

Fast fashion and ecology

Did you know that in ancient times, a person could only have a few suits throughout a lifetime? Even back in the last century shopping used to be an occasional event —something that happened a couple of times a year, at the end of each season. However, about 30 years ago, things changed. Clothes became cheaper, trend cycles sped up, and shopping became a weekly hobby for many of us. This happened when big Fast Fashion retailers, such as Zara, H&M, Primark and others took over our clothing market. But what exactly fast fashion is? Is it bad and Does it affect our environment and climate? That is the topic of my presentation.

Basically, Fast Fashion is a mass production of affordable yet stylish clothing that replicates current high-fashion trends. It is manufactured very quickly to be sold at the peak of its popularity. Garment collections change regularly, almost every few weeks.

The prices that fast fashion offers are quite low, so, when another collection is introduced, people rush for new pretty things. Consequently their previous purchases are soon discarded. It creates an endless cycle of buying, wearing perhaps a handful of times and then throwing away, either because those clothes are not trendy anymore or because of their poor quality. To make clothing cheaper, fast fashion brands often use low-quality and short-lived materials. This is another reason for customers to constantly come to change them. Despite of this, there always remains a lot of unsold product in the stores. Most of it is simply disposed of, it doesn't go anywhere.

In the end, all these factors result in the excess production of clothing and its overconsumption. Which, in turn, has an extremely negative impact on our natural resources, climate and environment overall.

According to some recent studies, the fashion industry is responsible for 10% of global carbon emissions, which is more than all international flights and sea shipping produce combined.

In addition to this, the clothing production is a very water-consuming process. For example, to produce just a single cotton shirt it is required almost 3 thousand liters of clean water.

But wait, there's more. In order to grow cotton in the amount we need, a lot of chemicals, like fertilizers and pesticides are used - so much that it makes the textile industry the number 2 greatest polluter of clean water behind agriculture itself.

And, of course, cotton isn't the only material used in clothes. Synthetic fabrics, such as polyester or nylon, have their own host of issues with the environment. Even a washing of synthetics releases a large amount of microplastics – tiny plastic particles that are too small to be filtrated. As a result they pollute the world's ocean and lead to death of sea creatures.

When I first heard about these facts I was sincerely horrified. And concerned: is there any solution for this problem?

The answer is yes. As opposite to Fast Fashion, there exists so-called “Slow Fashion” or “Sustainable Fashion” - a movement we can all join to.

Its core principle is to prioritize quality over quantity, which means to choose more high-quality clothing that’s going last for longer. It is important to look on the labels, giving preference to natural and more eco-friendly materials. You also should be able to adequately evaluate if the piece of garment you’re willing to buy is actually well-made. In case you haven’t got much experience, you may ask your parents for help or look for the sustainable brands’ stores nearby.

Another principle that’s easy to follow: buy clothes that are going to match well with those you’ve already have. That way you won't need to change your entire wardrobe because of 1 specific garment, and you can still diversify it with some accessories if you want.

And, of course, REDUCE.REUSE.RECYCLE rule applies here.

REDUCE: slow down your consumption. Don’t make impulsive purchases and always be mindful of the amount you really need.

REUSE: try to repair things before throwing them away. And for those that cannot be fixed, find another use, for example, I use them as cleaning rags.

RECYCLE. You can donate clothes you won’t wear anymore. You might contribute them to some charity centers or exchange with your family or friends.

Well, this is the end of my presentation. Now you know what is fast fashion, why it is a problem, and how together we can stop it by making mindful choices.