



ISSN: 2230-9926

Available online at <http://www.journalijdr.com>

IJDR

International Journal of Development Research

Vol. 13, Issue, 03, pp. 62239-62242, March, 2023

<https://doi.org/10.37118/ijdr.26580.03.2023>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

THE DANGER OF SWEATSHOPS IN FASHION INDUSTRY

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 27th January, 2023

Received in revised form

11th February, 2023

Accepted 18th February, 2023

Published online 30th March, 2023

KeyWords:

Fast fashion, Sweatshops,
Labour practice.

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ABSTRACT

Sweatshops are commonly associated with the fast fashion industry due to its reliance on exploitative labor practices in order to produce clothing quickly and inexpensively. Workers in these sweatshops often work in hazardous and unsanitary conditions, receive low wages, and may be subject to verbal or physical abuse. H&M and Forever 21, among other fast fashion retailers, have faced criticism for their use of sweatshops, and consumers are advocating for greater transparency and accountability in the industry to ensure ethical treatment of workers. As a way to cut costs, many of these businesses outsource production to unregistered vendors who are not bound by labor laws. Consequently, there is no obligation for these brands to ensure that the workers in their supply chain have safe working conditions. Sweatshops are not a new development and have been highlighted in the media for many years. The fast fashion industry has been complicit in a system that prioritizes maximizing profits by paying workers wages below subsistence levels. This business model centers on selling vast quantities of clothing at unsustainable prices, which has resulted in diminishing returns for those who actually manufacture the garments. The term "fast" in fast fashion pertains to the swift transformation of fashion trends from runway shows to retail stores. Numerous fashion brands produce a high volume of new designs each year and expedite their manufacturing process to meet the rapidly changing consumer demands. The concept of fast fashion industry is centered on the notion of regularly renewing our appearance due to the constant influx of new trends to buy. However, beneath the surface appeal of this approach lies a significant concealed expense associated with the process. The fashion industry holds great global significance in terms of its economic contribution and employment opportunities. However, its unfavorable influence on the environment and poverty through unsustainable practices is equally notable. The emergence of fast or "throwaway" fashion has further aggravated the trend of selling low-cost clothing designed for only a few uses. Prominent brands like H&M, ASOS, and Zara have benefited from this trend. Despite growing concerns among young consumers about sustainability, this mindset does not seem to reflect in their fashion preferences. The global impact of the fashion industry is substantial due to its economic contribution and employment opportunities. However, the industry's unsustainable practices have resulted in significant harm to the environment and contributed to worldwide poverty. The problem of selling large volumes of cheap clothes designed for limited use has been compounded by the rise of fast or "throwaway" fashion. In terms of effecting change, the most crucial role for us as consumers is to alter our habits. The tendency to constantly stay up-to-date with the latest trends often leads us to purchase numerous new items that we barely wear. To be stylish in an eco-friendly manner, it is crucial to adopt a slower approach. This entails spending more time searching for unique second-hand items or purchasing high-quality, classic clothing that won't lose its charm over time.

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Citation: Dr. Rakshita M Allapanavar, Jinal Jain, Mahek Doshi, Khushi N, Subhadeep Parua and Savikalpa Thapa. 2023. "The danger of sweatshops in fashion industry". *International Journal of Development Research*, 13, (03), 62239-62242.

INTRODUCTION

The term "sweatshop" is commonly associated with the fashion industry, particularly with well-known brands that acquire old and dilapidated factory buildings to turn them into sweatshops. This practice creates unsafe working conditions, resulting in terrible accidents such as fires or building collapses. In addition to its environmental impact, the fashion industry gives rise to social issues, particularly in emerging economies, where 80% of clothing is manufactured by young women aged between 18 to 24, as reported by Remake, a non-profit organization. The US Department of Labor has

also documented cases of forced and child labor in the fashion industry across several countries, such as Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Turkey, and Vietnam. The rapid production of fashion items often prioritizes sales and profits over the welfare of the workers involved. The fashion industry's constant demand for new apparel has a significant adverse impact on both the environment and human welfare. This is compounded by fashion brands' adoption of planned obsolescence, where low-quality manufacturing leads to a quicker deterioration of clothing items. According to Euromonitor International, the number of times clothing is worn before being disposed of has decreased by over a third in the last 15 years. Worldwide, between 80 and 100

billion new clothing items are produced every year, while a truckload of worn clothing is either burned or dumped in landfills every second. In the UK alone, a million tonnes of textiles are discarded annually. The fashion industry is considered the second most polluting industry globally, next only to the oil sector, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTD). It consumes 93 billion cubic meters of water annually, equivalent to the 7,500 liters required to produce a single pair of pants. Approximately 500,000 tonnes of plastic microfibers are dumped into the oceans each year. The toxic dyes produced in factories and the chemicals used in cotton cultivation significantly contribute to environmental pollution. Water that is chemically contaminated destroys organisms in or near streams, resulting in reduced ecological biodiversity in these areas. The chemicals used in dyeing have been linked to several health issues, such as cancer, digestive problems, and skin irritation. Irrigation of crops with contaminated water poses a significant threat to human health, as contaminated fruits and vegetables enter the food chain.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Personal style is a way for individuals to express their individuality and personality, which is not inherently problematic. However, some corporations take advantage of this by selling harmful products that have a significant impact on daily life, affecting the economy, environment, and daily interactions. While customers are aware of the benefits and drawbacks of their purchases, shopping can stimulate the economy, but it can also create waste and increase carbon emissions. Job creation is necessary for product manufacturing, but it can also result in outsourcing and employee mistreatment. Various industries are grappling with this balance, with the fashion industry being one of the main industries that is not as concerned about it. The fashion industry's adoption of fast fashion has had a catastrophic impact on the environment, as the production of textiles is responsible for emitting more greenhouse gases than international aviation and shipping combined. The industry's frequent introduction of new styles, often on a biweekly basis, has resulted in increased production and waste. Fast fashion's emergence, with its emphasis on low-priced and trend-led products, has further fuelled textile production and fashion consumption. This business model is based on recurring consumption and impulse buying, and while it has been successful in driving up clothing production, it has also had a damaging impact on the environment, polluting water and land and causing carbon emissions. Although the fashion industry has made some efforts to implement sustainable production measures, these have been insufficient, and the industry is still far from achieving sustainability.

The phenomenon of globalization has created a world that is more interconnected, primarily driven by economic progress. Although it has opened up access to new prospects and connections, it has also had negative repercussions on the environment, culture, and human health and well-being. The fast fashion industry, which relies on low-cost production and frequent consumption, has seen an upsurge in its operations thanks to globalization, with many factories located in developing countries where some of them have been identified as sweatshops. The working conditions in these sweatshops often involve forced labor, which is morally unacceptable. (Taylor, 2020). The fashion industry has a significant negative impact on the environment, accounting for up to 10% of global pollution, and is ranked as the second-largest polluting industry after aviation. Despite the well-documented environmental consequences, the industry continues to grow, driven by the fast fashion model's focus on low-cost production and disposable clothing. This analysis examines the textile and fashion value chain's environmental impact, including factors such as water usage, chemical pollution, carbon emissions, and textile waste, from production to consumption. Shockingly, the fashion industry produces over 92 million tons of waste each year and consumes 1.5 trillion liters of water. To address these environmental impacts, there must be a significant shift in the fashion industry's business model, including the adoption of sustainable practices throughout the supply chain and a deceleration in production.

Additionally, consumers must alter their behavior by reducing clothing purchases and extending the lifespan of their garments. This shift towards "slow" fashion aims to limit the detrimental environmental impact and improve the fashion industry's long-term sustainability (Co, 2022). Projections indicate that the global fast fashion market will experience a considerable upswing in the coming years, with estimations forecasting an increase from \$91.23 billion in 2021 to \$133.43 billion in 2026. This market expansion is being propelled by the burgeoning youth population, which favors stylish and affordable clothing. Meanwhile, in the fiscal year 2021, the Indian domestic market for IT was valued at around \$28 billion and is anticipated to grow further to \$28.9 billion in the fiscal year 2022. The global fast fashion market is expected to maintain its swift rate of growth in the years to come, with projections indicating that it will reach a value of USD 283,457.5 Million by 2030, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10.13% from 2023 to 2030. This growth trajectory is influenced by a variety of factors, including the ongoing advancements in media, the increasing population of young consumers, and the expanding emerging economies. According to forecasts, the U.S. fashion industry is expected to experience a growth rate of 8.3% in 2022, with sales figures projected to reach \$473.42 billion. This rate, however, is slower than the 18.4% growth rate seen in the previous year due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced fashion retailers to shut down and led consumers to limit their spending on non-essential items. Nevertheless, the industry is predicted to bounce back, with total sales projected to reach \$494.89 billion by 2023.

As the pandemic continues to create uncertainty, the fashion industry is currently undergoing a transformation as it seeks to adapt to the "new normal." In this context, consumers in Europe are displaying a growing interest in sustainability, offering the industry an excellent opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to sustainable practices and transition towards a less seasonal fashion system. In April 2020, a survey of more than 2,000 consumers in the UK and Germany was conducted to assess their attitudes during the COVID-19 crisis. The results revealed that European consumers are becoming increasingly engaged in sustainability topics, presenting a chance for the fashion industry to recommit to sustainable practices. Furthermore, this moment represents a critical juncture for the fashion industry to advocate for a shift towards a less seasonal fashion system. The survey conducted among over 2,000 UK and German consumers in April 2020 highlights the silver lining for the environment amid the shock and uncertainty that the fashion sector is facing during the COVID-19 crisis. Specifically, two-thirds of the survey respondents expressed that it has become even more important to limit the impacts of climate change, and 88 percent of participants believed that more attention should be paid to reducing pollution. As consumers become more aware of the negative impact of fashion on the environment, they have started altering their behaviors. According to the survey, over 60% of consumers in Europe now actively seek environmentally friendly products and recycling options, and 57% have made significant changes to their lifestyles to reduce their environmental footprint. Despite the challenges faced by the fashion industry, this shift towards sustainability among European consumers offers a positive opportunity for both the environment and the industry to create a more sustainable future.

History & Background: Fast fashion emerged as a response to the growing demand for trendy and affordable clothing. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, consumers wanted to keep up with the latest fashion trends but didn't want to spend a lot of money on designer clothes. Retailers like Zara, H&M, and Forever 21 responded to this demand by offering trendy clothing at low prices. To keep up with the fast pace of fashion, these retailers had to adopt a new production model. Instead of creating collections based on the four seasons, they started producing new styles every few weeks, sometimes even every few days. They also began to rely on cheap labor from countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia, and China, where wages are low and labor laws are lax. Fast fashion brands also focused on reducing costs by using cheaper materials and cutting corners on quality. For example, they used synthetic fabrics instead of natural fibers like cotton and

silk, which are more expensive. They also produced garments quickly and in large quantities, which meant that quality control was often sacrificed in favor of speed and quantity. While fast fashion has made trendy clothing accessible to more people, it has also had a negative impact on the environment and on garment workers in developing countries. The fast fashion production model is incredibly wasteful, with many garments ending up in landfills after just a few wears. Additionally, garment workers often work in dangerous conditions and are paid very low wages. Overall, the story of fast fashion is one of mass production, consumerism, and a desire for trendiness at low prices. While it has made fashion more accessible to more people, it has also had negative consequences for the environment and for workers in the global garment industry.

Objectives of Study

The main objectives of the study are:

- The main goal of this research is to examine the production practices within the fast fashion sector and investigate their impact on individuals, including their attitudes and decision-making processes.
- The fast fashion sector has a notable ecological impact, and the aim of the study is to assess its effects on various elements of our environment and ecosystem as well as ways to mitigate negative impacts and promote sustainable practices.
- With all the different types of pollution taking place in the world, it is vital for us to preserve our environment and ensure its sustained for future generations. So, the objective is to study the sustainable approaches that can be replaced in the world.
- Analyse the darker side of fast fashion and be more aware of a brand's approach to sustainable and ethical manufacturing, fair labour rights, and sustainable materials.
- Negative impacts of sweatshops and poor labour conditions across the globe.

Scope of Study: The various scopes of this study are:

- This study will help us get an insight into various problems in the society. It'll help the general population understand the various effects of their beloved brands and how they are causing problems in their everyday life.
- It will help understand the traditional methods used by modern companies, the primitive way of thinking and various cost cutting tactics.
- It will encourage people to come up with various innovative and sustainable solutions for the existing environmental problems.
- It can be used by governments and other entities as a way to regulate environmental laws and to ensure sustainability.

Impact: The impact of fast fashion on the environment and society is significant and multifaceted. The production of fast fashion consumes vast amounts of non-renewable resources, water, and energy, and also contributes to air, water, and soil pollution. The use of pesticides in cotton cultivation presents health risks to farmers and has a negative impact on the ecosystem. The textile dyeing process is a major polluter of water, and the leftover water is often dumped into rivers and streams, causing harm to aquatic life and ecosystems. In addition to environmental impacts, fast fashion also poses serious societal problems. The industry relies heavily on cheap labor, often in developing countries, and many workers are subjected to forced or child labor. Poor working conditions, low wages, and long working hours are common in the industry, and workers often lack basic rights and protections. The collapse of the factory building in Dhaka, Bangladesh, is a tragic example of the risks associated with this industry. The solution to the problems caused by fast fashion lies in adopting more sustainable and ethical practices. The use of sustainable fabrics such as organic cotton, hemp, linen, and lyocell can reduce the environmental impact of fashion production. Recycling and upcycling can also help reduce waste and extend the life of clothing. Companies should prioritize the rights and well-being of workers throughout their supply chains, and ensure that they are

paid fair wages and have safe working conditions. Consumers can also play a role by choosing to buy from ethical and sustainable brands, and by buying less and making their clothes last longer through repairs and alterations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research approach for this study has been determined based on the identified problem statement. To address this problem, the research has been divided into three stages of data collection, which will utilize both qualitative and quantitative methods. In addition, secondary data will also be utilized in this research. Secondary data refers to data that already exists and was not created by the researcher. This data comes from sources such as organizations, libraries, websites, books, reports, and more, and includes data, commentary, and discussions related to the research topic. The secondary data used in this study was collected from peer-reviewed academic journals, textbooks, and websites.

FINDINGS

- The fashion industry's fast fashion and sweatshop labor have negative impacts on both humans and the environment
- Brands buy old factory buildings leading to accidents among the workers. Fast fashion produces huge amounts of waste and affects the environment negatively.
- Chemicals used during the manufacturing process also have negative effects on human health.
- The fashion industry is considered the second most environmentally damaging sector.
- We learned the effects of fast fashion, such as increased textile production and waste, carbon emission, water and land pollution, and the mistreatment of workers.
- A radical transformation is imperative for the fashion industry's business model, encompassing a reduction in production speed, implementing sustainable measures across the supply chain, and encouraging consumers to adopt habits that minimize clothing purchases while maximizing garment longevity.

Suggestions: In our opinion sweatshops are a dangerous and exploitative reality for many workers around the world. Workplaces like these exhibit unfavourable working conditions such as low wages, extended work hours, and inadequate employee benefits, ultimately jeopardizing the physical and mental health of their workers. Companies should take this seriously and treat the workers in a safe working environment. Companies should be ethical enough to take action on this.

Some points to alter the practice of sweatshops.

1. Governments must enforce labor laws and regulations to protect workers from exploitation and ensure that companies comply with labor standards. This includes monitoring and inspecting factories, prosecuting companies that violate labor laws, and providing legal recourse for workers who are mistreated.
2. Corporations have a responsibility to ensure that their supply chains are free from sweatshop labor. This can be done by auditing suppliers, implementing codes of conduct, and working with labor unions and human rights groups to promote fair labor practices.
3. Consumers can support fair trade products, which are produced in accordance with ethical and sustainable labor standards by working together, governments, corporations, consumers, and workers can help eliminate sweatshops and promote fair labor practices around the world.

DISCUSSION

A thorough review of various literature and a comprehensive survey from our part has given us an understanding about the buying patterns

of consumers and their awareness and understanding towards its impact. The study has primarily shown us that the consumers in Karnataka have little to no knowledge about the adverse effects of fast fashion. Their buying patterns have nothing to do with how it affects the environment. High amount of education is required in this area. When the carbon footprint of an industry like fashion is so high, it has high implications for the society as a whole. If we do not adopt sustainable methods, we might not have a future to look forward to.

The study showed that people do not put extra efforts into sustainable products, although it showed that we choose quality over quantity, the amount of people that are ready to pay extra for sustainable products are very less. Most consumers dispose off their clothes annually which means every year, in India there are more than a billion pieces of clothing being discarded. However none of it is being recycled or disposed off in the manner that will help the environment. There is very less exchange of clothing, it is mainly dumped away. This is very hazardous to the environment. An organized initiative by the government to ensure the collection of discarded clothing and then reusing it will help the cause. A detailed information system so that the whole country is aware of what they are wearing and how it is produced also helps consumers reach a greater understanding about the industry.

“Dress the environment Green” is something that should be implemented in the society so that people can be aware of what is happening and it is catchy for an audience. An average middle class consumer spends more than 10,000rs yearly on their garments, which means the purchasing power of the citizens is high. The consumers can spend a little extra on sustainable clothing, if educated sufficiently and given that the sustainable choice is reasonable compared to the non-sustainable ones.

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