

H&M and Environmental Injustice Through Marketing

47078 | CAP 4800 | Senior Capstone

Michelle Mancuso

December 5, 2020

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Introduction

The fashion industry in America would be nonexistent without fast fashion and the greenwashing marketing tactics that come with it. Everything about this large sector of the fashion industry- from the targeted marketing to the cheaply made garments- is designed to be cheap for consumers, profitable for companies, and “fast” as ever. Fast fashion champions environmental injustice through the use of the ever-temporary seasonal collections, toxic clothing dyes and chemicals during manufacturing, and the use of non-local distributors and factories, among other externalized factors. The article “The global environmental injustice of fast fashion” by Rachel Bick et al states the following about the devastating effects fast fashion has on our expiring environment, which is one of the more relevant victims of the industry: “Approximately 85 % of the clothing Americans consume, nearly 3.8 billion pounds annually, is sent to landfills as solid waste, amounting to nearly 80 pounds per American per year” (Bick). Clearly, one of fast fashion’s biggest victims is the landfills, but without consumer participation, the clothing would never end up in the landfills. This capstone paper will examine the correlations between leading clothing company H&M’s advertising campaigns and the damage induced on the environment as a result of H&M’s convincing greenwashing and its everlasting success as a whole. Fast fashion’s purposeful ignorance of blatantly toxic materials and ability to look away from the wasteful practices involved in their manufacturing, transportation, and disposal of materials are the core of America’s treatment of their clothes. It is the hope of the researcher to help the reader commit to that which is too often left out of the conversation: to make a personal connection to clothing using factual information about the fast fashion industry, and to use a mindful approach when deciding on a fashion brand to invest- or not invest- in.

Literature Review

Themes that emerge from the literature based on the project's annotated bibliography are the following: Defining fast fashion and its effects on the environment, marketing in the world of consumerist fashion, and consumer psychology. All under the theme of defining fast fashion and its effects on the environment are the following articles taken from the bibliography: Bick and Halsey's "The global environmental injustice of fast fashion," Brooks et al's "Fashion, Sustainability, and the Anthropocene," H&M's "Planet, People, Animals" rating based on the rating system of GoodOnYou.eco (directory.goodonyou.eco/brand/h-and-m), Gultinan's "Creative Destruction and Destructive Creations: Environmental Ethics and Planned Obsolescence," Niinimäki, Peters, Dahlbo et al's "The environmental price of fast fashion," Sarah Young's article in The Independent titled "A Guide to Choosing Eco-Friendly Fabrics for Your Wardrobe," and finally a poem titled "a: Dress," written by Leah Thorn and performed as a spoken word piece. Within the theme of marketing in the world of consumerist fashion fit Byun and Sternquist's article titled "HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW: CONSUMER REACTIONS TO PERCEIVED LIMITED AVAILABILITY," in addition to Koivulehto's "Do Social Media Marketing Activities Enhance Customer Equity? A Case Study of Fast-Fashion Brand Zara." Within the theme of consumer psychology, the following articles remain: Haws et al's "Seeing the World through GREEN-Tinted Glasses: Green Consumption Values and Responses to Environmentally Friendly Products," Heidbreder et al's "Tackling the Plastic Problem: A Review on Perceptions, Behaviors, and Interventions," and Kilbourne and Pickett's "How Materialism Affects Environmental Beliefs, Concern, and Environmentally Responsible Behavior." Lastly, though the following sources do not formally fall within any of the above themes, they are most reminiscent of what the other sources in the "defining fast fashion and its

effects on the environment” theme bring to the table. Unofficially, within the first theme of defining fast fashion and its effects on the environment belong the following sources: H&M’s Instagram page (www.instagram.com/hm/), H&M’s website (“Online Fashion, Homeware & Kids Clothes: H&M US”), and the website for H&M partner I:CO (www.ico-spirit.com/en/referenzen/)

Theme 1: Defining Fast Fashion and its Effects on the Environment

The sources within this theme define and discuss fast fashion, how it damages the environment, or both. Bick, Halsey, Ekenga, in “The global environmental injustice of fast fashion” examine the definition of fast fashion, how it came to existence, why it is so accessible, and why it is here to stay. Brooks, Andrew, et al go into similar detail in the article “Fashion, Sustainability, and the Anthropocene” but more in the context of the environmental damage caused by fashion; the authors focus in on the minute details and scientific terminology regarding pollution and chemical leaching, among other concerns. The above two articles work hand in hand as one introduces the issue at hand (fast fashion) and the other gives more reason and real-life examples of the extent of the damage caused by this type of fashion. GoodOnYou.eco is a company rating site that rates brands based on three main categories: People, Planet, and Animals. By using GoodOnYou’s article on H&M (directory.goodonyou.eco/brand/h-and-m), the capstone project uses real standards and rating systems to bring to light why H&M qualifies among the “fastest” fast fashion brands, tying into the research taken from the first two articles within this theme. In the article “Creative Destruction and Destructive Creations: Environmental Ethics and Planned Obsolescence,” Gultinan dives into the topic of planned obsolescence, what it is, why it is of concern to our already damaged environment, and the important opportunity

marketing scholars have to develop sustainable durables before there is irreversible damage done. Planned obsolescence is important in the world of fast fashion, and relevant to the articles that discuss it, because there would be no seasonal clothing, short product turnovers, and incentive to re-purchase cheap clothing without it. Included in this theme is Niinimäki, Peters, Dhalbo, et al's "The environmental price of fast fashion." This article provides crucial information on "fast" and "slow" fashion, specifically why there is an urgent need to transition from one to the other. The current state of the fashion industry is one that is destroying the fashion supply chain as it exists due to short-lived use of garments, frequent consumption, and cheaply made garments as a whole. The above factors directly relate to the way in which H&M produces garments and falls perfectly into the definition of fast fashion. Sarah Young's article in "A Guide to Choosing Eco-Friendly Fabrics for Your Wardrobe" dissects the most commonly used fabrics, as well as the most and least harmful fabrics overall in terms of their relationship to the environment. Leah Thorn's poem titled "a:Dress," performed as a video piece (youtu.be/rHwtAJplV4M), uses fashion and informed imagery to define "fast fashion" and illustrate the negative domino effect it has on everything it touches.

The final sources within this theme are the official shopping website of H&M (www2.hm.com), their official Instagram page ([Instagram.com/hm](https://www.instagram.com/hm)), and their website dedicated to posting public company intentions, goals, campaign details, and more (hmgroup.com). Many examples based on the company's campaign content, garment and product information, among other details needed for the proper analysis are pulled from the above sites, as they directly correspond with company's message. Researching the intent and actions of the company are key to making the case that H&M is a fast fashion company that plays into environmental damage. Last in this theme is the website for I:CO (www.ico-spirit.com/en/referenzen/). This is the company H&M

partners with for their clothing recycling initiative. Researching I:CO aims to establish the legitimacy of H&M's recycling initiative.

Theme 2: Marketing in the World of Consumerist Fashion

Alternatively to discussing the environmental implications of fast fashion, the sources within this theme discuss the marketing side of the industry. Byun and Sternquist's article titled "HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW: CONSUMER REACTIONS TO PERCEIVED LIMITED AVAILABILITY" break down the marketing strategy of companies to create what is called a "perceived limited availability," and its effects on customers. This strategy leads to a phenomenon, *in-store hoarding*, where a customer buys an article of clothing believing that it will not be available at a later time. This article is especially valuable to the capstone project as it specifically uses H&M as an example of a company that uses the above marketing strategy. This article relates closely to the next one in this theme; Koivulehto's work examines the powerful use of social media by fashion industry giant Zara and how advertisements on the web are used to market fast-fashion material. A key point is that the use of social media as a marketing strategy establishes a relationship between a company and its consumers. Comparing H&M's marketing to that of a largely similar brand, Zara, further strengthens the researcher's argument about the ways in which social media advertising can create a consumer cult-like following.

Theme 3: Consumer Psychology

Within this theme, effective marketing from the customer perspective and customer decision-making is addressed. Haws et al's article, "Seeing the World through GREEN-Tinted Glasses: Green Consumption Values and Responses to Environmentally Friendly Products,"

studies the way in which consumers compare environmentally friendly products to ones that are not, and how they make an individual decision on which option to invest in. This article benefits the research paper in that it brings the mind of the consumer to light, essentially helping the argument as to why fast fashion is so effective on the consumer and successful in the fashion industry. Heidbreder et al's "Tackling the Plastic Problem: A Review on Perceptions, Behaviors, and Interventions" is used in the analysis below to draw a parallel between the mass production and overconsumption of both fast fashion products and plastic products. The article breaks apart the foundations of certain consumer behaviors that have led to the heavy dependence on plastic, and what steps would be needed for interventions in an effort to reduce the consumption of plastic.

This literature review suggests that fast fashion is a popular research topic, especially in the twenty-first century. As such, fast fashion has been analyzed as an environmental problem, a marketing phenomenon, and as an avenue to study consumer behaviors. However, the expiry of garments made under "fast fashion" standards has not been emphasized nearly as much as it needs to be in the literature on fast fashion. Though one of the scholarly sources discusses general planned obsolescence, its significance in fashion research is much overlooked. To fill the gap in the research, this capstone project will discuss the importance of clothing having an "expiration date," similarly to food, in the realm of clothing companies, specifically H&M. It is no mistake that cheap clothing is cheaply made; the quality of the clothing ties into the intent of H&M: to create and sell new styles on a fast rotation using cheap materials, toxic chemicals, and cheap labor, all without taking true responsibility for externalized environmental costs.

Analysis

Fast fashion “relies on cheap manufacturing, frequent consumption and short-lived garment use” (Niinimäki). Long-time fast fashion company H&M is not new to the benefits they can reap by using the cheap materials and toxic chemicals associated with the “fast fashion” supply chain. An H&M customer has incentive to replace their quickly deteriorating garments with more of the same, especially because of the cheap cost to do so. The clothing shrinks easily, threads pull with minimal effort, and colors fade quickly due to their poor quality. The function of fast fashion in the industry is not accidental; it is a process that allows companies like H&M to achieve quick production turn-around, the continuous use of cheap labor and materials, and even a loyal and constant customer base. Fast fashion extends far beyond H&M and has become a widespread systemic issue. In 2018, Business Insider deemed the top three largest clothing companies as the following: TJX (owns TJ Maxx and Marshalls), Nike, and Gap Inc. (Gap, Old Navy, Athleta, Banana Republic). All of these companies fall under the category of fast fashion, and they each reached revenues between 15 and 35 billion dollars that year. The research below attempts to uncover how so much success can co-exist with immense environmental injustice.

The opposite of fast fashion is what is known as “slow fashion,” which involves “decreasing clothing purchases and increasing garment lifetimes,” in addition to “minimizing and mitigating the detrimental environmental impacts [of fast fashion]” as defined by Niinimäki et al in “The environmental price of fast fashion.” Those who are aware of the costs that come with fast fashion and look to support slow fashion companies are familiar with the painfully extensive search that is required. Cheap and detrimental clothing has become the “norm,” and causes garments by slow fashion brands to fall toward the bottom of any Google search, thus perpetuating the lack of visibility the more ethical (and less successful) companies are faced

with. Due to the normalcy of the extremely cheap garments that are available around the country, slow fashion can be seen by consumers as unnecessarily pricey. The truth behind slow fashion garments, however, is that the price generally reflects the true price of the clothing item. The American population has been conditioned by companies like H&M to forget about the extensive resources that go into a pair of socks, for example. The cotton must be planted, grown, and harvested. Workers then use hundreds of gallons of water to process the cotton into fabric, the fabric is shipped to the manufacturing plant, and so on. In between these steps are many more nuances, which include transportation costs, packaging materials, labor, losses throughout the supply chain (damaged items, faulty crops, etc.), and more. When H&M churns out a pair of socks that costs only three dollars, it is an indication that the company is cutting ethical corners at some point in the production of the socks. Not only do these cut corners damage the already delicate environment, but they also sacrifice the quality of the clothing. Leah Thorn is a spoken-word poet and climate activist who was a featured speaker in the 2020 COP26 Coalition's "From the Ground Up: Global Gathering for Climate Justice" workshop on Fast Fashion. Thorn shared an informative and thought-provoking poem of hers with a 200-member Zoom audience on November 14th, 2020. "Fast fashion clothes have a deliberately limited lifespan, both in terms of being on trend and in terms of quality. It takes twelve years to recycle what fast fashion makes in forty-eight hours. But even before the clothes get to the shops, they've already caused tons of waste, which usually gets sent to landfill,"

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHwtAJplV4M&feature=youtu.be>) Thorn shares. The dilemma that Thorn is expressing in her poem is exactly what makes the quick turnover in products and seasonal collections of clothing possible.

A form of disinformation that distracts a customer from a company's participation in fast fashion, and often goes hand-in-hand with its marketing, is greenwashing. There is a prevalence of greenwashing by big-brand clothing companies in general, and H&M's approach to clothing and the massive effort to conceal their dirty secrets is part of what makes the brand such a success. Not only is H&M not fully transparent about their supply chain, but they use attractive words like "sustainable" and "conscious" to create a deceivingly feel-good shopping experience for the eco-conscious customer. In fact, H&M's supposed sustainable collection of clothing is known as H&M Conscious. This is how the company describes their new line of clothes directly on their website, www2.hm.com/en_us/women/concepts/conscious-sustainable-style.html: "Shop our selection of sustainable fashion pieces that make you both look and feel good. Our range of organic and sustainable clothing offer you a variety of new wardrobe favorites - everything from soft knits and stylish t-shirts to the latest denim looks and comfortable underwear." Based on the available information, it is unclear if the garments in the H&M Conscious collection must adhere to requirements or standards that are any different than the rest of their clothes. At first glance, all that can be gathered about how sustainable the garments are is the underwhelming claims in the garment descriptions: "Made partly from recycled cotton," "Cotton content is partly recycled," "Polyester content is partly recycled," and "Cotton content is organic" (https://www2.hm.com/en_us/women/concepts/conscious-sustainable-style.html). H&M again works to gain the shopper's trust by doing the bare minimum for the planet while making it sound as though it is an impressive feat that their pair of jeans is "Made partly from recycled cotton." Sarah Young, a fashion and beauty Lifestyle writer for The Independent, consults with several industry experts to determine which fabrics cause the most and least harm to the

environment. Young writes the following in her article “A Guide to Choosing Eco-Friendly Fabrics for Your Wardrobe”:

“...approximately £140m worth of clothing goes into landfill each year. Alice Wilby, a sustainable fashion consultant and spokesperson for Extinction Rebellion – a campaign group demanding governments take urgent action on climate change – tells *The Independent* that this kind of misuse results in ‘wasting perfectly usable textiles, slowly leaking toxins into the earth and microfibres into the waterways’ and contributes to methane emissions. ...While cotton is a natural fibre that can biodegrade at the end of its life, it is also one of the most environmentally demanding crops. Wilby explains that cotton is ‘very water intensive to cultivate and process’, taking between 10,000 and 20,000 gallons of water to make a single pair of jeans and up to 3,000 to make a T-shirt. The fashion consultant adds that cotton farming also uses high levels of pesticides and toxic chemicals that seep into the earth and water supplies. ‘Cotton as a crop wreaks havoc with both people and planet even before it’s turned into clothing,’ Wilby says.”

H&M’s claim to fame with their use of organic cotton unfortunately does not change the unspeakable amount of water it requires. No matter what type of farm it is grown on (organic or conventional), processing the cotton plant into the garment is where its water footprint skyrockets. Cotton is one of H&M’s most used materials, and in second place is polyester.

According to Young’s article: unlike with cotton, water usage is not the main concern with polyester. The material itself is a form of plastic and it is made from petroleum, a material that is dependent on fossil fuel extraction. Wilby again adds to the conversation in Young’s article: “Aside from the environmental impact incurred during extraction, manufacturing and shipping of synthetic clothing and material, ‘the use of fossil fuels brings with it other detrimental issues

including oil spills, methane emissions and wildlife disruption and biodiversity loss', Wilby says" (Young). Using recycled polyester, for example, is a better alternative to manufacturing virgin material as it uses half the amount of energy to do so and diverts some plastic from the landfills. However, even when recycling, non-plastic materials will always be the superior choice. This is partially because with every single wash, synthetic materials release micro plastics into water; as a result of synthetic material manufacturing, micro plastic has been found everywhere from tap water to different types of seafood. "Fish and other aquatic species are ingesting tiny plastic fragments, which include artificial microfibers released when polyester garments are laundered" (Brooks, Fletcher, et al). H&M is painting the picture that partially recycled polyester along with the occasional organic cotton garment is the epitome of sustainability for the company, which is characteristic of greenwashing. H&M does the absolute bare minimum with their twenty-billion-dollar yearly revenue with the planet in mind. Companies that are committed to better practices and act to not harm the planet any further are exploring materials such as linen, 100% recycled materials, and plant-based fibers like Tencel, bast, and Pinatex. Many of these materials are biodegradable, on top of having enough durability and color retention that little to no chemicals have to be used during the manufacturing of products made with these materials. It is relevant to also note that the H&M Conscious line of clothing is limited to their "Women's" section of clothing, excluding all clothing that is marketed under the categories of "Men," "Kids," and "Divided," which is H&M's massive line of junior apparel. This further drives the point home that the H&M Conscious line is not an example of a widespread effort to transform the company, but another potential way for H&M to placate customers that are looking for genuine change.

H&M's website makes many flashy claims about how green they are, especially within their Conscious tab. But upon closer inspection of the fine print, the descriptions of the garments include ambitious claims about what they *will* do and what they are working *toward*, rather than what is being done in the present. The language used on the website indicates changes that they will implement at some point in the future; this type of language can instill in the customer the belief that they are buying from a company that is actively striving to improve their fabrics to be more environmentally safe. The truth, however, is that there are countless other companies *right now* that are already strongly committed to using solely recycled textiles, companies that do not make flashy promises without intent to follow through, and honest companies that need more support in order to stay afloat in an industry dominated by brands like H&M. This hold that H&M has on their customers is unfortunately telling of the customers' standards. What potential buyers may overlook in terms of the company's claims is the fact that each blurb about H&M's goals is strategically placed around garment descriptions to make the buyer feel better about what they are doing. "Climate neutral by 2030. Let's be a part of the change!" and, of course, "Made partly from recycled cotton" are phrases that are found on the same page as the following statement about a widely used material, Polyamide: "Conventional nylon/polyamide is a commonly used artificial fiber made from oil which is a fossil resource. We are constantly striving to increase our use of recycled nylon, which is made from waste such as old fishing net, carpet, and industrial waste" ("Lyocell-Blend Dress - Powder Beige/Patterned - Ladies: H&M US").

In addition to using the greenwashing tactics described above, there is also a sense of urgency the company is capable of creating within customers when it involves shopping for gifts, using discounts, participating in promotional deals, and so on. At the top of the home page of

their website, H&M declares that they offer free shipping on orders over \$40 and a promotion called “Black Friday Pre-Deals,” which offers 50% off garments on both online and in-store shopping as of November 2020. Visual details such as the original price (in black) crossed off next to the sale price (in red) are also details that may affect the shopper’s subconscious. It is emphasized that their promotional periods will not last long, and the goal is to immediately reel customers in to the possible savings they can attain. The flashy words, colors, and deals can be enticing to the customer, as it means they get to pay even less money than what they may have anticipated. Creating the sense that time and resources may “run out” is a strategy that can be used to achieve the aforementioned feeling of urgency in a customer. This psychological effect can be compared to the phenomenon of in-store hoarding as described in the article “Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Consumer Reactions to Perceived Limited Availability” by Sang-Eun Byun and Brenda Sternquist. “Shoppers often rush to hoard products while shopping, worrying that supplies may run out before the end of the shopping trip. ...hoarding is usually associated with scarcity and is often adopted to minimize a perceived risk or anticipated loss (Frost and Gross 1993; McKinnon, Smith, and Hunt 1985)” (Byun and Sternquist 224). The effect that perceived limited availability may have on customers is strengthened with the following: “Previous studies found that limited availability promotes consumer purchase decisions and reduces further search intention because of the intensified desire to acquire a product (Aggarwal and Vaidyanathan 2003; One 1999)” (Byun and Sternquist). Based on the researcher’s insight and conclusions, this argument may be just as relevant in the world of online shopping as it is with the experience of in-store shopping. An example of the parallel could be that websites are now designed to reflect actual item availability. Alerts about how many garments are available for purchase can be seen on the online store sites of Nike ([nike.com](https://www.nike.com)), Lululemon (<https://shop.lululemon.com>), and many

more. Nike allows online shoppers to see if their warehouse is running low on a product by including an alert beside the photo of the item. One of these alerts might say, for example: “Just a few left. Order soon” (<https://www.nike.com/t/one-luxe-womens-heathered-mid-rise-tights-HSmf29/CD5915-693>). The above link may no longer contain the alert or be relevant to the reader as online supplies constantly change. On Lululemon’s site, there is a unique section of clothing that the company has creatively labeled “We Made Too Much.” Upon clicking this tab, there is a massive selection of slightly discounted clothing; as of November 2020, there are over 350 items, each item with two to six different colors to choose from, and each with the available size options (two to twelve). This separate section of clothing could arguably be yet another tactic used to have shoppers believe they are saving money *and* simultaneously minimizing waste in the industry by purchasing clothing that might otherwise possible be disposed of. There is no further information on their website to prove that the clothing in this section exists due to the company manufacturing “too much” of it. With a company as successful as Lululemon, shoppers have purchased- and will continue to purchase- their garments whether or not they are found within the “We Made Too Much” section. When it comes to H&M, their website has separate sections labeled with provocative wording such as “Last Chance Styles.” The site also has a feature that has shoppers click on the sold-out garments and add their email to a waitlist. This feature allows the shopper to be notified when the item is once again available. This ensures the customer does not miss out on the item, and that H&M does not miss out on the business opportunity.

Unsurprisingly, H&M takes their greenwashing tactics all the way to the end of the life of each garment, bringing the conversation full circle with their “Be A Fashion Recycler” campaign. H&M follows their consumer at each step their personal fashion journey by extending

too-good-to-be-true deals via email and social media, notifying them of irresistible sales at every opportunity, using a loyalty program for more redeemable discounts, and finally implementing a clothing recycling program for when the valued buyer decides to make space in their home for more H&M apparel. The brand teamed up with I:CO, short for I:Collect, to set up clothing collection receptacles in participating H&M store locations (*Recycling*, [hmgroupp.com/sustainability/circular-and-climate-positive/recycling.html](https://www.hm.com/sustainability/circular-and-climate-positive/recycling.html)). The partnership itself, in addition to the legitimacy of I:CO's services, does contribute to the circular vision that H&M claims to embody. The issue with the campaign is that providing an avenue for their customers to drop their old clothes at an H&M location does not erase the fact that they are mass-producing the clothing in the first place. The company unapologetically encourages people to take advantage of their outrageously convenient "BOGO" deals and participates in the non-stop rotation of their clothing to set trends with the changing seasons and holidays. For the company to market in this manner and swiftly offer a 15% off coupon to the customers that drop clothing into the in-store bins is painfully ironic, and only feeds the problem ("Garment Collecting," https://www2.hm.com/en_us/women/campaigns/16r-garment-collecting.html). This idea can be compared to the plastic paradox. Campaigns surrounding recycling plastics have been created for years in hopes of simplifying the act of recycling in order to increase recycling nation-wide. The problem, however, is that the recycling of plastic- residential or corporate- is labor-intensive, extremely energy-intensive, expensive, and takes the cooperation of the majority of Americans in order to function as a sustainable system. Recycling has been painted as one of the most responsible things an American can partake in when it comes to environmental sustainability, only because America's addiction to plastic is virtually unbreakable. Due to this uphill battle that recycling plastic has entailed, it is more preferable from an environmental standpoint to

transition away from the use of plastic altogether and toward reusable alternatives (Heidbreder et al). The mass production- and consumption- of both clothing and plastics in America are comparable in this way. It is more convenient to buy a plastic bottle of iced tea and throw it in the garbage than take the time to clean it and recycle it, or use a reusable container, even if it is more expensive in the end. In the same way, it is more desirable up front to purchase cheap clothing and rotate it with more cheap clothing than make an investment in a quality garment that can be used for a long time.

The above analysis points almost exclusively to the conclusion that H&M is no different than other fast-fashion giants. It should be noted that the brand has taken several sustainable initiatives, but the efforts hardly seem intentional in creating permanent change. If anything, the I:CO partnership gives people another reason to buy more, as it provides expired clothing an easy way out of the wardrobe. Underneath a listing for one of their dresses in the Conscious collection, there is a small list of “tips” under the heading “Sustainability – What can we do together?”. The tips guide the shopper on how they should take care of their clothing by following the instructions on the tag and washing in cooler temperatures when possible, even mentioning to “Bring your old garments to an H&M store and recycle it!” Meanwhile, the garment itself is made of 25% Polyamide, a material sourced from fossil fuels which releases microplastics with each wash and wear (“Lyocell-Blend Dress - Powder Beige/Patterned - Ladies: H&M US”). H&M’s attempts at sustainable initiatives are barely a feat, given the company is working with a \$20 billion revenue each year, on average. The initiatives they have come up with thus far are mainly surface-level, vague, and fail to address that the core of H&M’s environmental shortfalls lie at the manufacturing and marketing components of the brand’s problematic business model.

Conclusions & Recommendations for Future Research

H&M is not alone in the fight for shoppers' attention, loyalty, and money. Company participation in fast fashion is extremely widespread. Companies use their own techniques to achieve and maintain shoppers' positive image of the brand no matter the externalized costs, and H&M is particularly skillful in doing so. In conducting a qualitative analysis of H&M marketing strategies, this project ultimately encourages readers to ask themselves the following questions: What negative effects emerge when billion-dollar corporations like H&M continue to perpetuate environmental damage instead of re-evaluating their practices? How does H&M continue to change the fashion industry for the worse? In regard to unchanging brands like H&M, what responsibilities and powers do we have as consumers? It is the hope of the researcher to inspire more responsible consumption patterns and increase public awareness of the environment. Fast fashion marketing has likely desensitized the American people to the potential meaning clothing can create in one's life. It is also the hope of the researcher that a more in-depth investigation would be conducted on the strategy of producing low quality garments as part of a business model. This paper discusses the reality that clothing has an "expiration date," similarly to food, and that it seems to be a likely part of H&M's business model to pressure people to continue the relentless and short-lived cycle of buying, using, and tossing; it would be valuable to the reader and others to see more research done on this concept. Clothing can- and should- be a meaningful investment for any consumer. The possibility of creating a healthier consumer-garment relationship is reachable when re-evaluating whether a garment is truly needed in one's wardrobe, and when supporting slow fashion brands when buying a garment is absolutely necessary.

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