

What is the global flow of consumerism?

The global flow of consumerism is essentially the idea that increasing the consumption of goods and services being bought in the market is always the final goal and that people should depend on it to be happy. By increasing consumerism, it ensures a secure economy. It is a societal and cultural structure that enforces the idea of consuming the things we make in order to keep the world, economy, and people sustained. Although consumerism is meant to benefit people and the economy, there are many abuses that are a result of consumerism. Consumers purchase these goods and services from companies such as SHEIN, an online fashion retail store, who generated \$15.7 billion USD in 2021.³ SHEIN is a Chinese owned online business who manufacture and sell clothing items such as pants, swimwear, tops, shoes and accessories such as jewelry. They offer these at some of the cheapest prices on the market at the moment and that is what helps their business thrive in a world where consumers are looking for affordable products. SHEIN caters to trends that are popular in Gen Z. During an interview with a former MP of parliament, Belinda Vernon, she gave some insight on the issue. In terms of her consumption, she said “When I was earning a reasonable income, I would say yes. Now that I’m retired and on a pretty limited income and live in a small country town where there is not much to spend money on, I would say no. I basically only spend money on what I need.”

How does fast fashion impact society as a result of consumerism? (more choice and trend setting)

An example of the impact fast fashion has on society as a result of consumerism is changing and increasing trends. These trends cater to the ongoing demand in the consumerism industry and change almost every week to increase profit, which leads to implications. “[I look to] Pinterest and models like Gigi Hadid...” Derhartounian said This is an indication of an effective strategy where they exploit and manipulate consumers to buy items because a celebrity might promote/recommend it. This leads consumers to feeling out of fashion as celebrities and influencers keep promoting new clothing items. Major fast fashion companies such as Fashion Nova, have had collaborations with big, well known celebrities like Cardi B brought in almost \$1 million in the first 24 hours of its launch, becoming one of the most successful collaborations between a celebrity and a brand. This influences people to buy more from these unsustainable companies, giving in to consumerism. Although they may wear the trendiest clothing and “fit in”, this will further pollute and destroy the natural environment. Fast fashion contributes to 8-10% of global emissions. This will inevitably end up speeding up the process of the destruction of the human race.

More choices in fast fashion means that instead of having limited garments to choose from, there are much more choices for consumers to purchase from. Belinda Vernon mentioned the major impacts of fast fashion on society as a result of consumerism is that it helps inter-global economies thrive.⁸ Consumerism brought in \$30.58 billion global profit in 2021, in comparison to 2020, this is a 21.1% rise from \$25.09 billion. This helped recover almost all losses from COVID-19 related losses on a global scale. This is how in the past 2 years fast fashion has impacted society and increased the supply chain in the clothing industry. Because of the increase in interest in fast fashion, it has led to more choices being introduced to consumers in the fast fashion industry. This has a positive impact on society, as a consumer having more choice due to consumerism in fast fashion leads to happiness and fulfillment. For example, Shien, a Chinese online retail store, has approximately 10 thousand new items in their store per day. The impacts of more choice are however also negative as mass market retailers contribute to overproduction, unfair human labor, pollution, and damage to the environment.

What are the implications of consumerism in different societies? (human and health cost)

Although we all love trending clothes that come at a cheap cost, this has hidden implications on workers of these companies. Producers who supply the clothes to fast fashion companies, who later sell them to consumers have a history of treating their workers very very poorly. One major worry about these sweatshops is the environment they work in. Horrifyingly, statistics show that 43.1% of female clothing factory workers in Vietnam who have experienced and suffered from some form of sexual harassment and/or violence. The number of unsafe buildings used is not suitable for safe working conditions. In sweatshops in Bangladesh, methods known as “sandblasting” puts workers at risk of respiratory illnesses. When these methods contain crystalline silica, also known as quartz dust, it very likely will lead to major respiratory issues such as silicosis which is a lung disease caused by exposure over many years.

As we all know, the clothes in the fast fashion industry may sell for much cheaper, but this also means that the workers earn below living pay rates. This leaves them with low pay which can provide food, shelter, clean water, and clothes. On average in Bangladesh the rate per hour for sweatshop workers is \$1.48NZD, and in El Salvador it's only a measly \$1.11NZD. Because of these low wages sweatshop workers could be classed as slaves. Practically stripping their rights as not only workers but as humans. Asia has a ‘low wage’ economic model which has resulted in an inequity crisis with the most rich in society reaping the rewards of this system while the less fortunate are punished. Within the last two decades the richest 10% of the population in Indonesia, India, China, and Bangladesh have seen that their share incomes have increased by more than 15% whilst the poorest 10% have seen their share drop by more than 15%. This creates unfair advantages for the rich, and leaves the poor to work for the big fast fashion companies who produce the clothes we wear. Because of this we get stuck in a cycle of oppressing the poor and forcing them to produce the garments that will have irreversible effects on the environment. Belinda Vernon however pointed out that globalism does have a positive impact saying “If there were no globalization, there would be no trade or little trade, it would mean we would have no fast fashion...” This helps us to understand that although the fashion industry has its many many downsides, one being fast fashion, that we must find a balance and find social and environmental solutions for these problems to sustain globalism.

Throughout the sample, the student used basic footnoting to reference ideas, evidence and quotes from their primary and secondary sources.