**Forum:** Environment Commission

**Issue:** Addressing the problem of fast fashion

**Student Officer:** Sophie Lam

**Position:** President

Introduction

Nowadays, with the presence of social media and online influencers, there has been a significant increase in demand for cutting-edge styles in fashion —especially among young people. So, fast fashion, having cheap, productive manufacturing and shipping, effectively satisfies these growing desire for changing trends. Retailers adopting a fast fashion strategy include Forever 21, H&M, Shein, and Zara. These retailers have become large multinational corporations, selling large volumes of affordable, seasonally trendy clothing that appeals to fashion-conscious consumers.

In fact, the average customer now purchases 60% more apparel than they did 15 years ago. However, each item’s lifespan before being thrown out has shortened to half as long as before. The mass production of clothing from these retailers has caused detrimental effects on the environment, including excess water usage, microfiber pollution, greenhouse gases, deforestation, and toxins. Furthermore, according to the United Nations Environment Program, “the fashion industry is the second-biggest consumer of water and is responsible for 2-8 percent of global carbon emissions.” Over 75 million people worldwide work in the fashion sector, which is estimated to be worth $2.4 trillion. Despite this, due to a lack of recycling and clothing that is discarded into landfills before being sold, it suffers of $500 billion in monetary loss annually.

In accordance with its staggering environmental impacts, fast fashion has additionally caused damaging effects on our society. Steps taken towards promoting fair working conditions, gender equality, diversity, and inclusivity have been pushed back by fast fashion.

Hence, as part of this issue, there is a pressing need for member nations to fundamentally alter our consumption and production systems in fashion to response to the mounting environmental impacts of fast fashion.

Definition of Key Terms

Fast Fashion

A strategy in the fashion industry where clothing is inspired by the current catwalk trends and high-fashion designs is then mass-produced at a low cost, bringing them to retail stores rapidly, when demand is at its peak.

**Microfiber Pollution**

Synthetic clothing contains small plastic fibers that shed off during the manufacturing, washing, and wearing processes and end up in the environment. These microfibers that are released into the environment breaks down into smaller fragments rather than decomposing, which creates microfiber pollution.

**Soil Degradation**

The physical, chemical, and biological deterioration of soil quality is known as soil degradation. It may be due to erosion, a loss of organic matter, a decrease in soil fertility, a decline in the structural health of the soil, a change in salinity, acidity, or alkalinity, the effects of toxic chemicals and other pollutants, or severe flooding.

**Synthetic Fibers**

Contrary to natural fibers, which are taken directly from living things like plants or animal fur, synthetic fibers are textile materials made by humans through the chemical synthesis of petroleum or natural gas by-products.

Background

History of fast fashion

Before the Industrial Revolution, clothing manufacturing was dependent on agricultural methods with steps like raising sheep, spinning yarn, weaving cloth, etc. However, with the introduction of industrialization came the primer of new textile technology and factories. Such innovations allowed the textile industry to shift from clothing being created to order to those produced in mass and in various sizes. As an example, the sewing machine which was first developed in 1846 —helped drive down garment costs at an incredible rate and scale, which greatly expanded the size of the textile manufacturing industry. The cheaper cost of clothing played a key role altering the perspective of attire to the public- style and fashion have taken over the interest of the purchasers instead of buying out of necessity.

In the 1960s, the younger generation began purchasing inexpensive, low-quality clothing in an effort to follow the ever-changing trends and shun the sartorial customs of previous generations. Fashion manufacturers soon realized they had to meet the growing demand for reasonably priced apparel, which resulted in the building of enormous textile mills throughout the LEDCs. By outsourcing their workforce, American and European businesses were able to save millions of dollars. Shopping was now established as a hobby and a means of achieving status instead of an essential.

Later on, at the beginning of the 1990s, the term "fast fashion" was first introduced by the New York Times. They used fast fashion as terminology to describe the mission of the retail store Zara. This is as Zara implemented an accelerated production method which could take garments from designs to stores in less than 15 days. The designs were inspired by Fashion week from high-end brands and would resell these fashionable items at a considerably lower price for anyone to purchase. Today's fast fashion brands' explosive growth is a result of such cost-cutting methods. With the emphasis on affordable and trendy clothes, it is no wonder why fast fashion has so quickly infiltrated the global market.

Consequences of fast fashion

*Water consumption and pollution*

In light of the recent trend of fast fashion, detrimental water pollution and consumption is arguably one of the most problematic environmental impacts of the fast industry impacts have been exacerbated. The significant consumption of water in the process of clothing production has led to two major issues: water pollution and, needless to say, water consumption itself.

The dyeing and finishing of clothing use a significant amount of freshwater. As an example, the production of one cotton shirt requires roughly 700 gallons of water, and a single pair of jeans requires about 2000. Fast fashion has placed immense pressure on water, which is already in short supply. For instance, the fashion industry’s water consumption has caused drastic ecological effects like the drying of the Aral Sea, where cotton production has completely emptied the water.



Figure 1: Arab Sea Drying Up- National Geographic

Stephen Leahy, a reward-winning biosphere journalist, has stated, "85 % of the daily needs in the water of the entire population of India would be covered by the water used to grow cotton in the country. One hundred million people in India do not have access to drinking water." The fashion industry annually uses 1.2 trillion litres of water. Comparing that to the 750 million people in the world who do not have access to drinking water, it is evident that the continuation of this system of manufacturing clothing pieces is not sustainable.

The extent of environmental impacts the fashion industry has on water does not stop at consumption; the process of manufacturing said clothing also produces a high level of water pollution. This is mainly from the “wet-processing” stage of production. When cotton is wet processed, which involves dyeing, printing, and other finishing steps after it has been spun and woven into fabric. This method both uses and contaminates a significant amount of water. The process of turning raw material into clothing generally involves over 8000 types of synthetic chemicals. It is said that 20% of industrial water pollution comes from textile treatments and dyes. In Bangladesh only, 22000 litres of toxic water are dumped in the rivers by tanneries every day. Toxic substances in the wastewater, such as mercury and arsenic, prove to be hazardous to the well-being of the millions who live by these riverbanks as well as aquatic ecosystems.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Fast fashion is a practice which stresses affordability and rapidity. Since it is more affordable, more are able to purchase. Because of the energy involved in the production and transportation of the million items bought each year, the global fashion industry produces a lot of greenhouse emissions. In fact, 10% of the world's carbon emissions come from the garment sector, and it is estimated that the emissions of the fashion industry will increase to 50% by 2030. For example, the material used in fast fashion brands often involves synthetic fibres like polyester, acrylic, and nylon, which serve as a cheaper and faster alternative to natural fabrics. However, this efficiency and affordability are at the cost of more energy as such material are made from fossil fuel resources such as oil and natural gases.

Additionally, the majority of our clothing is made in China, Bangladesh, and India, which are primarily coal-powered nations. When it comes to carbon emissions, coal is one of the most frowned upon energy sources for the environment as it emits hazardous outdoor air pollutants from sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and carbon dioxide to mercury and arsenic.

Other environmental effects

Other environmental effects of fast fashion include soil degradation, microfibers, and textile wastes. Though these may seem impossible to all solve, they all find root in the nature of fast fashion.The overgrazing of pastures by cashmere goats and sheep farmed for their wool, the extensive use of chemicals to cultivate cotton, and deforestation brought on by demand for wood-based fibres like rayon are all significant contributions made by the fashion industry to soil degradation. However, we require quality soil to produce food as well as to absorb CO2. It is estimated that 90% of Mongolia’s surface is in threat of desertification primarily because of the breeding and farming of cashmere goats.

Additionally, large-scaled plantations of trees used to produce wood-based textiles like rayon, viscose, and modal replace hundreds of hectares of endangered and ancient forests. As in Indonesia, where extensive deforestation of the rainforests has occurred over the past ten years, this loss of forests is endangering the ecology and indigenous inhabitants. Seventy million trees are used each year for the production of our clothes, which due to fast fashion, are thrown away after being worn less than ten times. The culture of fast fashion is the quick following of the current trend, making it prone to textile waste. After all, cheap, trendy clothing is more likely to be thrown out than expensive, timeless clothing. Approximately $500 billion is lost per year from apparel that is not recycled or only worn a few times.

Major Parties Involved

The People’s Republic of China

China continues to be the world's biggest supplier of fast fashion goods as of 2019. This clothing is primarily produced by local Chinese fashion businesses. Many global fast fashion companies manufacture their clothing in China, where they may impose irrational quotas and take advantage of inexpensive labor to satisfy consumer demand. Overproduction and waste are the two worldwide textile trends that the Chinese fast fashion sector follows. As a result, a lot of the clothing goes out of style quickly after being produced. Companies dispose of much useable apparel "incineratively" or in the trash rather than recycling it or disposing of it appropriately. Each year, Chinese businesses and consumers throw away about 26 million metric tons of apparel. Because of the influence and dependency China has on the fast fashion industry, delegates must implement regulations to change the system of fast fashion, driving it to become a more sustainable aspect of our lives to change the system of fast fashion, driving it to become a more sustainable aspect in our lives.

The United States of America

In the United States, 88% of consumers favor shopping for fast fashion, followed by consumers in Europe (46%), India (25%) and China (21%). The leading consumption of the United States makes them a critical stakeholder in the issue of fast fashion. Since fast fashion is revolved around the consumer demand for cheap and trendy pieces, the United States, having the most consumers, could play a vital role in adjusting the way of fashion for a more sustainable future.

**India, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia**

Several less developed areas of Asian nations, including China, India, Vietnam, and Indonesia, produce the majority of the fabrics used by fast-fashion retailers. It's no accident that quick fashion companies choose this area to manufacture their goods. Retailers can produce apparel in large quantities in these nations without facing legal repercussions due to a lack of regulation in labor conditions (wages, etc.) or environmental costs. This has LEDCs to heavily depend on the exports of such read-made clothes for their economy.

**United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment)**

The United Nations Environment Programme, which was established in 1972, is the foremost international environmental organization that establishes the framework for global environmental agenda and collaboration. It encourages the consistent application of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the framework of the United Nations, and acts as an authoritative spokesperson for environmental issues and efforts on a global scale.

The UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion

According to the United Nations Alliance for Sustainable Fashion, a project of United Nations agencies and affiliated groups, The Sustainable Development Goals will be furthered through coordinated action in the fashion industry. The Alliance explicitly supports collaboration between UN agencies such as the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) involved in the fashion industry and promotes initiatives and regulations to guarantee that the fashion value chain helps to meet the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals. Through the Alliance, the UN pledges to alter the course of fashion, lessen its detrimental effects on the environment and society, and make it a catalyst for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Timeline of Events:

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| Date | Description of event |
| Pre 1800s | People farmed their own raw material such as sheep’s wool to make clothing. |
| 1700s~1800s | The Industrial Revolution occurs in England and the United States of America. With urbanisation from the Industrial Revolution, there is a development in textile technology. People began to purchase clothing for style instead of necessity. |
| 1892 | The establishment of Vogue, a monthly fashion and lifestyle publication based in the US that covers a wide range of subjects, including runway, beauty, culture, living, and haute couture. |
| October 4th, 1947 | In Västers, Sweden, Erling Persson founded Hennes. Today, the H&M group has a number of distinct brands that together give consumers all over the world access to fashion and design. This is the original establishment of a fast fashion retailer. |
| 1960s | Teenagers began using fashion as a way of individual expression through patterns, designs, and unique styles. |
| 1975 | Spanish clothing retailer Zara was formed in Galicia. It is the flagship chain shop of the Inditex group, the biggest clothes retailer in the world, which Amancio Ortega founded in 1975. |
| 1990 | The phrase "fast fashion" was first heard when Zara arrived in New York at the start of the 1990s. The phrase was created by the *New York Times* to characterize Zara's goal of completing a garment's journey from design to a retail sale in under 15 days. |
| 2000 | The United Nation’s establishment of the Millennial Development Goals (MDG), which includes goals on sustainability targeting developing countries. |
| 2010s | ECommerce started to popularize. For the first time ever in the history of online purchasing, the United States' Cyber Monday sales in 2010 exceeded $1 billion. |
| 2015 | The establishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which acts as a common framework for peace and prosperity for both people and the planet, promoting overall sustainability. |
| March, 2019 | The United Nations officially launches the UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion, which is made up of ten separate UN institutions. |
| December, 2019 | As governments shut down factories, stores, and events to stop the spread of the virus, the COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on the worldwide fashion industry. |

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The government of the United Kingdoms released only 19 policies and five strategies between 2007 and 2021 in an effort to address the environmental harm and human rights violations caused by the fashion industry. The 2007 Sustainable Clothing Roadmap, the 2007 Waste Strategy for England, the 2011 Sustainable Clothing Action Plan, the 2013 Waste Prevention Programme, and 2018's 'Our Waste, Our Resources': A Strategy for England were the five government strategies mentioned in the study.

However, the majority of the policies were put forth in a way that made them unlikely to result in implementation. For instance, it claims that only one policy, or 5% of policies, included any information about a cost or budget. Moreover, only 32% of the proposed initiatives aimed to address the fast fashion problem directly; the rest were based on raising awareness. Instead of explicitly addressing rapid fashion, these policies were primarily implemented under broad initiatives meant to address the waste issue. The research revealed that no significant incentives, rules, or legislation had been suggested for the policies that intended to directly address fast fashion. Instead, these policies were geared at offering voluntary advice and standards or attempts to assist companies in making change. Fast fashion is a complicated problem that involves concerns about the environment, workers' rights, and corporate sustainability. However, the UK government has merely approached it from the perspective of waste reduction, despite the fact that this is a problem that requires the cooperation of several departments.

The United Nations has also recognized and attempted to address the issue of fast fashion through the establishment of the UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion, launched in 2019 and composed of ten member organizations (Connect4Climate and the World Bank among them). The alliance aims to harness the reach and creativity of fashion to help achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, finding avenues for meaningful action on both the labor side and the environmental fronts.

Moreover, research facilities such as the London College of Fashion's Center for Sustainable Fashion strives to develop innovative strategies for maintaining fashion creation at a lower environmental and social cost. The Centre for Sustainable Fashion plans to keep investigating and educating the public about sustainable fashion practices and to work closely with fast fashion companies to provide them with the resources they need to be sustainable. Since its founding in 2008, CSF has collaborated with Nike, H&M, Kering, and many other companies to teach them innovative manufacturing and sales techniques that minimize waste and carbon emissions. Clothes Well Lived is a noteworthy initiative of CSF that uses prominent window display art to question people's preconceptions of clothing and the contemporary throw-away culture of clothing.

Possible Solutions

* Seeing as fast fashion stem from consumer interest in fashion, it is vital that member states **educate the public on the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion, factors that promotes fast fashion, and day-to-day methods to reduce the harmful effects of the industry.** The trends of fashion have been heavily influenced by the younger generation- particularly due to their presence on social media. Social media influences use continually shifting trend cycles to promote lifestyle goods and companies which accelerates the fast fashion culture. Thus, it is essential that means of **spreading awareness** through social media, celebrities, and other fashion influencers should be considered by member states when writing their resolution. Moreover, due to the general lack of knowledge on the production of fast fashion, people are oblivious of their actions negatively contributing to the environment and human rights issue. The fundamental player of the fast fashion industry is the public. Therefore, **public education on methods to combat fast fashion will help alleviate the stress of the industry on the environment.**
* In accordance, member states and relevant organizations should further **invest in research and development to produce new and more** **environmentally and socially sustainable fabrics and practices to change the apparel supply chain.**Due to synthetic fibre’s price of increasing microfiber pollution, it is vital to find a sustainable replacement for such material or new methods of manufacturing that can still satisfy the needs of affordability companies. To encourage the market for recycled and eco-friendly fibres, nations ought to **further establish a new investment fund**. Additionally, **said green materials and practices should be introduced to major fast fashion brands** such as Kering and H&M in a partnership to ensure the implementation of the researched technology. As an example, the Water & Resource Action Programme (WRAP) has exhorted businesses to emulate those like Patagonia and Lulu Lemon, who provide repairs for their products. Moreover, some delegates may want to consider specific organizations attempting to initiate sustainable innovations through competitions.
* **Strict regulations in the fashion industry** are further necessary for combating the problems of fast fashion. In spite of roughly 92 million tons of landfill textile waste annually, fashion is one of the least regulated sectors. For some nations, consideration of taxing sellers**of clothing and textiles a fee for each item they sell to deal with waste** could be beneficial. This could prompt a fundamental rethinking of clothing design to improve wearability, repairability, and recycling. Additionally, fees should be supported and met by clear goals to increase recycling. As the Changing Markets campaigns director, Nusa Urbancic, has said, “If set high enough, a disposal charge on brands would reverse this sorry situation and force the fashion world into an entirely new look, one that super-charges the production of sustainable, high-quality clothing.” **Tax reforms** could also be necessary to incentivize sellers. Such could be used to reward fashion companies who create items with minimal environmental implications and penalize those that do not.To encourage responsible disposal in businesses, the tax system should tip the scales in favor of reuse, repair, and recycling.

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