

Textiles : Fashion Industry's take on Sustainability

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Author Note

**Introduction**

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### **Introduction**

As people become gradually knowledgeable about the deterioration of the environment and ecosystem, the fashion industry has been a known contributor. Ultimately, it is merely impossible for the industry to turn a blind eye to such a reality. Despite pollution and contamination being around for a while, people still have the ability to take it upon themselves to seek alternative methods and lifestyle choices in order to implement practices that can at least slow down the rotting of the earth. The process of creating fashion products involves trial and error, multiple drafts, and many indecisive decisions. When applying this to the production of clothes, one can only imagine how many resources are used to achieve a satisfied result. Despite the industry being the grassroot of this issue, consumers are not making the situation any better. The demand for certain pieces of clothing have forced the hand of clothing businesses to push out as many products as they can to capitalize on sales. “You must solve the issue of excess inventory” before sustainability, said John Thorbeck, chairman of consultancy Chainge Capital and a former industry executive. The industry has “a tremendous amount of inefficiency. The idea that we are going to switch focus from inventory to sustainability without a solution that embraces both is very hypocritical (Cheng .2019)”.

Amongst these people and industries, the fashion industry has emphasized their concern for the environment and ecosystem and have projected their acknowledgement in more ways than one. This is done by knowing where the problem emerged from, the effect it has on the environment and ecosystem, and what possible solutions and alternatives can be put in place.

### **Textile Sustainability**

When it comes to the preservation of the environment and fashion, sustainability has always been the common denominator. The fashion industry has been known to use an immense amount of dyes, cloth, and one time use materials that clog up and stain the environment. *Pressure grows to make fashion more sustainable* by Eline Schaart explains how the production of raw materials in the fashion industry uses up so many essential resources. “Producing raw materials — from cotton to artificial fibers — as well as spinning, weaving and dyeing require enormous amounts of water and chemicals (Schaart .2019)”. That same water and chemicals are then disposed off into the ocean, contaminating the ecosystem of ocean life. Textile sustainability is a prominent issue pertaining to environmental upkeep, as it contributes more to pollution than international flights and shipping combined. “Clothes contribute more to climate change than international flights and shipping combined, and the problem is getting worse (Schaart .2019)”. This alarming fact alone raises questions as to whether or not the fashion industry is actually taking action to suppress the issue.

Taking into account who is affected by this issue, it is a no brainer as to why swift action must be taken. All life on earth is affected by textile sustainability, however it seems as if people are looking at just one “subject of the whole painting”. People’s health are also affected by fashion sustainability to things such as but not limited to ; factory fumes, poor work environments, and immense production of clothing which tires the worker. Generally, there is a social aspect of fashion sustainability that isn't talked about as much. *Sustain Your Style*, an independent platform has even gone on to say fast fashion is also to blame. “In reality, this continuous accumulation of cheap garments is only possible because of a constant reduction of production costs. This, in turn, has serious consequences on our health, our planet, and on garment workers’ lives (*Sustain Your Style*)”.

To expand as to what fast fashion has done to the environment, it is notorious for its consumer habits wearing an item only once and never wearing it again. *These Facts shows how Unsustainable the*

*Fashion industry is* by Morgan Mcfall-Johnsen provides alarming facts on how fast fashion has come to the expense of the environment's well being. "Fast fashion makes shopping for clothes more affordable, but it comes at an environmental cost. The fashion industry produces 10% of all humanity's carbon emissions and is the second-largest consumer of the world's water supply (Johnsen 2020)". With time, it is evident that without swift action in the near future this issue could be out of reach.

Overall, the question of who is being affected goes full circle. It may not affect one group directly, but eventually each group will experience the consequences. It is a cause/effect situation in which the cause has to be controlled to the extent that new practices can actually minimize the risk being placed socially, economically, and environmentally.

### **Fashion Houses take on sustainability**

Because of the overflowing issues the fashion industry has burdened the environment with, a set of guidelines were created to hopefully contain the practices recognized to contribute to environmental/ecosystem pollution. The Environmental Product Declaration document communicates to factories and other places of clothing production the lifecycle of the materials used and how long it takes for them to break down in the outside world. *Fashion's Sustainability Journey: Key Tools to Know* by Femi Preumbally explains how informative the document is and the range of information it provides. "These guidelines ensure that a pair of jeans with an EPD follows the same rules and guidelines for their product category as another pair anywhere in the world. Internationally standardized, independently verified, and globally recognized, EPDs are a great way to tell the environmental story of a wide range of products—from a pair of jeans to a train!(Perumpally .2020)". Although the EDP doesn't have a physical presence, it still enforces certain protocols and practices as if it were the law.

The EDP is one of many things that have been put into play when it comes to the extraction of the fashion industry being a key component of environmental pollution. If fashion sustainability is not taken seriously, in the long run the environment will not be as safe to thrive in. Many practices in the fashion industry now are seeds waiting to sprout disaster. For instance, the water consumption to make garments.

“It takes about 700 gallons of water to produce one cotton shirt. That's enough water for one person to drink at least eight cups per day for three-and-a-half years. It takes about 2,000 gallons of water to produce a pair of jeans. That's more than enough for one person to drink eight cups per day for 10 years. That's because both the jeans and the shirt are made from a highly water-intensive plant: cotton (Johnsen .2020)”.

An essential like water being turned into waste is very significant to acknowledge because there are people without water in general who could use it differently. It does not take a genius to realize the reason why so many resources are being used is because so many things are in demand. Fashion has grown to be a part of people's “appetite” when it comes to their selective lifestyles. If fashion brands do not start practicing exclusivity and less production making, who knows what will become of the Earth many years to come.

### **Can fashion and sustainability share the same stage?**

*Can the Fashion Industry Ever Really be Sustainable* by TFL mentions that despite efforts to eliminate this issue, there is no silencing the demand for fashion. “Yes, the industry is working to reduce the environmental footprint of its products. But the problem has now shifted to the consumption side: the insatiable appetite for fashion means people are buying more and more clothes. Since 2012, there has been a 10 percent increase in the amount of clothing purchased in the UK alone (TFL .2019)” . There is

no quick fix to a problem this severe. However, there are many organizations and laws that aim to commit to a long term solution

### **Conclusion**

Now that the hard facts and information about fashion sustainability and how it affects the environment, it is in best interest to keep innovating different ways to slow down the deterioration. As time goes on, more information is being gathered and is available for people to indulge in. From guidelines being available for factories and newer alternatives being used in the workplace, it is evident that there is some action being taken. It is now nearly impossible to turn a blind eye to this topic because although fashion does not seem to be everyone's cup of tea, it might be affecting it one way or the other.

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