

Fashion and Media
Social Media, Fast Fashion, & Sustainability

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Introduction

Fashion has been portrayed through the media for years specifically through editorials. Magazines like Vogue, Elle, Harper's Bazaar have taken the most gorgeous photos from fashion weeks all around the world. They were your insight into the fashion industry. You were able to see how designers would market their collection through the use of visuals all from magazine pages. They were the 'bible' to many kids who dreamed of growing up and getting a career in the fashion world. Now, as we're entering a more technological age, magazines are no longer prominent. A number of magazine companies have shifted from editorial print to online magazines whereas others stopped print editorials. Sadly, others were not as fortunate and had to close down completely. You could possibly say magazines are dead.

What is also dead is individuality. Everyone wants to wear what celebrities are wearing and making sure their outfit gets a lot of likes on Instagram. No one is really concerned about how the clothing they are buying is manufactured or the affect it has on the planet. It's sad but, also, no one is really aware. The only thing people are really aware of are fast fashion brands and how it is similar to what Kim Kardashian or Cardi B is wearing. As you read, you will get a sense of how social media has played a role in the increase of fast fashion brands and how they are now popular. Also, you will see how fast fashion is not good for the planet and how it's truly harmful to all those involved. As shoppers, we need to be more aware and concerned about our clothing. It touches our skin and sensitive parts of our body. We could always buy new clothes, but we will not be able to buy a new body. The harmful chemicals that touch our clothing almost immediately touches us and our skin. That is not okay. A change needs to be made along with a spread of awareness. The more people who know will bring about a faster amount of change. If

more and more people fight for sustainability than it will become a topic of discussion at fast fashion brands. They would then realize that they need to make a change in the use of their fabrics and textiles and hopefully be more careful in how they create our clothes. That's more important than looking like the best dressed celebrity of the week.

Social Media

The decline in magazines has started the digital age. Popular social media apps like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook have taken over. It has become the new wave of marketing. All requiring you to use your smartphone, laptop, or tablet. It's easier and faster. You are now able to keep in touch with a particular company with ways provided through the application. With Twitter, you are able to retweet posts from a company and comment on what you may or may not like. For Instagram, companies and brands have verified accounts where they are able to post a video or photo to their story or provide a link in which you swipe up to connect to the website right from the app. This helps for consumers to get a preview of what the business is doing next. Also, social media makes it easier to know what is going on. For example, celebrities who are walking red carpets can tag designers on their Instagram posts to allow for viewers to know where the outfits are from. Ashley Barnett of A. Barnett Style says, *"Social media and fashion have grown to be one of the best collaborations to exist today. The variety of social media platforms has allowed fashion inspirations to be at the fingertips of many who seek daily inspiration."* You might be thinking, "What does this all mean?" Well, this means that no one is buying fashion magazines, and everyone looks to Instagram for fashion advice. Millennials all around the world are posting pictures of their own outfits and giving out fashion inspiration to those who might be looking for it. Hashtags like #fashion is mentioned almost 13 million times a month compared to #ootd (outfit of the day) which is mentioned 140 times. Social media has completely transformed fashion.

Instagram has become one of the best platforms for fashion. There are roughly over 800 monthly users that use this app with the highest engagement rate compared to any other social media application. Fashion brands use Instagram to easily connect with their audience. It's an

easier approach to figuring out what the consumer may or may not want while also being able to communicate with them. This allows for brands to see who really purchases their products and have a more accurate target market. Real people have an opportunity at being represented with such diversity in the world – body shapes, skin tones, and gender inclusivity. Simone Suber of Suber Media says, *“In many ways social media has democratized fashion – difference sizes, price points, and specialized styles are more accessible to the masses.”* A whole new world has been created with easier access to fashion and the ideas that follow with it.

In the midst of this new world, a new set of ‘celebrity’ has been created and those are fashion influencers. What’s a fashion influencer? Possibly you. Do you post pictures of your outfits almost every day and tag the designer or store in which you got the product? Do you discuss if you like the clothing or hate it? Regular people who post daily pictures of their outfits have been become extremely popular, or even famous, due to their following. It has even gotten some people modeling contracts or business deals of their own. So, what do they do? Well, they post pictures of their outfits and if they have about 50k or more followers, they are able to charge at least 1k to post a specific brand. For example, fashion influencer Camille Charriere is a fashion influencer with about 494k followers. She is paid to attend events, designer fashion shows, and fashion dinners; also, she’s paid to wear the clothes from said designer and to post about the clothes. Fashion influencers are basically marketing themselves and turning into their own brand. Instagram has created this. And, it’s because of Instagram that people rely on this app for fashion influencers advice on destination travels, makeup ideas, and clothing. *Oh, especially clothing!* The most popular brands have excellent marketing strategies in how they choose an influencer to wear their clothes and popularize the brand. Most brands with influencers are fast fashion brands. Thus, creating a new height for fast fashion to flourish.

Fast Fashion

The brand *Good on You* defines fast fashion as “cheap, trendy clothing, that samples ideas from catwalk or celebrity culture and turns them into garments in high street stores at breakneck speed” (Rauturier, 2018). Consumers want a “continuous cycle of trend-led clothing all year round” (Gilliand, 2019) instead of having to wait for seasonal collections to be released. Popular fast fashion brands are H&M, Zara, TopShop, Fashion Nova, and Pretty Little Thing.

But, first, let us go back a little in history and detail how fast fashion got started. Fashion was slow in the 1800s (Rauturier, 2018). Materials like leather and wool had to be sourced, prepared, and weaved by the designer. Then, the Industrial Revolution happened and allowed for the sewing machine to be created. This new technology allowed for making clothes to be faster and easier. Dress shops were now being created (Rauturier, 2018) to accommodate the middle class. Around this time, sweatshops started to become popular because of how many garment workers were working in one particular business or area. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in 1911 was one of the first incidents that happened that effected garment workers and how people treated the way people who created our clothes. Fast forward to the 1960s-70s where fashion trends started to get really popular and fashion designers were at the peak of their careers due to their creativity. Toward the end of the 1990s-2000s, fast fashion stores became very popular. H&M, Zara, and TopShop came to the forefront in shopping along with the beginning of online shopping which made things a little bit easier and less complicated. Sadly, things became too easy and now fast fashion brands are taking an easier way out by copying designs by bigger designer brands.

Key factors that help to identify fast fashion brands are:

- Numerous amounts of styles that all are based off of the latest trends.

- A short amount of turnaround time between when a garment is seen on the catwalk/celebrity and when it's in store.
- Sweatshops where wages are low and the working conditions are not safe.
- Low quality materials.

Fashion Nova's CEO, Richard Saghian, stated to WWD that the company grew 600% due to its large social media platform. They have hired numerous fashion influencers as a marketing strategy. Celebrities like Kylie Jenner and Cardi B post pictures of themselves in the clothing and tag the brand. Fashion Nova has capitalized on the reach from said influencers and have created a 'see it, want it' mentality within consumers.

Zara has 1600 stores in about 58 countries. The Spanish retailers sells its own label clothes in the latest trends and styles. It is said that about 30,000 units of product are manufactured annually and 18,000 designs a year are averaged to be manufactured in about 3 weeks. You would think that the store would keep all the clothes in store for a while, but no. Zara restocks their stores twice a week.

PrettyLittleThing was founded in Manchester in 2012 by two brothers, Umar and Adam Kamani. They've prided themselves on "forward thinking fashion ... aimed at bringing killer, affordable style to female fashion breakers and makers" (Lillington, 2017). The company sales increased by 400% in the 12 months to February 2016 (Lillington, 2017). CEO Kamani was quoted saying, "Our customers are constantly on the lookout for a perfect dress for their next night out and our affordable price tags allow them to achieve regular wardrobe updates – even on the tightest budgets" (Lillington, 2017).

Forever 21 is one of the longest run fast fashion stores. The company has over 600 stores in countries spanning from the United States, Canada, Europe, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines.

They are based in Los Angeles and has become “a staple for shopping malls and local plazas everywhere” (Ehlers, 2016).

To dig a little deeper, lets discuss why these brands are so popular. Yes, fashion influencers make the clothes look good. Yes, this is what’s in style but why must we wear what’s in style? For years, magazines and now Instagram are telling us what’s cool and what we should be wearing. But that’s the point of marketing, right? Making consumers believe they need something they probably don’t. Those who love fashion are probably very obsessed with watching the fashion shows during fashion week from New York, London, and Paris. We see what these famous designers have created and want them instantly in our closet. But most of us can’t afford it so we go to these fast fashion brands that make cheaper versions of the real thing. Granted, most of these brands get sued for copyright infringement, but still, we have a version that suits our standards for the time being. But why are we settling for less? We know these brands specialize in making cheap clothes with cheap fabrics and textiles. We know these items that we crave so badly will never compare to the real thing. So, settling makes no sense. These clothes are going to rip or look dingy after a few wears and we’re going to have to buy something new a week or two later. We’re wasting money on clothes that aren’t worth it. What’s worse is that the demographics for these brands are millennials who already can’t afford it. Money is being wasted when you buy similar items almost every two weeks because the original item shopped no longer looks decent. Also, it’s been surveyed that consumers get rid of clothes after posting one or two pictures on Instagram. It’s like the piece of clothing has been seen too many times and needs to go which is completely ridiculous. The point of fashion is to buy clothing you will really appreciate and cherish. You want to keep these items for years and get your moneys worth. No one should want to buy clothes knowing they will get rid of it soon. It’s

insane. Consumers need to go back to giving their money to businesses that truly care about their customers and how they create clothes. Businesses that have high values and love for their consumers know how to make them come back for more. Fast fashion brands only have our attention for the time being. Bigger and better things are happening, slowly but surely.

Sustainability

To begin, what is sustainability? Sustainability is the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level. Is fast fashion sustainable? Fast fashion is NOT sustainable. The fashion industry, in general, is the “second largest polluter of clean water globally after agriculture” (Rauturier, 2018). Fast fashion brands have an increased amount of pressure to create and design clothes and send them straight from sweatshops and into the stores itself. Problems within fast fashion are the “negative environmental impact, water pollution, the use of toxic chemicals and increasing levels of textile waste” (Perry, 2018). More importantly, these problems are dangerous and are affecting the planet. Another negative of fast fashion are the textiles being used. Polyester is a fabric that’s used by almost every fast fashion manufacturer. It is extracted from fossil fuels and “can shed microfibers that add to the increasing levels of plastic in our oceans” (Rauturier, 2018). Cotton, a natural fiber, is also detrimental to the planet. It requires a lot of care like enormous amounts of water and pesticides. This could potentially lead to droughts and extreme “stress on water basins and other environmental concerns” (Rauturier, 2018). And, let’s not forget about leather. This also impacts the environment; “300kg of chemicals are added for every 900kg of animal hides” (Rauturier, 2018). Can you imagine the damage that’s doing to the Earth? Also, let’s not forget about the people who work these jobs. Garment workers get paid low wages to work in dangerous environments that can affect their mental and physical health. In my opinion, I don’t think fast fashion is worth it.

To continue, some fast fashion brands have realized the errors in their ways and are trying to become sustainable. H&M, for example, has a sustainable line within the brand that is supposed to be created from all recycled clothes. The brand has released a report describing how they plan to take charge on sustainability within their company. They will soon be launching the

seventh edition of the Conscious Exclusive Collection which is clothes all re-created from “regenerated nylon fiber and recycled silver” (Samaha, 2018). Head of sustainability at H&M, Anna Gedda, spoke with Forbes on how the company defines sustainability and how they plan to move forward with their plans. Gedda states, “To us, sustainability is everything we do as a company, all our actions, to take responsibility on the impact we have on people and workers along the value chain, and also on the planet and natural resources needed to create our collections. When we define sustainability, we always take long term vision of the business, so we use the resources not only in a way to meet the demand of present generation, but future presentations. And if we want to continue to be relevant to future generations, we have to think how fashion is made and enjoyed today” (Samaha, 2018). In other words, the word sustainability means if they treat their company negatively then it will affect workers, consumers, and the planet. They have to think about how clothes are being created, if it’s beneficial for the planet, and if future consumers would want to wear their clothes knowing how bad fast fashion is for the environment. Gedda continues to talk about the plan for the future and how H&M will be completely sustainable by 2040. By 2020, all cotton used by H&M will come from sustainable sources; organic, recycled, and Better Cotton. By 2030, the products being produced will come from healthier materials such as recycled polyester or Econyl which is 100% regenerated nylon fiber that’s made from fishnets and other nylon waste. By 2040, the company is said to be climate positive which means that the process of the clothes being made will be beneficial to the environment because extra carbon dioxide in the atmosphere will be removed. In my opinion, it’s very easy to draw and create a plan. But it is not always easy to implement it. I applaud H&M for their efforts, but I’ll be happier when more change is in effect. Also, Zara has created a sustainable line within the brand called ‘Join Life.’ The collection is made from “eco-friendly

materials such as organic cotton, recycled wool, and forest friendly wood fiber” (Brittlebank, 2016). Factories associated with the ‘Join Life’ collection are supposed to be “powered by renewable energy and use water efficient manufacturing processes” (Brittlebank, 2016). In order for a piece of clothing to be selected for the ‘Join Life’ collection, it needs to have a numerous amount of qualities. For fabric, it has to be made from either “Better Cotton approved cotton, Lenzing Modal, organic cotton, Tencel, recycled cotton, recycled polyester, or recycled polyamide” (Fernandez, 2016). It has to be constructed in one of Inditex’s, parent company of Zara, “Green to Wear” technology meaning water recycling and wet process for the primary fabric which must get a grade of A or B in Inditex’s environmental sustainability standard. The majority of Zara’s sustainability efforts are in store with less electricity usage and greenhouse gas emissions. Zara’s motto for the campaign is “Clothing That Respects the Environment” and has a video titled “Boxes of the Past” where artists are recreating old Zara cardboard boxes and turning them into pieces of art.

Lastly, how can us as consumers be more sustainable? Well, first, we need to stop encouraging the ‘throw away’ culture. The ‘throw away’ culture is the consistent need to throw away clothes we’ve worn 2 or 3 times and to always purchase what’s new at fast fashion stores because it’s what’s in style for the time being. These retailers don’t care about where your old clothes go as long as you buy the new ones. And that’s not okay. Where are those clothes going? Landfills. In the UK, about “235 million pieces of clothes were sent to landfills” (Rauturier, 2018). This is adding to pollution and a bad environment. So, back to my original question, what can we do? You can recreate clothes from the clothes you already have. For example, you can turn a long sleeve shirt into a short sleeve shirt but cutting the sleeves off. Or, you can turn a regular shirt into a cropped top by cutting off the bottom of it. Another idea is getting fabrics,

sewing, and creating your own clothes. It might be extra work but it's better than buying new clothes every month. Also, you can thrift shop. Thrift shops are stores that sell used or old clothes from people who no longer wanted them. You can find some very nice pieces of clothing when going to a thrift shop and the prices are always marked down. A popular thrift shop is L Train Vintage and they sell so much clothing. You will find something in the racks and leave with articles of clothing you can revamp and make your own. Another idea is using Instagram or another social media platform and selling your clothes. People may be looking for something you no longer want and be able to purchase it off of you. Or, you could tag thrift shops in the area you live and bring attention to people who would love to shop there. These are not a lot of ideas but it's a start to a change.

Conclusion

As stated previously, fashion magazines are no longer relevant. Instagram has taken over and are telling consumers what's in or out of style. Sustainability is slowly becoming popular within companies because they've realized the damage it's doing to the planet.

Honestly, I'm a fast fashion shopper. But, with this research, I am slowly changing my ways. When I was younger, and first started online shopping, I would buy clothes that I probably didn't need almost once a month. I thought I absolutely needed these items. My closet started to overflow, and I would just donate whatever I didn't wear anymore. I donated clothes monthly and most of the clothes I was donating were clothes I bought about a month or two previously. I was wasting my money and buying clothing that I really didn't care about or looked horrible after being worn or washed. Why? I looked at my Instagram and saw these beautiful models and fashion influencers wearing these amazing clothes. And, I'm not going to lie, I go on Instagram looking for the outfit inspiration. But I no longer want to buy clothes that won't last me. It's a waste. Always wanting to look like someone else or wear an outfit similar to someone else is disheartening. It's taking away my individuality. I can be no one but myself and I'm pretty awesome. My style will always be my style. Also, I've realized that it's not about what a person is wearing that makes it look cool or stylish but it's how a person wears it. You can wear the ugliest outfit ever but your confidence in wearing it is what will make others feel inspired to wear their ugliest outfit as well. Furthermore, I have started to thrift shop. My best friend told me about thrift shopping years ago, but I thought it was so boring. I gave it another shot and it's the most fun you can ever have. You find old, vintage designer clothes at half or 75% the difference of the original price. It's amazing. Also, thrift shops are pretty huge so you will be in there for hours. You go through the women's clothing and men's clothing and can find some real eclectic

pieces of clothing. I have purchased numerous WWE shirts that are extremely expensive at wrestling events and I have spent about \$6 on each. Thrift shopping saves you money and helps to recycle fashion. It also allows for people to be individuals and go against the regular. You feel a sense of freedom from not shopping at fast fashion brands. Not everyone will have what you buy from a thrift shop. Not everyone will be wearing the same thing. Fast fashion brands are all similar and will make everyone look the same. Being an individual is more important to me now than wearing what's in style. Also, knowing what's good for the planet is important to me. I am still pretty young so I would like to remain on this Earth a few fifty years or more. And so should consumers.

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