

**Contemporary Issues in the Fashion Industry: BUF 4700**

**Final Research Paper**

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Dark Side of the Fashion Industry

The fashion industry remains the cornerstone of popular culture and defines the lifestyles of millions of people worldwide. It sets trends and creates innovative ideas that make everyday routine original and inspiring by dressing and creating unique looks. However, it can be unexpected that the same industry violates ethical norms and laws, and it is a leading contributor to the total amount of waste that humans produce. The dark side of fashion endangers people's well-being, undermines human values by exploiting workers, and worsens the environment.

**Environmental Issues**

The fashion industry continues its expansion and impact on people's lives, and it generates substantial profits that strengthen this direction. It is essential to admit that the increase in the world's population will lead to an increased amount of consumption, and the industry will take advantage of this situation to enhance its operability and sales. This perspective does not

create significant issues, though the problems arise in the long-term development as it shapes the tendency of overconsumption. It means that the new customer will buy products in enormous quantities since fashion uses marketing and the decisive impact of PR management to stimulate sales. In turn, it will necessitate the production of clothing to match the estimated demand on the market, and companies will implement different approaches to minimize the production costs, including illegal ones. They further ignore the ecological issues, and the big brands are the main contributors to the worsened environmental situation in the world.

Many companies do not use sustainable standards in manufacturing, and the means of production also generates enormous volumes of hazardous emissions. As mentioned before, customers' interest in buying new clothes will continue to grow as a result of the increasing population which is expected to be at around 10 billion by 2050 (Banks, 2016). This will create an exponential boost in the carbon footprint that will eventually harm the environment. "Fashion production makes up 10% of humanity's carbon emissions, dries up water sources, and pollutes rivers and streams" (*Environmental Sustainability*, 2021). Pollution and worsening air quality are the main problems that question the supposed development of the industry since it does not recognize or directly respond to the situation. The hidden price of beauty that people who live near manufacturing plants pay for is terrible living conditions because most plants are located in

developing countries.

The plants make the

people there suffer

because they

adversely affect their

health. Savar

residents in



**Figure 1**

Bangladesh claim that the water in a river where textile companies dump their waste creates sores on the body and that those who wash their hands or face in the water get fevers and skin irritation (Regan, 2020). Unfortunately, most people do not have any choice but to drink this same water. They are hopeless since they lack the funds to buy a filter or drill a well for deep water.

### **Waste Problems**

Another related problem is wasted products and materials, and it is reasonable to distinguish the environmental and wasting issues since they emerge from different sources.

Waste is a direct contribution of consumers who buy the clothes or support the fashion brands,

though they do not use them effectively. The lack of conscious consumption and misunderstanding of the outcomes of generated waste strengthens the discussed environmental issues, though customers only encircle and sustain the negative effects mentioned above. In the United States, an average of 35 kilograms of textile waste is created per person every year (Charpail, 2017). The same source confirms that most of these individuals do not wear the purchased clothes on a regular basis, and they can try them a few times and throw them in the garbage can. The same people will buy new products, and this process repeats by following the same attitude of making purchases and collecting new waste.

This issue denotes the personal contribution to the environmental issues and ecological crisis caused by the waste of textile products. Also, the same concern remains underestimated in regard to its impact on the current situation, and every purchase and choice matters since it can increase or decrease the amount of personal waste. It is possible to question the recycling practices that strive to limit worn clothes as they do not motivate people to revise their behaviors and view on sustainability. Eventually, the fashion industry continues to maintain unethical approaches to the consumption of its products, and consumers follow the same position that encircles the adverse effects that increase the amount of waste. People remain the equal contributor to the environmental problems, and the fashion industry avoids this discussion since

it will cut its profits. The ineffective use of clothing only strengthens this adverse trend that supports the fashion brands to keep their position.

### **Economic and Labor Challenges**

Socio Economic problems constitute another topic that concerns the issue of labor and exploitation of workers by fashion companies. Many brands benefit from outsourcing and establishing their factories in developing countries to pay fewer taxes and salaries, and they further use the opportunity of finding leeways to avoid the legal consequences of their actions. The fashion industry has a reputation for embracing an all-in/anything-goes attitude to diversity. Nowadays, there are all-black runway shows, all-Asian fashion editorials, and prominent transgender models, but this is all just racial progress if the garment workers are ignored along with the structural conditions that make their work necessary and exploitable (Pham, 2019). Because of the continued high demand for low-cost apparel, countries such as Bangladesh, China, and Mexico are sought after due to their poor socioeconomic standing worldwide (Carlile, 2022). A company can make an official statement that it benefits the host country by creating workplaces and employment opportunities that directly lead to the improvement of its well-being. However, it can hide the actual working conditions and salaries, and most of these workers endure unbearable pressure that consists of unhealthy schedules and overwork.

Furthermore, the majority of these cases demonstrate the exploitation of women and children, and they further do not receive



**Figure 2**

adequate payments for the stressful and unbearable working shifts. The fashion industry continues to take advantage of using these tactics and shifting to other countries that allow them to maintain their unethical practices. Fashion businesses tend to pay "at least the minimum legal wage" of the country they are located to garment workers. Still, countries such as China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and India have a minimum wage that only represents between half to a fifth of a living wage. A living wage should ideally be obtained in a typical working week (no more than 48 hours) and allow garment workers to buy food for themselves and their families, pay rent, pay for healthcare, clothes, transportation, and education, with a little bit saved up in case something unexpected happens (Roeland, 2018). A living wage is not the case for most garment workers as they barely make enough money to survive, but since they are legally getting

paid enough in their respective countries, it is swept under the rug. These issues are challenging to monitor and prevent due to the limitations created by legal barriers and brands, further establishing complex organizational structures to take less legal responsibility for these operations. Corruption and human rights violations remain the ongoing challenge for the industry that struggles to resolve, though the alternatives and legal business mean the loss of the opportunity to generate substantial profits from these strategies.

### **Solutions and Recommendations**

Nevertheless, the struggle against these problems intensifies since it becomes impossible to diminish or ignore the consequences of these practices maintained by the industry. Different organizations and activists take a leading role in investigating crimes and harmful activities behind fashion brands. These measures remain insufficient since the current situation is global and impacts every individual and country, and it is vital to create awareness and effective steps to initiate the changes on a different level. “Conscious consumption is consuming to minimize impact; consuming differently, without excess or waste, so that there is enough, for everyone, forever” (*Why Conscious Consumption?* 2022). Conscious consumption can include the literacy and understanding of the harmful effects of the manufacturing process, and it involves the knowledge of the personal contribution to the problem. The same measures support the

individual in making ethical decisions and reducing the carbon footprint and waste of clothes.

Consequently, the possible solution to the discussed problems is a comprehensive revision of maintained practices by global brands, and it is crucial to address the necessity of conscious consumption. Customers have to take an active part in monitoring the problems related to sustainability and human rights, and companies must improve their transparency and build a commitment to CSR principles. The integration of sustainable standards with global awareness can be a solution to the ongoing crisis created by the industry. Personal contribution can be a decisive step in changing the fashion industry and creating a better world.



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