



MTAUN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

FAST FASHION

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the third annual Mount Allison United Nations Conference. We are honoured that you chose to participate in our discussion focusing on Fast Fashion. Whether you are a beginner or an experienced delegate, we are eager to watch your knowledge and confidence grow throughout the weekend. We both started our Model UN experience here at the Mount Allison conference 3 years ago participating in the General Assembly. We are ecstatic that our first experience as chairs is taking place here at Mount Allison, in the very same committee. Fast Fashion is a challenge for global sustainability that is often overlooked. However, it has an enormous impact on the environment. Facing a climate emergency, Fast Fashion is an issue that needs to be addressed on a global scale immediately. We are extremely passionate about the environment and could not be more excited to hear the discussions and debates that are to be had during this conference.

See you on October 18th, we are looking forward to meeting you all.

Warmly,

Sydney Orr and Mary MacFarlane

Forum:	General Assembly
Issue:	Fast Fashion
Student Officers:	Sydney Orr and Mary MacFarlane
Positions:	Co-Chairs of the General Assembly

Overview

The contemporary term, fast fashion, is the mass production of clothing by market retailers in response to the latest fashion trends, which cycle into landfills at a frightening pace. The fast fashion model emerged in the 1980s, although not until more recently has the urgency to regulate this industry and alter consumer's patterns for the protection of our environment and human rights become so prevalent. The fashion industry is responsible for 20 percent of global wastewater and 10 percent of global emissions, which are shockingly more than all international flights and maritime shipping¹. There are many other concerns in regards to the fashion industry than environmental concerns. The labor conditions of producing cheap fashion trends at such a high demand, with trends constantly evolving, is seen as extremely unethical. The textile workers are typically paid low wages and work long hours in horrendous conditions². The average Canadian throws out 81 pounds of textiles each year. The environmental impact the fast fashion industry is staggering.

The sustainability of the Fashion Industry is tremendously low and it is necessary that changes be made for the sake of our people and planet. There has not been much progress made in this industry, but any progress is significant, as the UN has brought attention to the issue at the fourth UN Environment Assembly³. Brands, entrepreneurs and celebrities have been advocates for change and put in conscious efforts to diminish the negative impacts of fashion.

¹ United Nations Environment

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Statement of Issue

Under capitalism, there is a pressure to consume the newest and trendiest clothing. Currently, clothing is becoming cheaper and produced faster than ever before. The fashion industry has been able to capitalize on trends and inexpensive labour. Clothing is now made at a lower quality and high quantity to ensure the consumer is buying new clothes as often as possible. In addition to this, clothing is more accessible than ever, as online shopping has taken off. The amount that people shop has increased 400% in the past 20 years and what is bought is not even being worn. In the UK, the average shopper only wears 70% of what is in their wardrobe. The UN seeks a resolution to lessen the environmental impacts that the fast fashion industry has on the planet, moving toward more sustainable goals for the fashion industry in the future.

History of Fast Fashion

The industrial revolution transformed the way that clothing was produced and sold. Sewing machines made clothing faster and easier to make – que the introduction of the dressmaking shop. These shops mainly catered for the middle class. With the introduction of sewing machines, ready-made clothing and other technologies, the scale of clothing manufacturing was able to increase. Following the industrial revolution, in the 1900s, WW2 led to a break-through in standardization for clothing production and mass-produced clothing⁴. This innovation forever changed the way clothing was made, and led to what we now know as the fashion industry.

In the 60's and 70's, society was revolutionized through social movements, culture, politics, etc. With the societal transformation also came individuality and fashion as more of an expression of self. Previously, clothing was all about durability and functionality. As fashion became more and more personalized, the fashion industry was also able to capitalize on shopping as a leisure activity rather than a necessity.

By the 2000's, European clothing prices had dropped 26.2%. Fast fashion companies traditionally target young consumers due to the general assumption of disposable income, and the availability of credit in today's day and age⁵. However, it is not only young people buying into the industry. Consumers have been primed to browse stores in search of new clothing roughly every three weeks⁶. While historically, clothing was

⁴ Breward, 2003

⁵ Annamma Joy et. al, 2012

⁶ Ibid

made to last and was only thrown out when worn through or grown out of, fast fashion companies now have what is referred to as the '10 Wash Rule' – meaning that clothing is only designed to last 10 washes⁷.

Country Case Analysis: Cambodia

Cambodia is well known for their low-cost manufacturing industry. The industry is the number one source of employment in the country⁸. This country's central location within Southeast Asia has allowed them to build relationships with many other countries as a fundamental component of the global supply chains. The entire country as a whole relies on this industry's success because it is responsible for 80% of the country's exports and 16% of their GDP⁹. Cambodia's strongest international business relationship is with the European Union, who generates 40% of Cambodia's exports, followed by the United States at 30% of their products, and then Canada at 9% (Rastogi). The country has international pressure to keep their prices low with rapid output, forcing their human rights policies surrounding their factories and employees to be disregarded, creating ethical issues for the consumers who purchase their products. The question is whether it is the responsibility of the country to recognize their low wages and terrible working conditions as a violation of human rights, or is it the responsibility of the international fashion community to put pressure on the country to implement such policies. As well, are human rights something to be spared when an industry supports such a large part of the country's economy and global fashion economy? An additional barrier that makes policy change difficult is that foreign owned firms dominate industries (Rastogi). The challenge of foreign countries doing business in another is when policy making becomes more difficult and international organizations, such as the United Nations are needed.

Country Case Analysis: Italy

Italy is well known for being one of the fashion capitals of the world, making their textile and apparel environmental footprint quite large. The structure of the Italian fashion industry is made up predominantly of elevated local firms. The local systems are specialized in either textile manufacturing or apparel, sometimes both. With over 50,000 firms operating in this sector, the economic and social impacts these fashion industries have are felt nationally, as well as internationally¹⁰. During the year of 2017

⁷ Joy

⁸ Rastogi

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Guercini

within the European Union, the textile and clothing industry had a turnover of 181 billion euros. Though they are financially successful, in terms of environmental impact, the textile industry is extremely concerning due to the amount of water that goes into producing clothing and the carbon emissions generated. Natural fibers have the highest environmental impact and cotton is the most common material used, accounting for more than 40% of the clothes on the EU market.¹¹ Cotton is made up of a large water content, whereas polyester uses less but has been shown to discharge up to 700,000 microplastics from one load of laundry¹². Italy, being a democratic country that is part of the European Union has human rights laws to uphold, therefore the aspect of their fashion industry that needs policy work is their environmental footprint. Italy imports a large quantity of their raw materials and final products, meaning the transportation emissions and ethical concerns of countries they are importing from are additional concerns. A country of fashionable high-class consumers has a tendency to always want the newest trends; meaning Italians are large contributors to the amount of textiles in landfills. Unfortunately, it is not only the consumers generating waste, but high-end fashion firms are known for disposing of outdated clothing lines instead of reducing the prices, to maintain the item's authenticity and rarity. Different countries have different components of their fashion industry that need tending to and because Italy is in the global eye for fashion, they must demonstrate to the world by example what an environmentally friendly, ethical, waste-free industry looks like.

Current International Action

All parties involved in the fashion industry's supply and demand chains are aware of the consequences of their actions yet have chosen to ignore this reality. In 2019, 10 United Nation Organizations decided it was time that they came together to create the UN Alliance on Sustainable Fashion at the UN Environmental Assembly. The primary goal being for private sectors, governments, and non-governmental organizations to be encouraged to reduce the social, economic, and environmental negative impacts within the industry¹³. There have been many initiatives completed within the UN by different organizations, as well as within individual countries and clothing brands.

There have been many campaigns created to bring awareness to the fashion industry's rapidly growing issue of fast fashion. A specific example of a campaign that has taken action within the industry is by Greenpeace. They took 141 samples of clothing from 20

¹¹ Šajn

¹² *ibid*

¹³ UN ENvironment

different brands to trace hazardous toxins within these clothes and the results were that every single brand contained hazardous toxins¹⁴. Greenpeace launched a Detox Campaign with their findings and demanded brands to pledge that their garments will emit zero discharge of hazardous substances by January 2020¹⁵. Holding brands accountable for their decisions to unethically source their garments is in an attempt to cut the fast fashion cycle from the top of the chain.

The European Union has shown the world what true property rights can do for the fashion industry. "The EU Designs Protection Directive" created unified design rights to protect the designers rights over a piece of clothing to protect their work from being copied then produced at lower quality in high quantities¹⁶. Within the United States there have been numerous unsuccessful attempts to broaden the copyright laws within the fashion industry. One of the most recent attempts being "The innovative Design Protection Act" introduced in 2012 to extend copyright protection to designers¹⁷. Within the fashion industry, there has been a cry for adequate intellectual property rights for the designers. Beginning with the legislated protection of the designers, it is hopeful that a chain effect will fall in place to end retailers from mimicking styles of couture designs, which will stop consumers from constantly purchasing new trends, which will help end the unethical production of garments¹⁸.

Conclusion

Fast fashion has supported a high volume supply chain to ensure consumers are given the latest trends, in record time, at incredibly low prices. The negative impact this model has created internationally is undeniable. The fashion industry is urged to alter their business model of "take, make and dispose" for the protection of the global environment and human rights.¹⁹ Although it is the United Nations and local Government's responsibility to implement strict laws to ensure change and spread awareness, fast fashion is an international issue that is predicted to worsen by 50% in the next 10 years²⁰. The UNEP believes that if consumers and retailers could take action by being more conscious with their purchases, taking better care to prolong their lifespan, and thinking of recycling, donating, and take-back programs, there could be

¹⁴ Elrod

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ UN Climate change

²⁰ Sajj

significant improvement within the industry.²¹ The environmental and socially destructive practices within the fashion industry have created a vicious cycle between the countries that produce and the countries that purchase. The solutions pertaining this issue could be blamed just as much on the retailer than the consumer shopping unethically, but unfortunately both parties are focused on style trends and the best prices. It is time for government and international organizations to take control and implement policies and regulations to ensure the sustainability of this industry and our environment for generations to come.

²¹ UN Climate change

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