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FAST FASHION AND ITS NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES*Arkhitskaya A.R.**Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics
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Annotation. Fast fashion is a term used to describe a business model that involves the rapid production of inexpensive clothing designs that are quickly brought to market in response to the latest trends. This term from the fashion world hides huge social, economic, and ecological problems. This study is aimed at identifying the negative impact of fast fashion and its evidence, the expected consequences, as well as finding solutions to this problem at different levels. The concept of slow fashion is considered a reasonable alternative to fast fashion.

Keywords: fast fashion, slow fashion, environmental impact, consumer behavior, labor practices, social norms, water pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, microplastics.

Introduction. Fashion, style, and clothes are those things that directly or indirectly concern each of us, regardless of age, gender, and place of residence. There is one term from the fashion world that involves many of us, unfortunately. At least it hides huge social, economic, and ecological problems.

Fast fashion is a term used to describe a business model that involves the rapid production of inexpensive clothing designs that are quickly brought to market in response to the latest trends. The most common representatives of the mass market are Zara, H&M, Mango, Befree, Bershka, Pull&Bear, and others.

Retailers use cheap labor and materials to create garments that are designed to be worn for a short period and then discarded. This business model encourages consumers to purchase new clothes frequently and dispose of them quickly, resulting in a large amount of textile waste and a negative impact on the environment.

In this article, we will look at the fast fashion industry and its negative consequences. Correct solutions can only be formulated after a full understanding of the problem.

The following areas of influence will be considered:

- environmental impact;
- consumer behavior;
- labor practices;
- social norms.

The environmental impact.

Water pollution. The fashion industry is the second largest water-consuming and polluting industry. It is used in the stages of growing cotton, dyeing fabrics, and finishing clothes on a huge scale [1]. The toxic chemicals used in these processes are often dumped into ditches, streams, and rivers, resulting in pollution. As a result, it harms both the environment and human health.

Greenhouse gas emissions. Instant clothing releases significant amounts of greenhouse gases during production and transportation, contributing to climate change [2].

Microplastics and textile waste. Consumers quickly discard clothing that is no longer in style or has fallen apart due to poor quality. This waste takes up space in landfills and contributes to greenhouse gas emissions as it decomposes [3]. And it's worth remembering, that brands use synthetic fibers like polyester, nylon, and acrylic which take hundreds of years to biodegrade [4].

Deforestation. The production of certain materials used in fast fashion, such as cotton, can lead to deforestation as natural habitats are cleared to make room for agriculture.

Consumer behavior.

Frequent shopping. Consumers often buy new items weekly or monthly, while representatives of slow fashion make purchases at least 2 times less often.

Price sensitivity. Fast fashion consumers prioritize low cost over quality and sustainability.

Disposability. Clothes are bought for short-term use, or sometimes never worn. Subsequently, it is quickly thrown out when it goes out of fashion or wears out.

Impulse purchases. People make impulsive purchases, driven by social media trends, sales, or other factors.

Labor practices.

Low wages. Many companies pay low wages to workers, particularly those in developing countries where labor laws may be weaker.

Long hours. Workers in fast fashion supply chains may work long hours, often without overtime pay or breaks.

Unsafe working conditions. Factories may not meet safety standards, exposing workers to hazardous conditions and increasing the risk of workplace accidents.

Forced labor. In some cases, workers may be subjected to forced labor, with workers working against their will or being coerced into working long hours in dangerous conditions.

Social norms.

Pressure to stay on-trend. Social norms dictate that consumers should stay up-to-date with the latest fashion trends, which can create pressure to constantly purchase new clothing items to keep up with changing styles.

Body image ideals. Fast fashion brands often promote specific body image ideals through advertising and the types of clothing they offer, which can contribute to unrealistic beauty standards and promote unhealthy body image ideals.

The glamorization of labor exploitation. The fast fashion industry often glamorizes fashion and the fashion industry, while downplaying the negative impact of fast fashion on labor exploitation and environmental damage[5].

Research. We interviewed 50 college students and 30 adults working in different areas. We asked some simple questions that can already give us information about how aware people are about fast fashion and whether they are involved in it. Some of the statistics is listed below.

The first question was «How often do I buy new clothes?». The answers were as follows: 40% of respondents buy clothes once a month, 30 % – once a season, 20 % – as needed, and 10 % – once a year.

The second question was «Do I know where my clothes come from?». To which a little less than half responded positively.

The third research was «Do you know that the clothes we wear can contain dangerous chemicals such as lead, cadmium, and phthalates, which can enter our body through the skin and cause various diseases?». About 52 % of respondents did not even think about it.

The fourth survey was «Do you know that fashion is the second most environmentally damaging sector after the oil industry?» and 71% responded negatively.

The fifth question was «Do you know that the fast fashion industry entails water pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and active deforestation?» and 55 % of the survey participants also answered negatively.

After analyzing the data obtained, we can conclude that fast fashion is still progressing. A huge part of people are poorly aware of this problem, and someone does not even know that this is some kind of problem.

If the situation does not change in any way, then by 2030 we expect the following consequences:

- the amount of textile waste produced annually will reach 134 million tons;
- global average temperatures could rise by 1.5 to 2 degrees Celsius, leading to more frequent and intense heatwaves, droughts, floods, wildfires, and tornadoes;
- sea level can rise by several centimeters;

- air quality will deteriorate due to the resulting smog, which will subsequently increase the number of people suffering from respiratory diseases;
- natural resources can be depleted, which will lead to higher prices;
- there will be an aggravation of social inequality.

What can help change the situation?

One of the most effective solutions is slow fashion.

Slow fashion is not just a concept or a trend, it is a cultural movement that celebrates durability and quality over speed and quantity. It encourages us not to just buy clothes but to consciously choose quality clothes that are made with environmental and ethical principles in mind. Slow fashion also promotes the development of regional and local industries, which helps to preserve the traditions of the craft and reduce transport costs. It teaches us to be responsible consumers and gives us the opportunity to care for the environment and the health of those who work in the clothing industry. Ultimately, slow fashion can lead to a more sustainable and ethical fashion industry that will contribute to the well-being of our planet and all its inhabitants [6].

Slow fashion is also characterized by an emphasis on transparency and accountability, with brands providing information about the origin of their materials and the conditions under which their clothes are made.

To counter the trend of fast fashion and embrace the concept of slow fashion, here are some tips:

1. Buy fewer clothes, but invest in better items that will last longer.
2. Support sustainable fashion. Look for brands that prioritize sustainable and ethical practices in their manufacturing processes.
3. Rent or borrow clothes.
4. Sell or donate old clothes. Instead of throwing away your old clothes, give them to a thrift store or sell them to a used clothing dealer.
5. Participate in a clothing exchange.
6. Educate yourself and others. Learn more about the negative effects of fast fashion and share your knowledge with others.
7. Lobby for change. Write to your elected officials, sign petitions, and support organizations that advocate for better labor and environmental standards in the fashion industry. Your voice can make a difference.
8. Buy clothes secondhand.
9. Make the most of the clothes you already have. Mix and match items to create new outfits and wear clothes more than once before washing them.
10. Clothing repair and recycling. Instead of throwing away clothes that are damaged or no longer fit, repair them or turn them into something new.

Governments can influence the issue of fast fashion in several ways:

1. Regulation. Countries can introduce laws and regulations to limit the production of fast fashion, reduce waste and greenhouse gas emissions.
2. Support for sustainable producers. Governments can provide financial support to manufacturers that follow the principles of slow fashion and produce sustainable and ethical products.
3. Education and awareness. Governments can conduct a public awareness campaign about fast fashion, and its environmental impact, and educate schoolchildren and adults about how to make more sustainable clothing choices. Particular attention should be paid to educating the younger generation, because in the future they are decision-makers in society, and now they can influence on their parents.
4. Development of the secondary market. Governments can help create programs for the recycling of old clothes, and organize a secondary market where people can buy and sell used clothes.

Conclusion. Having studied information about all stages of the production from the fast fashion industry, as well as conducting small independent research, we identified the main areas where this industry manifests its negative consequences, identified specific problems, made forecasts for the development of the situation, and also provided possible solutions to this problem.

Many are silent about the seriousness of this problem and do not pay attention to it, but fast fashion brings with it huge problems that require immediate solutions.

However, we can all take action to combat the negative effects of fast fashion by promoting sustainable and ethical fashion, reducing consumption, and educating ourselves and others about the issue. A more responsible and sustainable fashion industry is possible, but it requires a collective effort from consumers, governments, and fashion companies to make it happen. By working together, we can create a healthier and more sustainable future for ourselves, our planet, and future generations.

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БЫСТРАЯ МОДА И ЕЁ НЕГАТИВНЫЕ ПОСЛЕДСТВИЯ

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Аннотация. Быстрая мода – это термин, используемый для описания бизнес-модели, которая включает в себя быстрое производство недорогой одежды, быстро выводящейся на рынок в ответ на последние тенденции. За этим термином из мира моды скрываются огромные социальные, экономические и экологические проблемы. Данное исследование направлено на выявление негативного влияния быстрой моды и их проявлений, ожидаемых последствий, а также поиск решений данной проблемы на разных уровнях. Концепция медленной моды рассматривается как разумная альтернативой быстрой моде.

Ключевые слова: быстрая мода, медленная мода, воздействие на окружающую среду, потребительское поведение, эксплуатация рабочих, социальные нормы, загрязнение воды, выбросы парниковых газов, микропластик.