



Sustainability in the Fashion Industry

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Section 2: Fashion's Negative Environmental Impact

Section 3: Sustainable Fashion Materials and Technologies

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Fashion Industry Overview



The fashion industry is highly unsustainable at all steps of the value chain, from intense energy and water consumption during production to pollution during usage and disposal.

8-10%

The fashion industry is responsible for up to 10% of all of humanity's **carbon emissions**—more than international flights and maritime shipping combined.

60%

60% of all materials used in the fashion industry are made of **plastic**. That ends up with a garbage truck's worth being incinerated or in a landfill every **second**.

50 billion

The equivalent of 50 billion plastic bottles, or 500,000 tons of microfibers are released into the **ocean** every year from **washing clothes**.

20%

20% of all **industrial wastewater pollution**, specifically through the process of chemical textile dyeing, originates from the fashion industry.

2,000 gals

Producing a single **pair of jeans** requires 2,000 gallons of water—with the fashion industry utilizing **93 billion cubic meters of water** annually.

2%

The fashion industry accounts for more than **2% of the world's energy consumption**, with production of textiles being highly **energy-intensive**.

Key Takeaway

As the fashion industry is a large contributor of waste and pollution, it is important that efforts are undertaken to combat the industry's unsustainable nature while working towards making it easier for fashion companies to use recycled products and energy efficient processes.

[Earth Org.](#), [Geneva Environment Network](#), [Fair Planet](#)

Consumer Attitudes towards Sustainability



Since the onset of the pandemic, consumer attitudes have largely shifted towards a stronger awareness and proclivity towards sustainable fashion choices, and consumers continue to change their behavior around purchasing apparel.

Consumer Expectations for Brand Actions

A survey conducted in 2020 during the height of Covid-19 shows **38% of consumers** expected brands to have **negative environmental impact reduction** as a top priority. In another survey, **67% of consumers** indicated that the **use of sustainable materials** is an important factor in their purchasing of apparel.

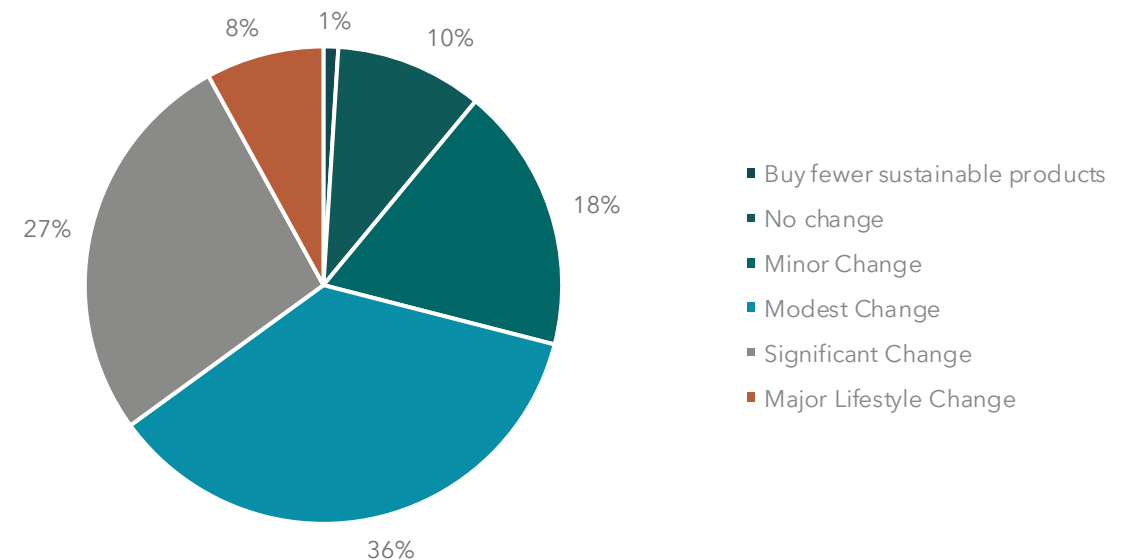
Age Group Differences in Sustainable Attitudes

Members of Gen-Z and Millennials have shown a greater interest in secondhand fashion, while around **72% of Baby Boomers and 81% of older generations** exhibited no intent to do so. **61% of Millennials** said they were open to **experimenting with smaller, less-known** brands after the pandemic began.

Types of Sustainable Apparel Purchases

There are more purchases of some versions of sustainable apparel than others. **47% of consumers** purchase sustainable fashion in the form of **clothing**, and **39%** in the form of **shoes**. Clothing is more diverse and has a greater set of sustainable options than footwear.

Consumer Behavior Shift Towards Buying Sustainable Products as of 2022



Key Takeaway

The pandemic gave way to a shift in consumer behavior towards sustainability, and this new attitude varies across age groups. Consumers are more skeptical of fashion brands' sustainability measures and expect them to do better in terms of their environmental impact.

Secondhand Apparel Overview



Secondhand purchase of apparel, or thrifting, is a growing trend that has held the attention of consumers eager to reduce their carbon footprint and impact on environmental well-being.

Trends and Brands

Brands such as **Levi's, Patagonia, Reformation and Adidas** are committed to making sustainability a key part of their mission. They utilize techniques such as **using recycled materials** like plastic when manufacturing their clothing, committing to using **FairTrade suppliers**, and **tracking the carbon and water footprints** of their products to assess their environmental impact.

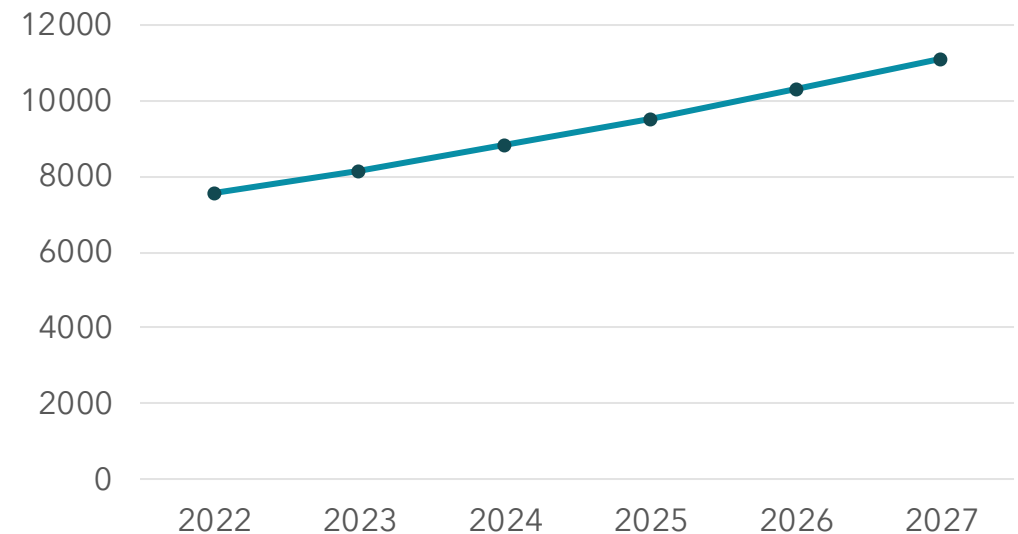
Environmental Impact of Thrifting

Thrifting **keeps clothes in circulation** but is **not necessarily the most sustainable practice**. Reused clothes end up in landfills, especially stained/damaged pieces. Only about **10%-30% of donated clothes** are purchased by consumers, and the rest go to salvage markets. Still, buying secondhand clothing **can reduce demand for new items**, and can lead to a **lower carbon footprint** as a result of reduced transportation and manufacturing.

Consumer Attitudes

70%+ of consumers in 2023 in countries like the US, UK, Italy, and France showed **increased concern for brand sustainability** compared to the previous year. Around **39% of consumers** in 2022 shared that they were **at least slightly concerned** with a company's sustainability practices when it comes to purchasing shoes, apparel, and fashion items.

Estimated value (in millions) of the ethical fashion market worldwide from 2022 to 2027



Key Takeaway

Buying secondhand apparel helps reduce carbon footprints and promote sustainability, but it does not address the core issue of the fast-fashion industry's dominance. Additionally, many donated clothes are never resold or used for long after being repurchased.

[Sustainabilitymag.com](https://sustainabilitymag.com), [Forbes](https://forbes.com), [Statista](https://statista.com), [Earthday.org](https://earthday.org)



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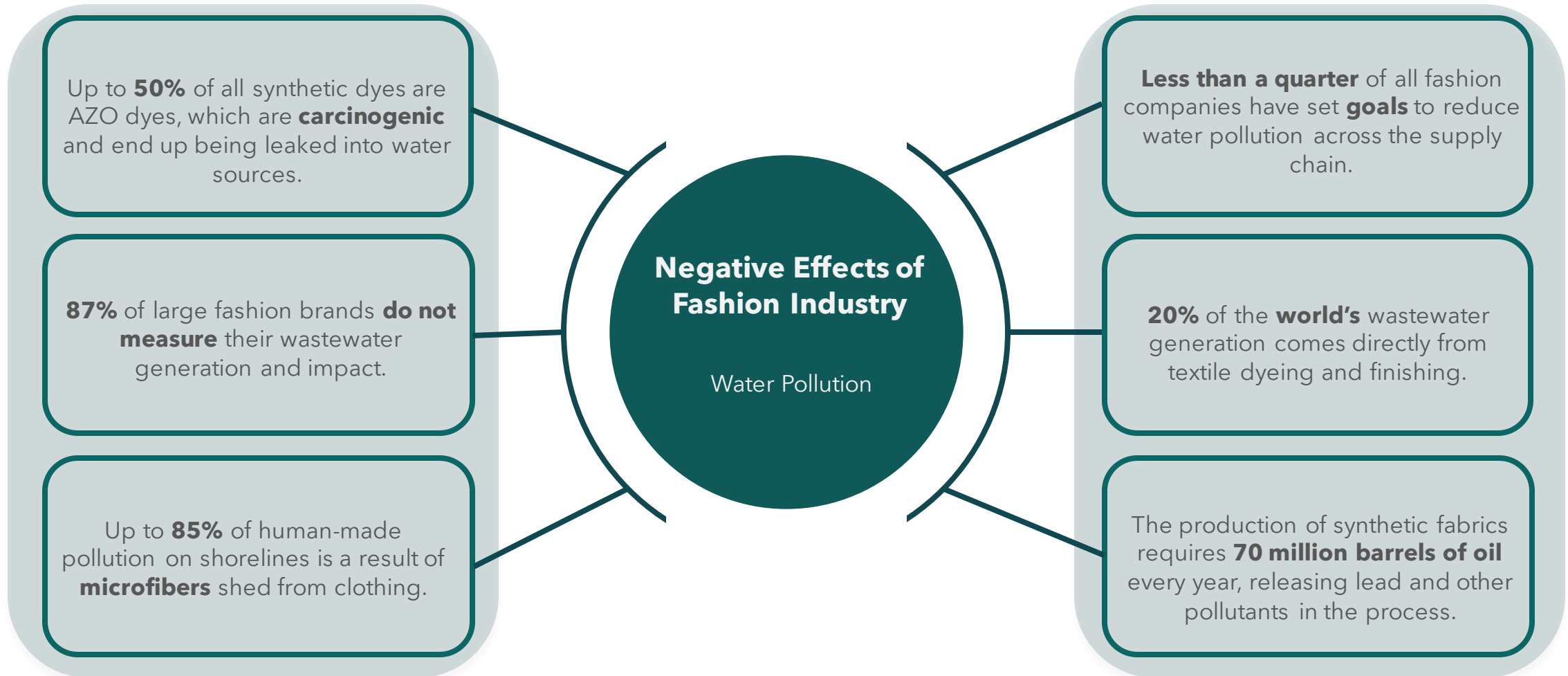
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Negative Environmental Effects of the Fashion Industry



The fashion industry has an outsized negative effect on the world's water resources, both consuming and polluting in vast quantities throughout all stages of production.

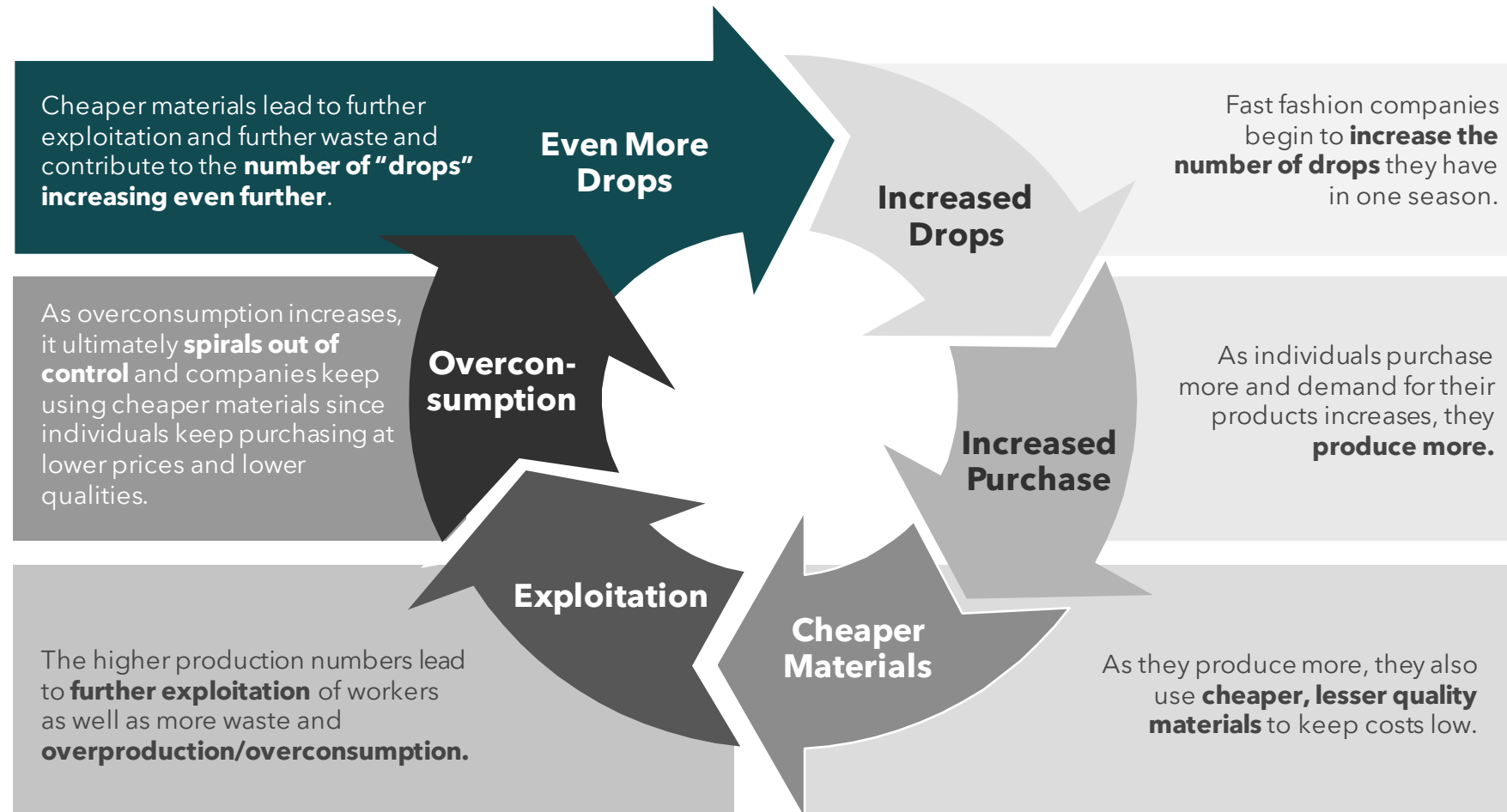


Waste Today Magazine, Fair Planet, Borgen Project, Good on You

"Drops" in the Fashion Industry



The fast fashion industry ultimately creates a self-perpetuating cycle of cheap and frequent drops, which leads to the usage of cheaper materials, which contributes to the exploitation of workers and the environment, and so on.



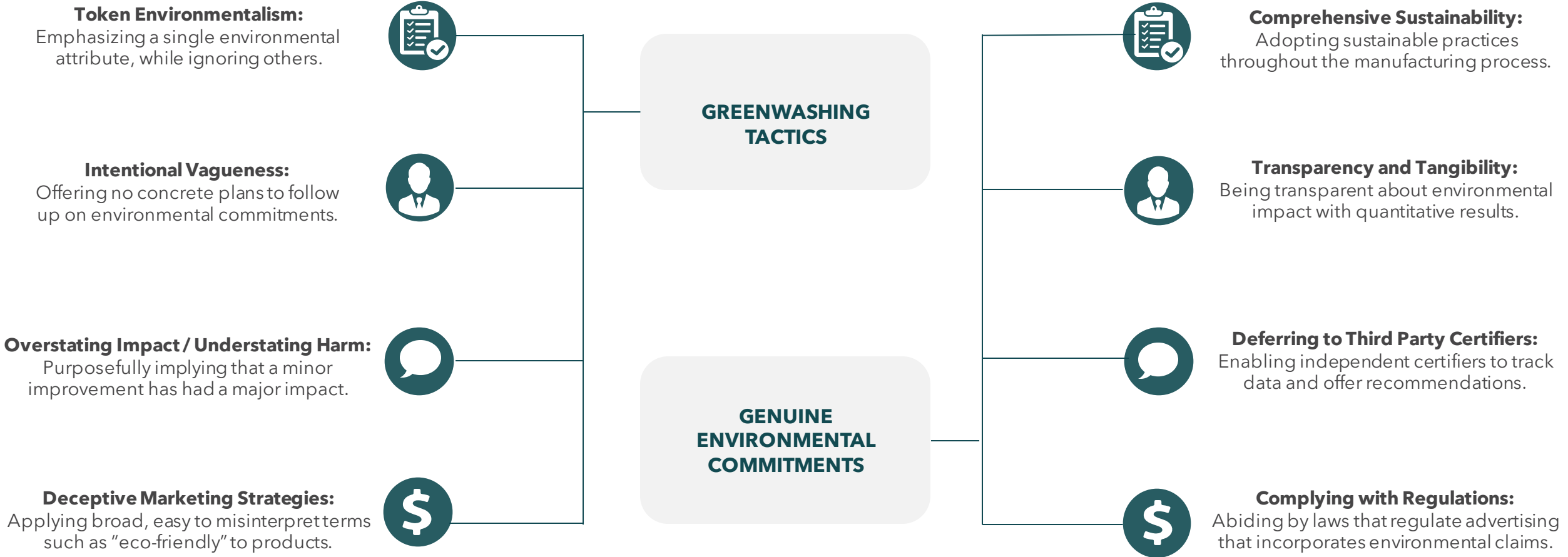
Illustrating the Harm of the Cyclical Nature of the Fashion Industry

- In the fashion industry, "**drops**" refer to the release of a new collection or limited-edition items in **small quantities** at specific times. This strategy **creates a sense of urgency and exclusivity**, encouraging customers to make quick purchases to avoid missing out.
- The diagram illustrates the **disproportionately harmful** effects of the fast fashion industry on garment workers and the environment in the Global South.

The Concept of "Greenwashing"



Greenwashing as a concept involves companies understating their carbon footprint by employing deceptive marketing tactics and engaging in token environmentalism to evade environmental protection laws and gain consumer support.



[NRDC](#), [Springer](#), [UN](#)

Three Companies with a Negative Environmental Impact



Fast fashion companies operate in an unsustainable way, promoting harmful consumer habits, polluting the environment, and unfairly treating their workers, ultimately resulting in significant carbon emissions and social costs.

H&M



3B Garments

Sold Yearly

- Founded in 1947, Swedish fashion retailer H&M is the second-largest retailer in the world, with 5K stores world-wide and 3B garments sold yearly.
- H&M's **high clothing turnover** and **use of harmful chemicals** like PFCs and phthalates contribute significantly to textile waste and environmental pollution.
- The company is also scrutinized due to its **failed promise of paying its 850,000 workers a living wage** by 2018.

Zara



450M Items

Manufactured Yearly

- Established in 1975, Spanish apparel company Zara was one of the first retailers to be considered in the fast fashion category.
- Zara currently manufactures **450M items** per year and **500 designs** each week.
- The company has faced criticism for **inhumane working conditions** across its foreign supply chain, with workers enduring **11-hour shifts, six days a week**, for wages as low as **under \$5**.

Shein



500+ Products

Added to Website Daily

- Founded in 2008, Chinese-Singaporean company Shein is the largest fashion retailer in the world.
- Shein churns out over **500 new products daily**, relying heavily on **virgin polyester** and **significant amounts of oil** in its manufacturing process.
- The company has been investigated for the harsh working conditions of its workers, with reports of **7-day work weeks** and **12-hour workdays**.

[Earth.org](#), [Business Insider](#), [Brightly](#), [BuzzFeed](#), [good on you](#), [Turn Around H&M](#), [Time](#), [Wired](#)



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Four Brands in Sustainable Fashion



Even though brands may come in different shapes and sizes, they can still have a positive impact on the environment through adopting sustainable goals and practices, including partnerships, donations, and green manufacturing.



Patagonia

Accounting for **5.6%** of the Hiking and Outdoor Equipment market, Patagonia stands out as a leading brand in sustainable clothing and fashion. Notably, the ownership of Patagonia was transferred in 2022 to the **Patagonia Purpose Trust** and the **Holdfast Collective**. These organizations ensure that **100% of the company's profits** are dedicated to combating climate change and preserving undeveloped land.



Levi's

With a commanding **6%** market share in global jeans, Levi's has embraced its **2021 "Buy Better, Wear Longer" campaign**, promoting sustainable consumption and emphasizing durability and quality in fashion. Complementing this initiative has been the company's sustainable production efforts, including its **Water<Less manufacturing**, which has conserved 4 billion liters of water and recycled 10 billion liters since 2011.



Pact

Founded in 2009, Pact aims to prove "that style and sustainability can coexist." Pact partners with **Fair Trade USA**, **Global Organic Textile**, and **SimpliZero** to ensure that its products and processes are thoroughly green. It sources its cotton organically, measures its carbon emissions to offset via reforestation, renewable energy, and community projects, and invests over **\$1M in fair trade premiums**.



Conscious Step

Founded in 2013, Conscious Step has the goal of "connecting its customers with world-changing non-profits." It does this by **partnering with over 15 organizations** to strengthen its sustainable practices and ensure that its donations are making genuine change. Over the last year, Conscious Step has donated nearly **\$1.5M** to its non-profit partners to support causes ranging from **restoring oceans** to **donating books**.

Patagonia, McKinsey, IBISWorld, Pact, New York Times, Levi's, Wall Street Journal, Statista, Statista (1), Conscious Step

Three Companies that are Leading Recycling in Fashion



To combat clothing and textile waste in the fashion industry, certain companies in the tech and reverse logistics spaces are leading the effort in recycling by offering various services from rewards to fabric upcycling.

Trashie



Can Handle 1B LBs

of clothing and textile waste per week

- Trashie is a **recycling and rewards program platform** that offers different services to combat clothing and textile waste.
 - Trashie's **Take Back Bag** collects unwanted clothing and textiles from homes and ensures **90% of materials reach the appropriate next step** through its sorting and grading system.

Circ



\$30M

Raised in series B financing round

- Circ is a **fashion technology company** that returns clothing and textile waste into their raw ingredients, allowing them to be **upcycled into fabrics such as viscose and lyocell**.
 - In addition to its production of upcycled textiles, Circ partners with retailers such as **Zara** to incorporate **sustainable materials into their supply chain**.

SuperCircle



\$7M

Raised in pre-series A financing round

- SuperCircle is a **tech and reverse logistics platform** that partners with retailers to scale the recyclability of discarded clothing and textiles.
 - SuperCircle employs a crediting system in collaboration with partners like **Thousand Fell**. Through this system, individuals who recycle via SuperCircle's platform receive **in-store credits** to make purchases.

[Forbes](#), [PR Newswire](#), [Business of Fashion](#), [Conscious Fashion Collective](#), [Circ](#)

Sustainable Fashion Collaborations



Leading brands around the world have begun partnering with external startups or establishing internal initiatives to promote sustainable dying, take-back programs, and up-cycling.

Leading Brands | 2024

Sustainable Dying

- Leading brands can emulate H&M's "**Color Story**" collection which uses biotechnology, plant-based dyes, and closed-loop systems to sustainably dye textiles, in collaboration with Alchemie Technology Endeavor, which reduces the carbon footprint of H&M's dyeing process by **85%**.



Take-Back Programs

- Companies such as Madewell have implemented **trade-in programs**, where consumers drop off unwanted denim to be recycled or resold, in exchange for \$20 of credit towards a new pair at Madewell. Nike has a **take-back program** at select locations accepting used Nike shoes and clothes for recycling, although with no credit.



Up-Cycling

- The Real Real, a luxury consignment platform, partnered with eight luxury brands, such as Balenciaga, Dries Van Noten, and Stella McCartney, and **circular fashion** initiative Atelier & Repairs to turn distressed and damaged clothing into one-of-a-kind luxury pieces as a part of their **ReCollection 01**.

The RealReal

[Women's Wear Daily](#), [Nike](#), [Madewell](#), [The Real Real](#)



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Sustainable Fashion Disposal



Consumers seeking to discard unwanted garments can divert textile waste from landfills by choosing to repurpose, resell, and recycle their items instead of throwing them away.

APPROACH →

Repurpose

- Inventive methods of **upcycling**, such as turning old t-shirts and clothing items into tote bags, quilts, pillowcases, rugs, rags, and even insulation can **divert waste** from landfills, while potentially reducing consumption by eliminating the need to purchase these products new.

Resell

- Consumers can dispose of unwanted clothing by either donating or selling to **consignment** stores, such as Goodwill, The Salvation Army, local boutiques, or on platforms such as Depop and The Real Real. However, only about **10-30%** of donated clothes are resold in stores, and the rest are often **exported** to the Global South.

Recycle

- Currently, **less than 1%** of garments are recycled. However, more and more local governments, brands, and companies are implementing textile recycling programs, as well as **take-back programs**, such as For Days and Retold Recycling that offer consumers credit in exchange for unwanted textiles.

IMPACT

The average American throws away

81 lbs

of clothes every year.



In America alone,

11.3m

tons of textile waste end up in landfills on a yearly basis.

Waste Management Strategies



In order to reduce the number of resources consumed and waste generated, brands have invested in sustainable processes, natural dyes, and recycling textiles.



1 >

Sustainable Processes

Companies are experimenting with **innovative dyeing processes** that decrease the amount of resources consumed. For example, **ColorZen** uses patented technology to **pre-treat cotton**, reducing water usage by 90%, energy usage by 75%, and requiring 90% less chemicals in textile production.



2 >

Natural Dyes

Brands are increasingly looking into **natural dye** derived from plant, animal, and mineral sources as alternatives that do not create the same environmental hazards as synthetic dyes. FaberFuture is using **synthetic biology** to dye fibers using bacteria.



3 >

Recycling Textiles

Brands and governments are investing in recycling textiles in order to decrease the amount of waste being incinerated or diverted to landfills, over **30%** of the world's largest brands have set up **take-back programs**.

Engie Impact, Plug and Play, Waste Today

Sustainable Waste Management Takeaways



Sustainability in fashion ultimately falls within the reduction of production, the resale or donation of unwanted goods, and the recycling or reuse of otherwise to-be discarded goods.

Reduce

Sustainability in fashion must begin at the **production stage**, with **reductions** in water and energy usage, pollution, and wastewater generation. Companies and consumer must move away from fast fashion and decrease the magnitude of their overall **consumption**.

Resell

Donating and reselling unwanted clothing seems to be an ideal solution but is **complicated** by the vast quantity of clothing donated. A large proportion of donated clothing ends up in **landfills** or burdens the **Global South**, making reselling not as truly sustainable.

Recycle

Textile recycling is currently an **underutilized** strategy in fashion sustainability but can be used effectively to **divert waste** from landfills and reduce new consumption. Take-back programs present an opportunity for brands to integrate sustainability within their consumer relations.



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Four Ways to Achieve a Greener Fashion Industry



To achieve a greener fashion industry, fashion companies should collaborate with independent regulators, utilize up-to-date technologies to recycle, adopt comprehensive sustainable practices, and challenge rapid consumerism.

Collaborating with Independent Regulators

- Companies in the fashion industry can collaborate with independent regulators to track their **carbon footprint**, set **tangible sustainability goals**, and **strategically plan** their future practices. Such independent regulators and certifiers include **Fair Trade USA**, **Global Organic Textile**, and **SimpliZero**. These organizations allow both producers and consumers to gain insight into the **environmental** and **ethical** aspects of fashion production, ranging from **assessing working conditions** to **validating the use of organic materials**.

Adopting Comprehensive Sustainable Practices

- To avoid greenwashing to placate consumers, fashion firms should instead prioritize ensuring that their sustainability initiatives are **thorough** and **encompassing**. This will not only ensure that the firms **help the environment and support their communities**, but it will also **boost their financial goals**. A 2023 McKinsey article highlights this point, indicating that firms that incorporate solid environmental, social, and corporate goals into their growth strategies are **twice as likely as their peers to achieve a 10% increase in revenue**.

Utilizing Up-to-date Recycling Technologies

- The rapid pace at which recycling technologies are progressing offers firms in the fashion industry an opportunity to **reduce their adverse environmental impact**. Fashion firms can **use recycled textiles** as a part of their production processes or **offer ways for which their consumers can recycle** the products after use. Currently, these methods may be too expensive for companies to carry out at an aggregate scale, but new technologies, such as those employed by **Circ**, are making these practices more **accessible**.

Shift the Culture

- To achieve long-lasting positive change in the fashion industry, it is vital to solve the root issue: **consumerist culture**. This cultural shift may initially pose challenges to a firm's financial objectives. However, a shift in values for both businesses and consumers will evolve the fashion landscape, ensuring that **the industry will stop its destructive cycle of overproduction and excessive consumption**, leading to a **more sustainable** and **equitable future** for both the field and the planet.

[Fair Trade USA](#), [Global Organic Textile](#), [SimpliZero](#), [Sustainable Fashion Forum](#), [McKinsey](#)

Sustainable Textiles in Fashion



The fashion industry sees the largest emissions from the supply chain. As of late, IPOs and brands have taken to investing in textile startups, and companies are looking for next-gen alternatives to cotton and man-made cellulosic fibers (MMCFs).

Spinnova

- Spinnova is a company based in Finland that has used technology to turn wood, leather, and food waste into cellulosic textile fiber. Spinnova also uses **no harmful chemical solvents** in their process, which **eliminates the need for wastewater treatment plants**.
- Spinnova's facility runs on **100% renewable energy**, and a third-party assessment by Simreka found a **carbon footprint 64.5% less than cotton production**. By 2034 they aim to produce **1 million tons**, which is about **4% of all cotton production**.

Infinite Fiber Company

- Infinite Fiber Company (IFC) is a Finland-based company that turns **organic waste like paper and wood into cotton-like fibers** that can be turned into woven and non-woven textile to make T-shirt, jeans, and wipes.
- IFC **avoids the use of carbon disulfide**, a known **neurotoxin** commonly used in the productions of MMCFs.
- IFC has partnered with **H&M and Wrangler in a three-year initiative** to develop the **New Cotton Project**.
- IFC **produces their own wood pulp from waste textiles** unlike Spinnova, which receives its wood pulp from outside sources

Renewcell

- Renewcell is based in Sweden and has **leveraged local infrastructure** to turn a pulp mill into a textile factory. Renewcell uses **100% textile waste** to produce their pulp instead of using wood pulp that can then be used by MMCF producers.
- Renewcell **partnered with Spinnova** in 2023 to **scale production of textile waste-based fibers without harmful chemicals**.
- By 2030, Renewcell **aims to supply 7% of global viscose fiber demand**, and plans to have a **production capacity of 360,000 tons** by 2025.

Forbes, Renewcell

Technologies Changing Fast Fashion



New technologies to combat the environmental effects of fast fashion are being developed at every point in the fashion cycle, from the creation of the design, to its making and selling, to the end of its use.

Design

- **Artificial Intelligence** has the potential, coupled with machine learning, to **predict future fashion demand** by analyzing past data.
 - This is done in the effort to **reduce potential waste**. H&M is one company that uses AI to **analyze past sales trends** and make predictions about future ones. They have been able to **reduce their inventory by 20%** using this method while still being able to meet demand.
- **3D design** can **decrease or eliminate the need of sample production**, which **reduces the waste of fabric** that often must be allocated for the designing phase of fashion garments, **many of which are scrapped** until the final garment is decided upon.

Manufacturing

- **Waterless dyeing** is the process of dyeing garments using **carbon dioxide**, using up to **90% less water** than conventional dyeing.
 - **Nike** is a notable brand that has taken part in this technique with their **ColorDry procedure** and has **saved 1 billion tons of water** since its 2015 implementation and has **reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 20%**.
- **Closed-loop production** makes use of waste scraps and recycles them throughout the production and manufacturing process, which also **helps eliminate the volume of fabric waste produced**.

Retail

- **Sustainability-based pricing** is pricing that depends on the level of sustainable material used to make clothing items.
 - Reformation uses the **cost of materials, labor, shipping, and composition of sustainable materials** to **incentivize customers** to purchase more environmentally friendly options.
- **AI chatbots** can be a resource for customers to use in order to **identify the products or clothing items they need the most**, match their style, and will last for long periods of time without needing to be replaced, which can **decrease clothing returns**.

End-of-Life

- **Textile recycling** has been used by several companies like H&M and Worn Again. It **converts used textiles back into raw materials** that can be reused again in the fashion manufacturing process in order to **reduce the amount of new material** that must be produced.
 - The process often begins with **dissolution**, whereby the textiles are dissolved with chemicals and dyes are removed. **Filtration** measures remove certain fine impurities. These are then **re-spun into cellulosic fibers** that can then be made into garments in an energy-saving process that decreases the production of new materials.

The Costs of Sustainable Fashion Initiatives



While the use of recyclable materials and new sustainable fashion practices is crucial to reducing the carbon footprint of the fashion industry, these practices can come with high costs that present a barrier to environmental sustainability.

Waterless Dyeing Expenses

- Waterless dyeing is an answer to the growing issue of pollution from the textile industry. Each year, the textile industry uses **trillions of liters of water** mixed with chemicals, and untreated wastewater is often dumped into rivers.
- DyeCoo states that their **production costs can be brought down 30-50%** through this process, and dyeing machines can recycle about **95% of the carbon dioxide** and use it again
- A major cost in the waterless dyeing process is the **cost of the equipment** needed to perform the process. Waterless dyeing machines can cost anywhere from **\$2.5 million up to \$4 million**.

Hidden Costs of Textile Recycling

- Textile recycling **reduces the need for the production of new fabric**, thus requiring less energy to be used to produce new garment. Textiles can be broken down, rewoven, and sent to companies to reuse in their supply chain.
- This process of recycling is a **multi-step process**, where hidden costs emerge. Textiles must be **collected and sorted** through by pattern and texture. Textiles must then be broken down, and **synthetic textiles** often require some sort of **chemical processing** in order to do so.
- Labor intensity, energy consumption, and contamination are all potential **high-cost** barriers to recycling being widespread.

Sustainable Firms Find Difficulties Operating

- Spinnova's revenue fell from **€24.2 million to just €10.6 million in one year**. They experienced a significant increase in **operating losses from €13.1 million to €20.1 million**, and major profit losses. This came just following the **collapse of the company Renewcell**, a similar textile recycling firm to Spinnova.
- New innovative practices like that of Spinnova and Renewcell must receive **substantial investments, incentives and continued interest and commitment from investors** in the current market in order to be producing large volumes of their sustainable fibers.

Integrating Sustainability into the Fashion Industry



To achieve a more sustainable fashion industry, green practices should be integrated in a way that is effective both environmentally and financially, which can be achieved through partnerships and encouraging entrepreneurship.

INTEGRATION OF SUSTAINABILITY INTO FASHION

Sustainable fashion must be both environmentally and financially sound.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP

- Large companies in the fashion industry can **outsource** some parts of their manufacturing processes **to smaller firms in the fashion and green tech** spaces to ensure their adoption of green practices are cost-effective and impactful.
 - These companies include **Circ** and **SuperCircle**.

ENCOURAGING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- Large fashion companies can support **sustainability-focused entrepreneurs** through experience and funding, fostering innovation that could revolutionize industry practices, benefiting the environment and society.
 - These encouragements could come in the form of **awards, competitions, or incubator programs**.

Key Takeaway

To make sustainability viable, it is essential to minimize costs associated with green practices. Hence, large companies should collaborate with smaller firms specializing in sustainability or entrepreneurs that want to develop solutions aimed at achieve a balance between profitability and sustainability.

The Future of Technology within the Fashion Industry



In summary, there have been strides made towards the mitigation of the negative effects of the fashion industry on the environment, but these advances face obstacles to their long-term implementation and effectiveness.

Technological Innovation can Mitigate Effects of Fashion Industry

Technological innovation in dyeing and recycling processes is shown to result in reductions in carbon consumption and water waste in the production of clothing, and these advances could lead to long term solutions to mitigating the negative effects of the fashion industry on the environment

Innovations Come with Costs and Barriers to Success

Innovations such as more eco-friendly dyeing or textile recycling come with high costs for machinery and extensive processing, and companies can have a difficult time in earning enough revenue to offset these costs, and substantial investment is needed to allow these advancements to succeed in the current market.



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Regulations in the US for the Fashion Industry



There are various regulations in the US to ensure fair labor and sustainable practices. However, the extent of their effect is unclear since their penalties are not very dire and some are still undergoing revisions.

ESG Disclosure Simplification Act

- This bill was passed by House of Representatives in 2021.
- The act requires public companies to **disclose more information** about their **environmental, social and governance practices**.
- Some companies would have to already start reporting in 2023 for 2023. However, it is likely the proposal will undergo several rounds of revisions, and the extent of its effectiveness is unclear.
- The House narrowly approved this act with a **215 to 214 vote**.

FABRIC Act

- The act **aims to protect American garment workers** and revitalize the domestic garment industry by improving working conditions, reforming the piece rate pay scale, and investing in domestic apparel production.
- Includes a **\$40M grant** to help reduce dependency on overseas supplier, to provide help to US manufacturers for equipment costs, safety improvements, and training/workforce development.

SEC Climate Related Disclosures/ESG Investing

- Prompted by the Climate Risk Disclosure Act of 2021, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) issued a rule proposal that would require **US publicly traded companies to disclose** how their businesses are assessing, measuring, and managing climate-related risk.
- Includes climate-related risks and their material impacts on the business, greenhouse gas emissions, information about **climate-related targets and goals**.

Fashion Sustainability and Social Accountability Act

- Requires fashion companies to map their supply chains and **address** the human rights and environmental **impacts of their operations** and supply chain.
- Companies found to be out of compliance by the New York Attorney General have three months to remediate their noncompliance - if they are still out of compliance after three months, they may receive **a fine of up to 2% of their annual revenue**.

Fast Fashion in the Global South



The fast fashion industry has disproportionately harmful impacts the environment and the people in the Global South, which primarily consists of the countries colored blue in the below map.



Unethical labor

To keep prices low, most fast fashion brands **import from the Global South**, which further contributes to the cycle of **poverty** and **suffering** of garment workers.



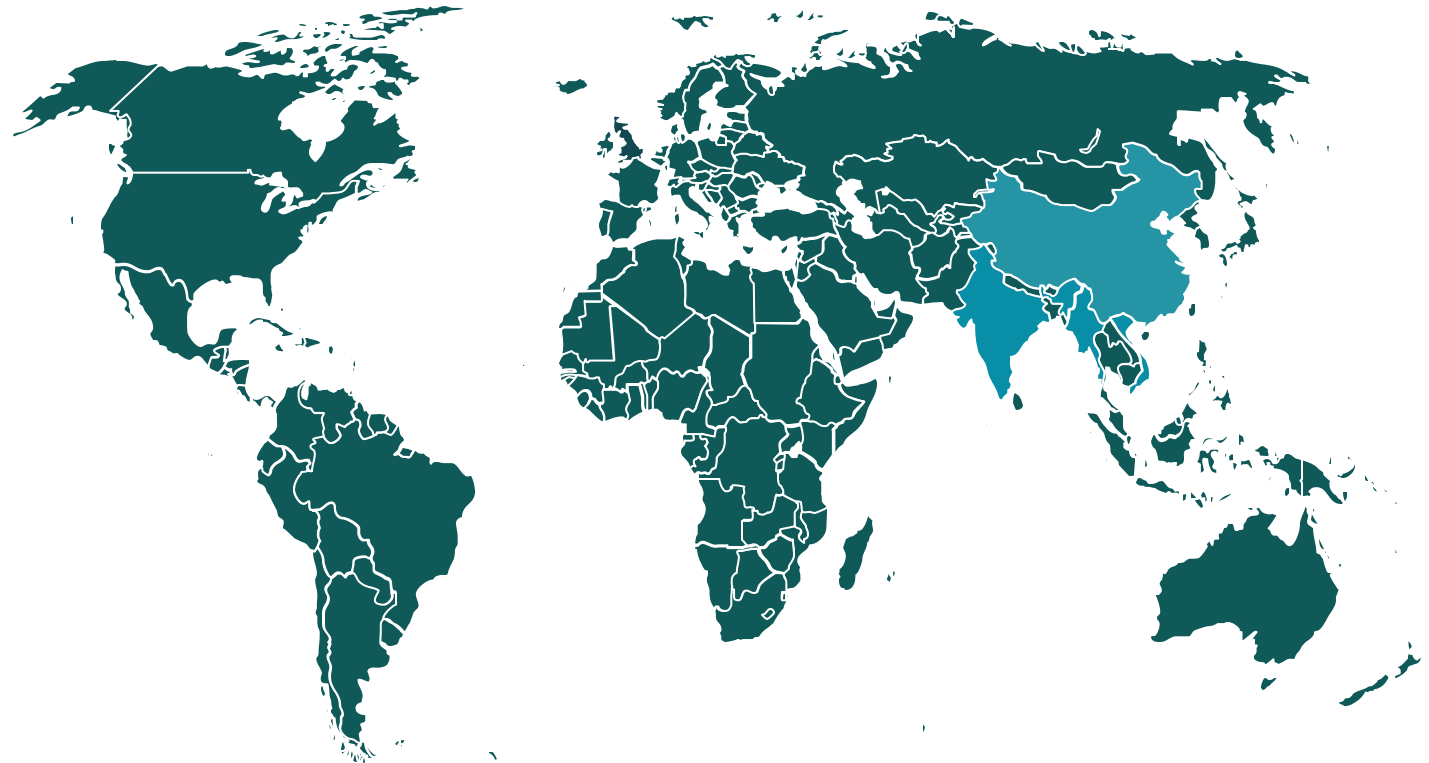
Unsustainable

Fast fashion pieces are often made with **low quality, inexpensive materials**. These further contribute to the lack of durability within these clothes, and the need for **constant repurchasing** by customers.



Environmental

The environment within the Global South is also **disproportionately harmed** by fast fashion since the Global North will export its waste as “donations” to the Global South, which often has less advanced waste systems, leading to these unwanted clothing ending up in **landfills**.



Exploitation of Workers in the Fashion Industry



The concept of racial capitalism refers to the “commodification of nonwhites for social and economic gain”, and is a concept largely encountered within the fast fashion industry, especially with “ultra” fast fashion brands like Shein.

The regions that are the biggest exporters of fast fashion such as Bangladesh and Cambodia also have the highest percentages for **sexual assault** and **gaps in compensation** for women in the world.

Of the 74 million textile workers worldwide, **80% are women of color**. Almost one third of most women from the Global South report not participating in activities **out of fear** of being sexually harassed, assaulted, or injured.

One third of all female garment workers in Cambodia experience **sexual assault**, harassment, and violence at work. For women in Bangladesh, this applies to 28% of females. Similar statistics hold for women in Pakistan and India.

Workers work in **inhumane conditions**, being at risk of chemical burns, injury from machinery, side effects from harmful acids and chemicals, and not being compensated. It was mentioned that a **textile worker died** but his conditions were purposefully not disclosed.

Despite the textile industry being made up of 85% women, only **4% of high-paying**, leadership level jobs consist of women in the Global South; and there’s a lack of training opportunities as well as peers, coaches, mentors and support structures.

Some companies that “**greenwash**” and exploit textile workers include Gap, Adidas, H&M, Puma, and Levi’s, all of whom were reported by **Labor Behind the Label**. Furthermore, this exploitation targets individuals from the Global South facing the **worst of inflation**.

Key Takeaway

The fast fashion industry physically, mentally, and financially harms people from less developed countries in a disproportionate manner.

[Care](#), [Collective Fashion Justice](#), [Fashion United](#), [Keppel Health Review](#), [The Guardian](#), [The Olympian](#)

Ways to Mitigate Exploitation of Fast Fashion Workers

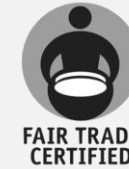


There are three major avenues through which individuals can take action to mitigate the exploitation of textile workers, which are putting pressure on fast fashion companies to provide living wages, donating, and volunteering.

Example Organizations

Put Pressure on Brands to #PayUp

- With the COVID-19 pandemic, different nonprofits began to put **pressure onto brands to #PayUp**.
- #PayUp is a petition created by Remake in collaboration with the Workers Rights Consortium. It is a **tracker** that shows which companies are compensating workers fairly; every time someone signs it, that company gets an email that holds them accountable.



Donate to Organizations

- 80% of textile workers in the world are women; and these women are usually the sole provider and source of income for families.
- **Donating to several funds** can help **food packages** to be brought to families, and provide women and families with **sanitary products** and other **basic necessities**.



Get Active

- While “getting active”, you can become **an ambassador** or **volunteer** with brands such as Remake and other nonprofits dedicated to ending the exploitation of textile workers.
- Some examples of organizations to volunteer with are **Collective Fashion Justice** and your country’s **Fashion Revolution Team**.



[Attire Media](#), [Fashion Revolution](#), [Kleiderly](#), [Remake](#), [The Guardian](#)

Key Takeaways and Future Recommendations



Some key takeaways, such as how fast fashion disproportionately harms the Global South, as well as how these can be combatted, such as through supporting ethical fashion brands and participating in campaigns, are detailed below.

Key Takeaways



The textile industry **disproportionately harms minorities**, including women, people of color, and low-income families.



Textile workers work in **inhumane conditions**, being at risk of chemical burns, injuries from machinery, and working overtime.



Most regulations for fast fashion companies are **too small** in scope and don't include **consequences** dire enough to be effective.



There is an increasing number of **"drops"** by fast fashion companies, which only further contributes to the cycle of **overconsumption**.



The Global South's **environment** is also disproportionately harmed since most old clothing from the US is shipped to their **landfills**.

Recommendations



Holding fast fashion companies **accountable** through donating, participating in, and volunteering at campaigns is significant.



Supporting **ethical/local fashion brands**, as well as once again contributing to campaigns can help decrease this.



Pressuring local, state, and even the federal government to pursue **more dire consequences** can help disincentivize fast fashion.



Lowering the amount of one's own spending on clothing is the most effective way to combat and stop contributing to overconsumption.



Pressuring more economically developed countries to **aid** countries in the Global South with more **efficient** waste management systems.