

FAST FASHION

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Fast Fashion
The Effects of Fast Fashion

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Abstract

Background: Fast fashion mass produces clothing and accessories at a quicker rate using chemicals that create cheap quality fabrics that are harmful to the environment. As a result, this has led people to overspending and throwing out thousands of clothes per year.

Objective: This study focuses on the impacts of fast fashion on our environment, and garment workers and how to change from fast fashion shopping to sustainable shopping.

Design and Method: The design and method of my research is based on the current issues that are occurring due to fast fashion and the popularity. In my research, I have used peer-reviewed articles, news articles, and documentaries to describe the problems of fast fashion. The research questions are the following: *How does fast fashion affect the environment? What are ways social media is used in the rise of fast fashion companies? What is sustainable shopping? What are methods of sustainable shopping?*

Results: This research allows the audience to know the harms of fast fashion and how controlling the profit of fast fashion companies. The research also tells the audience of the different ways you can reduce your shopping activities by shopping sustainably.

Conclusions: Shoppers should be aware of where their clothes come from and what materials they are made with; by knowing this, they are able to make better decisions of what clothing they are putting on their skin.

Keywords: Fast fashion, clothing, sustainable, social media, climate change, environment

Chapter 1: Introduction

Today's retail experience has completely changed the dynamic of how we shop and view clothing. Purchasing clothing has become more attainable, instead of purchasing clothing at malls we are able to buy clothes from our phones and computers. The change within the fashion industry is due to the rise of fast fashion. Fast fashion is clothing that is mass produced overseas using cheap materials in order to get clothing into stores and sell them at a lower price. Fast fashion has introduced the simplicity of shopping for a lesser cost, unfortunately fast fashion takes away the meaning of what fashion actually is and has harmful repercussions.

The question of why fast fashion appeals to costumers is simple; trendy clothes and a low price. Since fast fashion has appealed to a large audience, the demand is growing extremely high and the demand is continuing to increase. Fast fashion companies are now million-dollar corporations who are taking over the fashion industry and changing the definition of fashion. As the desire for fast fashion clothing increases so does the harmful elements of the fast fashion markets. The aim of this study is to discuss the primary and secondary reasons as to why fast fashion is a problem. The unfamiliarity of the harms of fast fashion shopping is why I chose to conduct my research on fast fashion. Similarly, many fast fashion shoppers I was unaware of what happens behind fast fashion production. Now that I learned the truth of fast fashion, I want to raise awareness of the affects fast fashion has on us, the garment workers and our planet. Using different shopping methods, such as sustainable shopping which buying from secondhand stores and purchasing clothing made ethically by raw materials decreases the harms that are produced by fast fashion. Now more than ever we are conscious of methods of our everyday life that have destroyed our planet.

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One might wonder how clothing impacts the environment; fast fashion produces tremendous amounts of clothing yearly. Fast fashion has increased the amount of clothing we are purchasing and the amount we are disposing “textile waste in U.S. landfills increased almost 40% (39.89%) between 1999 and 2009 and is expected to reach 35.4 billion pounds by 2019” (Norum,2017). In order for fast fashion companies to create lower cost clothing they set up fashion warehouses overseas because the expenses are cheaper. Although fast fashion companies will revenue thousands of dollars yearly, they are not paying their garment workers a livable wage. The working conditions that are provided by fast fashion companies are dangerous and harmful to these workers. Many factory workers have lost their lives due to the harsh conditions, “2013 collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory building in Bangladesh, which claimed 1134 lives, the 2012 Ali Enterprises factory fire in Pakistan that killed more than 250 workers, and the death of 13 people in a leather factory blaze in a suburb of Delhi in 2016 speak to the hazardous conditions in supply chains across South Asia and how the neglect of workplace safety imperils human life” (Mezzadri, 2017 p.1) .

Revealing to the public the truth about fast fashion will change their fast fashion habits, unfortunately the low cost of fast fashion appeals to a wide range of people. However, fashion should not mean sacrificing the lives of our planet and workers across the world. By making better shopping habits we are able to reduce the income of fast fashion companies in order to erase them forever and go back what fashion really was.

RQ#1: How does fast fashion affect the environment?

RQ#2: What are ways social media is used in the rise of fast fashion companies?

RQ#3: What is sustainable shopping?

RQ#4: What are methods of sustainable shopping?

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Chapter 2 will indicate my literature review, Chapter 3 will discuss my methods, Chapter 4 examine my results, and Chapter 5 shows my researches' conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Fashion today is much different than it was twenty years ago, clothing is more accessible in stores and online. Although clothing is easier to find, this has changed the dynamic in the way clothing is made. The clothing that was on the racks twenty years ago was made from materials like real cotton and denim and made ethically here in the United States. Now clothing and production is completely different. Clothing is made overseas and made of synthetic materials because they are cheaper to produce. As a result, retailers like *Zara*, *Forever 21* and *H&M* are able to dominate the fashion industry by the number of products being made. Since the companies use cheap materials, they are able to price their clothing lower than a product made ethically. “Fast fashion companies thrive on fast cycles: rapid prototyping, small batches combined with large variety, more efficient transportation and delivery, and merchandise that is presented "floor ready" on hangers with price tags already attached” (Skov 2002, p. 275). Shoppers have taken notice of the amount of merchandise being brought in stores and are purchasing twice the amount of clothing than before, “Avid consumers are now primed to browse fast fashion stores every three weeks or so in search of new styles” (Skov 2002, p. 276). Fast fashion companies are aware of the increase in customers; and they use the tactics like never repeating the same items in stores twice, customers are then more inclined to purchase the item right then and there. To keep customers coming back, high street retailers routinely source new trends in the field, and purchase on a weekly basis to introduce new items and replenish stock (Tokatli and Kizilgun 2009, p. 146).

By fast fashion companies consistently producing more clothing leads to people buying more and causes the most significant problems in fast fashion. Since most of the pieces are made with low-quality materials consumers use them as a one-time basis and often end up being throw

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them away. Purchasing items to wear only once leads to a massive waste and unused clothing throughout the United States, “the average American throws away approximately 80 pounds of clothing and textiles annually, occupying nearly 5% of landfill space” (Byun, & Sternquist, (2011 p.279). Shoppers are also participating more in fast fashion sales, because the prices are low, they feel as if they cannot resist. This year fast fashion retailer *Pretty Little Thing* had a black Friday sale for 99% off. For anyone especially fast fashion shoppers these sales are hard to decline. “Clothing brand *Pretty Little Thing* offered deals of up to 99% off, with high-heeled shoes on sale for 25p and dresses for 8p” (Blackall 2020, p.1).

Strategies like Black Friday sales and social media has allowed fast fashion companies to target a larger audience. By fast fashion companies creating their own social media pages like *Instagram* and *Twitter* they are able to leer in customers they never had. Social media allows companies to show case their new clothing faster and users can purchase clothes within the social media apps instead of browsing through their website. By using the strategy of social media companies are able to create more business and following. “The fashion Industry is using social media to study trends and anticipate fashion behaviors. It is embracing social media which has enabled it to emerge in the forefront as a phenomenon” (Ahmad 2015, p.1).

The growth of fast fashion companies has expanded the garment factories in countries like Bangladesh. The poor work regulations in these countries benefit the fast-producing industry of fast fashion retailers. Regardless of revenue fast fashion companies make they still subject their employees to work in unkept factories “the factories in the Rana Plaza building passed several social compliance audits that did not require support for basic labour rights; hence, on the day of the collapse workers who were fearful of entering an already cracked building could not exercise a right to refuse unsafe work (Sinkovics 2016 p. 625). Instead of offering livable pay

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and condition, companies much rather ignore what is going on, “rather than working with suppliers to improve ethical compliance over time, multinational companies have often engaged in ‘cut-and-run’ tactics by abandoning factories—sometimes in the middle of an order—that do not meet the required ethical standards (Locke 2009, p. 157). By continuing to purchase from fast fashion retailers we are allowing overseas workers to be treated harshly by rich fast fashion corporations. The fast fashion industry has manipulated their employees and it is being done at our expense.

It seems as if the entire world is benefitting from fast fashion companies, yet many people have realized the issues that come with fast fashion shopping and have quickly turned away. Instead, they have opted for sustainable shopping in stores that make ethical clothing or secondhand stores. Secondhand stores have allowed clothing to have more use instead of being thrown away. Since more people are seeing the effects of climate change, they realize that their decisions in shopping matter. In many instances, we now see younger generations shopping ethically. “Over the past decade, sustainability and ethical conduct have begun to matter in fashion (Emberley, 1998; Moisander and Personen 2002); companies have realized that affordable and trend-sensitive fashion, while typically highly profitable, also raises ethical issues” (Aspers, and Skov 2006, p 120). Sustainable shopping has even taken course online, apps like *Depop* and *Poshmark* allow users to sell and purchase used clothing. During a time where secondhand stores are not as attainable these apps are allowing the public to stray away from fast fashion.

The facts of the fast fashion industry in the literature is meant to introduce the truth to readers. Learning about fast fashion leads to making mindful decisions on their everyday life choices.

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Readers should know the journey their clothing takes before it reaches their hands and how their decisions can affect the lives of other people.

Chapter 3: Methods

I have based my study on the current climate issue and how fast fashion and the public is contributing to the crisis. By overspending the public has allowed fast fashion companies to continue the production of cheap and low-cost clothing. The manufacturing of inexpensive clothing has allowed fast fashion companies to abuse their garment workers and not pay them livable wages. In my research I have discussed the ways to reduce fast fashion shopping by finding new ways to shop smarter to reduce the harms of fast fashion.

For my research, I have used peer reviewed articles which I have found using the Purchase Database and Google Scholar as well as news articles and popular articles found on Google. I used popular posts from Instagram and other social media sites in order to show the posts of fast fashion brands. I watched documentaries like the *True Cost* (Morgan,2015). which interviews garment workers overseas to get their perspective of the work they do. I also watched fashion summits where fast fashion representatives and activist discuss ways to change their brands to become sustainable. Watching these summits has allowed me to gather information firsthand about the opinions and views of fast fashion brands towards the issue of climate change.

Specific key terms used were *Fast fashion, Slow fashion, Sustainable shopping, Climate change, Garment Workers, Overseas.*

My research questions were

RQ#1: How does fast fashion affect the environment?

RQ#2: What are ways social media is used in the rise of fast fashion companies?

RQ#3: What is sustainable shopping?

RQ#4: What are methods of sustainable shopping?

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The Effects of Fast Fashion

The increase of fast fashion has led to clothing landfills across the world. Fast fashion companies are over producing clothing which entails customers are overspending. Both fast fashion companies and consumers will purchase clothing items that will end up in the garbage. Since these items are made of harmful materials that contain plastic, they are contributing waste in the ocean and effects of climate change. One of the ways to reduce the amounts of landfill is to burn the clothing which then results in the destructive fumes to our ozone layer.

Oversea Garment Workers

Since there is little to no work regulations overseas it allows fast fashion companies to abuse their workers, this results to them working in dangerous conditions for less than a livable wage. Many of these workers are women and suffer abuse from their managers which are mostly men. “Studies in Bangladesh highlight high levels of violence; a study conducted by Fair Labor Foundation on garment factories, suggested Bangladesh had the highest rates of violence compared to China, and other Asian countries (Siddiqi, 2003 p. 3). Despite these facts fast fashion companies continue to ignore the lives of their workers

Sustainable Shopping

Sustainable shopping is shopping for clothes that are made ethically with real materials. Instead of being mass produced like fast fashion clothing, only limited clothing items are released. Popular sustainable brands of today are *Reformation*, *Everlane* and *Patagonia*, these companies are based on treating their garment workers with respect and paying them livable wages. Another form of sustainable shopping is buying and donating from secondhand stores. By

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shopping in secondhand stores, it decreases the amount of clothing produced and decreases the amount of clothing that is thrown out.

Limitations

Fast fashion has permitted people of low income to purchase clothing at lower cost. Fast fashion allows everyone to have clothing regardless of the season and the occasion. Fast fashion companies have also helped the economy by creating jobs within their stores and added revenue from the items they sell and tax.

Due to the time limit of the fifteen-week school semester I was not able to further my research. Seeing that the rise of fast fashion is fairly new, the environmental factors are limited. I was also limited due to the pandemic which did not allow me to have person to person contact.

Chapter 4: Results

RQ1: How does fast fashion affect the environment?

Fast fashion companies have completely changed the idea of consumerism, shopping, and fashion. Today clothing is made entirely different from twenty years ago, and the materials are different. Previously, clothing was made more durable and out of real and natural materials such as cotton. Today, fast fashion has completely changed that; fast fashion companies are now using cheap labor and cheap materials in order to make their clothing.

Now fast fashion clothing is made up of unnatural and synthetic materials; one of the most popular materials used in fast fashion clothing is polyester. “The majority of polyester are not biodegradable” (Ureen, 2018 p.1). Fast fashion companies use materials like polyester because they are easier, faster, and cheaper to make. Unfortunately, that also means the materials that we are putting on our skin and body are not good for them, “polyester is, in part derived from petroleum and oil manufacturing industry is the world’s largest pollutant (Ureen, 2018 p.1). On the contrary, when produced ethically, materials like cotton, are softer and more breathable for our bodies. Since fast fashion companies cannot lie about what kind of materials the clothing is made of, most fast-fashion clothing tags note that the clothing might be flammable. Not only is polyester bad for your skin but also bad for the environment “wastewater from textile factories containing leftover dye is difficult to treat and, as such, enters the environment where its toxicity causes serious problems to plant and animal life” (Ureen, 2018 p.1).

The aim of fast fashion companies is to quickly make clothing and accessories and get them in stores in a matter of months to even weeks. This attracts people to purchase fast fashion

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because they know that they will frequently see new items. By making products of low-cost material, they are able to sell their clothing at cheaper rates, which makes the customers more inclined to buy their products. The price tag and accessibility of fast fashion has made shoppers accumulate more clothes, which ends up being thrown out, especially because of how fast trends wear off. Fast fashion is derived from trends, and they are able to feed the public into buying into those trends, however trendy clothes only last a couple of months. Trendy clothing is soon thrown since they are made out of cheap materials, they are not meant to last.

Today piles of fast fashion clothing are sitting in garbage landfills across the United States and the world, “40 million pounds, or 36,125,000 pieces of unwanted clothing and household items were donated and diverted from the landfill over the past twelve months” (Chemicals & Chemistry, 2010 p. 1). One of the latest ways found to get rid of these clothing landfills is by burning them. By burning the clothing, they are getting rid of them, but the toxic elements and air from the fires get admitted into our ozone layer resulting in climate change. (The equivalent of one garbage truck full of clothes is burned or dumped in a landfill every second” (McFall Johnsen 2019 p. 1). Many of the clothing that are not burned will be sent to third world countries like Haiti for them to use. Yet, the amount of clothing donated to these countries has also resulted in giant landfills because they are not being used there either.

Figure 1: Clothing Landfill

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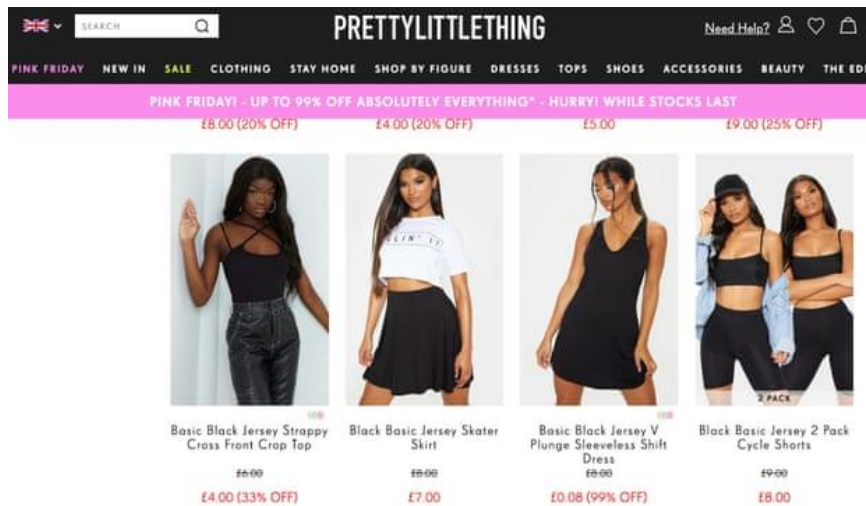


(Spring, 2018, p.1).

By increasing our spending, we are also increasing the amount of clothing we return. Shoppers are often inconvenienced by trying on clothes in the fitting rooms, or the item they bought online did not fit the way they liked. Rarely are the items shipped back to the retailers and sold as brand new; instead, they are thrown out because fast fashion shoppers do not want to deal with those items “shipping returned goods contributes to greenhouse-gas emissions – and much of what they send back ends up in landfills. Each year Americans return about 3.5 billion products, and five billion pounds of returned goods ended up in US landfill” (Renwick, 2020, p.1). The cheap cost and labor allow fast fashion companies not to care since they rarely lose money over these issues. The amount of landfill that is added solely on returned items aids climate change, “landfill waste from returns alone contributes 15 million metric tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere” (Renwick, 2020, p.1). Just by trying on clothing in stores, knowing how that item fits, and being sure about your purchase can make a difference by reducing the landfill. Below is a photo of the fast fashion brand *Pretty Little Thing* and the black Friday sale the company had for 99% off.

Figure 2: Critics attack Pretty Little Thing’s 8p Black Friday dress deal

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(Blackhall, 2020 p. 1)

Fast fashion is the second leading cause of climate change; fast fashion companies have been allowed to completely take over the fashion industry and change it to make it worse than it was. Our shopping tendencies have allowed these companies to abuse their power and ultimately create the collapse of fashion and what it truly is.

RQ#2 What are ways social media is used in the rise of fast fashion?

Social media and fast fashion go hand in hand; the rise of the internet has allowed fast fashion companies to expand their customers worldwide. Some of the most popular fast fashion companies are only online retailers such as *Missguided* and *Pretty Little Thing*. By using social media, they have marketed their business and expand their revenue. Instagram is one of the leading contributors to fast-fashion consumerism. Fast fashion companies and famous Instagram influencers work together in order to market their products. These influencers take pictures in fast fashion clothing and convince their audience to purchase the same things; they also persuade their audience by giving them custom discount codes. These same influencers are even using YouTube as a way to market fast fashion products; all over YouTube are videos of shopping hauls or shopping sprees where they show off what they have purchased. Youtubers will link the

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products in description boxes in order for the public to also buy the products, “Young adults are power users of social media sites .They engage themselves with their favorite fashion brands through these online platforms and consider their opinions about brands important .According to “Young Adult Revealed” a global survey was carried out on 12603 people from 18 to 24 years old among 26 countries to find out how much young adults engage online with brands every day. The result shows 28% talked about brand on a discussion forum, 19% added brand related content to their homepage on favorite social sites” (Qualman, 2002 p. 2).

Instagram has recently made an update that has changed the use of Instagram to benefit fast-fashion retailers. Instagram is now a place to shop instead of sharing pictures with friends and family mainly. This change allowed fast fashion companies to always be in the line of vision of Instagram users. Along with unwanted ads while scrolling through your Instagram feed or watching someone’s stories, “Social media has become one of the most popular fashionable tools which creates link between brand and the consumer. This link not only gives boost to the purchase intent it also increases the oral communication” (Ahmad, 2015 p. 2).

RQ#3 What is sustainable shopping? & What are the methods of sustainable shopping?

Sustainable clothing is the very opposite of fast fashion. Instead, it promotes livable wages to garment workers. The clothing is made from ethical materials and fabrics like natural cotton, denim, silk, and wool, “sustainable clothing offers a possible solution to these problems. It has been defined as clothing that “incorporates one or more aspects of social and environmental sustainability, such as Fair-Trade manufacturing or fabric containing organically-grown raw material” (Goworek, 2012 p.938). Sustainable shopping encourages shoppers to stray away from the typical fast fashion tendencies in order to help with the problem of global warming that comes from purchasing fast fashion items. The goal of sustainable shopping is for

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the customer to be aware of the behind the scenes of fast fashion companies and how sustainable shopping benefits the environment. Instead of large garment factories in China, Cambodia, and India used by fast-fashion retailers, sustainable companies make their clothing in the United States or small factories overseas. Sustainable clothing can also be made from other items to create something new. Popular sustainable clothing brands include *Reformation*, *Everlane*, and *Patagonia*, “Patagonia was successful internally by having their entire product line use organic cotton” (O’Rourke, 2017, p.119), which focus only on making several items in order to avoid mass production. Another form of sustainable shopping includes shopping at second-hand stores like *Goodwill* and *Salvation Army*; doing so, decreases the number of clothes being produced. Instead of throwing out clothes that are no longer wanted to donate, the clothes help reduce the amount thrown into landfills.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The rise of fast fashion retailers has shifted what fashion is completely; it has stripped fashion from its true art form. Designers have taken stands against fast fashion companies in for the sake of their brands and the environment. Many fast-fashion retailers have stolen the ideas of name brand designers and made them into trendy and inexpensive fashion. Although many fast fashion companies have been faced with lawsuits, they still are not stopping because they feel as if they are invincible, especially because many consumers are not willing to stop purchasing from them. Since we are the ones giving these companies so much power, we are also to blame. The accessibility of fast fashion has grown into shoppers, thinking they need more, and fast fashion brands provide it, and the cycle continues.

Since the cycle has gotten as far as it has, it has led to fast fashion companies moving overseas to underdeveloped countries where little to no labor laws exist. The move means the individuals making the clothes that you will throw out or give away in a month are paid a few dollars, which is not enough to support them and their families. Besides the little they are paid; they are forced to work in dangerous places without any regulations. Owing to that fact, many of these workers

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have gotten hurt or died because the garment factories may be poorly maintained. Several factories collapsed or were destroyed by fire. Yet, nothing is being done to help the factory workers or diminish creating fast fashion. Many of these factory workers have to work with dangerous chemicals that affect them, their children, and even the individuals who are not working in the factories but live in the cities where they are located. These chemicals are being dumped into the water, which affects the environment.

Some types of fast fashion send's thousands of bits of plastic into the ocean. Additionally, the millions and millions of clothing thrown out yearly are piling up at the dump. Fast fashion impacts our planet.

These are the reasons I chose to do my research on fast fashion; right before our eyes, the fashion industry has changed. This change is harming people all over the world and our environment and will continue to do so quicker and quicker if more people are not aware of the harm that comes with their shopping habits. Instead, we should focus on shopping methods that are better for the environment, as I previously have mentioned, which is sustainable shopping. Sustainable shopping is shopping methods that do not include purchasing from fast fashion companies, so it is the opposite of fast fashion. Sustainable shopping includes buying from second hand clothing shops, donating unused clothes, and buying from a small owned business who that focuses on making their products with sustainable materials, cotton, and made in the United States where factory workers are not exploited.

Future Research

Future research should focus on the ongoing implementations of fast fashion and how these factors are affecting the environment and the health of garment workers. Emphasizing to the public of the environmental impacts that fast fashion causes yearly in order to keep the public

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aware. As well as, monitoring how fast fashion companies are treating their employees and the amount of landfill as it grows yearly. Researches should continue pressuring fast fashion brands to change their methods of producing clothes we can make attempts to change the fashion industry to become sustainable. By doing more research on fast fashion the public becomes aware of their destructive habits and possibly slow down the profits that go into fast fashion companies.

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