and labor exploitation. The industry perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces gender inequalities.



Class Disparities and Consumerism:

The burden of overconsumption falls disproportionately on lower-income communities. Fast fashion's affordability often appeals to these demographics, creating a cycle of exploitation where those with fewer economic resources bear the brunt of the industry's negative impacts.

Understanding the systemic and intersectional injustices embedded in the fast fashion industry is essential for conscientious consumers. As high schoolers, we play a vital role in reshaping the narrative surrounding fashion. By making informed choices, advocating for ethical practices, and fostering inclusivity, we can contribute to a more sustainable and just future. It's time to redefine our approach to fashion, placing emphasis on values that prioritize environmental responsibility, workers' rights, and social equity.

Pinning the hopes of a better future on each generation that emerges is nothing new—and it's our collective responsibility to acknowledge that waiting for future generations to solve today's problems is not the answer.

- Solene Rauturier



Reflection



Challenging your beliefs: What does Fast Fashion Represent to you?

1. Write down a list of words that represent Fast Fashion as an industry. How is Fast Fashion present in your life? How do you perceive Fast Fashion?
2. Once you have your list of words, try and understand how your intersectional identity plays a part in your perception.
3. If with a friend, try this exercise together. How do your words differ? Discuss where these beliefs come from and how your intersectional identity might have played a part.

Calls to Action



We are constantly bombarded by fast fashion and this zine only goes so far in the actions that we have to take to challenge the current systems which operate within fast fashion.

Here are a list of actions to deepen our work at a cultural, industrial and political level.

On the policy level most recently, French lawmakers put forth a bill that seeks to curb fast fashion and it's impact on the climate, labor rights and economy. In practice, this would make it more costly for these companies, to operate in France. The bill would also ban fast fashion advertisements within the country and instead have all products include transparency markers. Here in Canada we want to push our governments to enact similar policy surrounding fast fashion. We want to see our local governments to push for a disclosure of activities around social and environmental policies, practices and impacts.

As a wearer and consumer we should try to avoid buying new from fast fashion and exploitative brands, as well as not participate in haul or hyper consumerist culture. Another way to avoid fast fashion is to look after the clothes we already own; wear them until they are worn out, mend them wherever possible, and recycle them responsibly in the end. If you do not like the feeling of parting with your clothes permanently, you can always swap clothes with your friends or lend them out.

At Threading Change we are working with civil society, governments and brands to eliminate fast fashion and the endemic consumerist culture and fast rewarding desires.

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Additionally, we wish to acknowledge that the land on which UBC is situated is on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) First Nation peoples.

