# Implications Of Fast Fashion On Economy And Environment

Fast fashion is the process of producing unsustainable and inexpensive clothing rapidly, in order to keep up with the latest trends. Cheap and trendy cloths are desired by many, however the consequences of fast fashion is much more damaging than its benefits. To an extent we can argue that fast fashion is a market failure, due to its economic cost to the environment being greater than its benefit.

Firstly, fast fashion is extremely costly to the environment simply because the production process is very water intensive. For example, production of jeans and a t-shirt requires almost 10,000 – 20,000 litres of water. This is because jeans and t-shirt are initially dyed and then washed repeatedly to obtain a specific colour. As a result, wasting a lot of water. Research shows that India and Pakistan are major suppliers of cloths (from which jeans are made from) suffer from high levels of water scarcity. Although some argue that water is renewable, many countries lack water and go through a water crisis. Almost 85% of daily needs of water in India can be covered by the water used to grow cotton, yet 100 million people still do not have access to drinking water. Watering the cotton plants also requires vast amounts of water. Lakes in some parts of Asia have started to dry up where cotton farming is intensive as most of the water is being used for cotton growing. Water is a scarce resource and having a low supply of it may mean that in the future, demand may exceed supply and as a result, price of water may rise. Excess demand may also be classed as a market failure as there is a misallocation of water.

Secondly clothes made from polyester include a basic chain of polymers called plastic. Polymer is frequently used to make clothes because of its poor quality and is easy to produce meaning businesses would want to use it more often. Polyester is cheap which is beneficial for businesses as they can produce goods for a cheaper price and sell it at a higher price to make profit. T-shirts and jeans contain plastic, more specifically microfibrils. This means that every time we wash jeans and t-shirts to obtain a particular colour, around 1,900 individual microfibrils are released into the water. This water eventually reaches oceans and rivers and sea creatures consume it. Later when humans consume the sea creatures, we are also consuming the plastic. When clothes are washed, not all the plastic chemicals are washed. Some stay on the clothes and causes severe health issues especially when we wear clothes day, night and our whole life. Polyester is made from fossil fuels which are non-renewable and as a result non-biodegradable. It takes around 200 years for polyester to decay. This means an increase in waste and landfills, more plastic starts to build up in oceans. Indirectly this links to the issue of fishing. The plastic waste is so much where fishes consume the plastic and cause lowers fishes being caught. As a result, causing lower revenue for fishers. Either the fishes are of low quality or quantity of fishes are low.

Furthermore, the dyeing process uses a specific dye which contain toxic chemicals. During the washing process these toxins are released into the surrounding environment, once again contaminating the water. The water with toxins and chemicals may also be used to water other plants to grow fruits and vegetables. Essentially the food we eat contain some traces of toxins and chemicals. Dyes are hazardous and can cause serious health issues. These toxic chemicals start to build up in the organisms faster than the organism can excrete it. I.e. the

chemicals stay in the human body for a long time. As the health of people starts to reduce, it reduces economic welfare and more use of healthcare.

Finally, fast fashion has large impacts on the environment significantly because of its production of carbon emissions. The production of raw materials used to make clothes such as polyester are made from non-renewable resources such as fossil fuels. Burning these means the production of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. These are the causes of climate change. The sheer quantity of materials produced makes the fast fashion idea so destructive. Most of these goods are made in countries with cheap labour such as India and china. China mainly uses coal to produce their clothes and hence more greenhouse gases.

In addition to this there are transport cost of clothes. Most of the clothes being produced in china and India, they need to be transported to the UK which means more carbon emissions, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide. Ships and planes are used to transport these goods which all use diesel or petrol. We can argue that pollution means poor air, and this affects labour productivity as the health of worker can deteriorate and potentially cause death. This is evident because as previously stated India is one of the major suppliers of clothes. They produce clothes using non-renewable resources and as a result India has some of the dirtiest air.

Producing the clothes and putting them together also burns gasses for example using sewing machine and ironing machines, they all require electricity which mostly comes from non-renewable resources consequently producing carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxide.

We see fast fashion as a cost to the economy however it does have some benefits. Fast fashion allows consumer to buy the trendy clothes they want for a cheaper price. We can argue that even though we can buy cloths that are of better quality some people do not have the finance for it and cannot afford it. Currently wages are not increasing and thus being unable to afford good quality clothing. As a result, people tend towards cheap clothes. Fast fashion allows new ideas to be formed and new ideas means consumers visit the retailers more often. Furthermore, according to an article consumers buy the goods regardless of the price because they assume the goods will not be there for long. With a macroeconomic view, business such as Zara and H and M make enormous amounts of profit and thus increase GDP and economic growth. For example, the retail company Zara makes around $19.7 billion. A business earning that would be beneficial to the economy as it means the government would get more revenue to spend elsewhere as the business pays cooperation tax.

Every economic activity has consequences, but they all have solutions with them. It’s the same with fast fashion. To reduce water consumption, we can use fibres that use less water such as recycled fibres and linen etc. Recycling clothes more means we have to produce less of new ones. We can also choose to produce cloths in a stricter environment such as Canada and EU. Production of chemicals can also be reduced if we used more organic fibres to produce our clothes, which does not release any chemicals harmful to the environment and humans. Buying better quality clothes means less has to be spent and they would last longer. One option we have is sewing our cloths. Sometimes clothes rip and people throw them away however we can reuse then by mending them. Polyester is made using fossil fuels and, in some countries, made using coal. We can avoid using non-renewable sources and make these raw materials using renewable sources. Buying clothes comes into consumers hands. If any changes were to take place, then it all depends on the consumers. Some consumers may have poor information or imperfect information where the business may have more information than the consumer and as

a result, they would exploit the consumer. To overcome this, more information needs to be out. Informing and educating consumers may make a change to their buying habits.

Fast fashion has many implications, some are good, and others are bad for the economy. Environmental issues are not the only issues with fast fashion. Many countries with cheap labour do not get paid enough for the work they produce. Low wages mean they are exploiting workers and although it was said that globalisation would create jobs for people, there are still workers working below minimum wage and earning almost nothing. Working conditions for these workers are also poor and this was evident during the Rana Plaza incident in Bangladesh. Many workers died due to the building collapsing and that was a company producing cheap clothes. Fast fashion also goes against most of the sustainable development goals which is that there should be good health and well-being, clean water and sanitation, decent work and economic growth, climate action, life below water and life on land.

Overall cheap and trendy clothes are wanted by all however the consequences are extremely harmful for the economy as it reduces welfare and causes market failure. The future has even more harmful consequences specifically related to the usage of water. The dyes used also cause health issues and the greenhouse gases produced from producing raw materials causes air pollution and is unhealthy especially in countries that use non-renewable resources to produce their garments.