Секция «Управление охраной окружающей среды и рациональным использованием природных ресурсов»

Fast Fashion as a Global Threat

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Fashion apparel industry has changed drastically in the last thirty years, transforming from the luxurious source of pleasure and the indicator of a social status that only some could afford to one of the main environmental and social threats of today's world. While some fifty years ago shopping for clothes was mainly seasonal and of perforce, now it is perceived more as an everyday entertainment activity. The ease of consumption of apparel goods has led to the emergence of mass-production, increase in the number of seasonal collections produced by brands and eventually to the concept of fast fashion, a term defined by Bick et al. (2018) as "the readily available, inexpensively made fashion of today". The accessibility of clothing has, in turn, resulted in a number of damaging consequences. The negative effects of this concept vary from a significant increase in the level of environmental pollution to substantial damages caused to human rights. This paper is going to discuss some of these negative effects in detail and propose several possible solutions to the problem of fast fashion development.

The ecological damage caused by fast fashion begins with the production of textile. The vast majority of clothing items are made with cotton or polyester, the materials which are connected to significant environmental impact. Cotton cultivation requires substantial amounts of water and pesticides, whereas the production of polyester, the most popular synthetic fabrics (Claudio, 2007), is associated with crude oil and the emissions of acid gases and other harmful substances which can cause deadly diseases to humans and animals. The dyeing process, which comes after, is yet another addition to the hazardous effects (Bick et al, 2018). The wastewater that is left after the material has been dyed is often poured off into local rivers where it releases toxic matters, detrimental to the inhabitants of the area.

Along with the environmental hazards, the social impact of fashion also takes place. Not only does this trend augment the scope of globalization processes, which can be perceived as both a positive and a negative factor, it also influences the human rights perspective throughout the globe. People who are employed at each stage of the production chain in fashion industry, especially those in underdeveloped or developing countries, often face poor working conditions due to cost reduction tendencies of producers (Mukherjee, 2015). These conditions range from long working hours (over 48 hours per week) and life-threatening situations, including accidental injuries, as well as respiratory and musculoskeletal damage risks, to child labour and sexual harassment (Bick et al., 2018; Mukherjee, 2015). That being stated, various occupational and safety standards are being enforced by different institutions, including the United Nations (Bick et al., 2018). However, they seem to be rather insufficient for various reasons which will not be discussed in this paper, for this is another broad subject for debate.

After the pieces of apparel have been produced, the transportation comes in place, causing yet more damage to the environment. The most frequently used means of worldwide transportation at the moment are by sea routes and by air. Each of these types of transport contributes significantly to various emissions of toxic substances, including NO2, SO2, and CO2 (Turker & Altuntas, 2014; Dalsøren *et al.*, 2009). These substances constitute a major threat to the ozone

layer and acidic deposition of our planet, thus conducing to the climate change (Dalsøren *et al.*, 2009).

The next stages of the clothing lifecycle (namely, distribution and use) do not contribute considerably to the levels of environmental or social detriment. However, the final one - that is, the disposal of used and unused pieces of clothing - does affect the ecological wellbeing. There are several ways in which consumers and retail companies can liquidate superfluous items. These are: donation, reuse of the fabrics, recycle, or disposal (Weber *et al.*, 2016). The first three of these are rather environmentally friendly, for they prolong the lifespan of a garment and decrease the need for additional purchasing of production by providing the ready-made materials. Nevertheless, the determinant of how frequent these three measures are utilized by individuals and firms is the convenience and availability of recycling stations and donation depots (ibid). Therefore, in places where these special sites are not available (most countries fall under this category), the most commonly used way of liquidation of apparel is disposal. In fact, the 85% of all fabrics in the US is found in landfills, although 100% of that waste can be recycled (Council for Textile Recycling, 2014 in Weber *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, whilst naturally made materials will eventually biodegrade, producing a number of dangerous for environment gases and substances, synthetic fibres are most likely to remain in landfills for an interminable period of time (Tammemagi, 1999; Li *et al.*, 2010 in Weber *et al.*, 2016).

As with firms and their decision-making on what to do with unsold garments, there has always existed a big dilemma. Some analysts believe that the best way to manage this problem is to distribute the residuary items to charity, although this solution contradicts the market positioning of fashion brands, especially in the luxury sector. The other frequently used means of solving the dilemma is to dispose of the items by burning them. There has recently been a scandal with a luxury brand Burberry when it admitted to having burnt a $40 million worth of unsold apparel and accessories (Wernick, 2019). A large number of activists protested against such a resolution, questionably proclaiming that all unused garments should have been donated to those in need. Nonetheless, it still remains a mystery why Burberry and other big companies do not simply reuse the materials for their new collections.

Summing up the information above, fashion industry, and fast fashion in particular, is a substantial source of global pollution and social injustice. Unfortunately, it is also undoubtful that the process of mass production is unlikely to slow down in the foreseeable future. However, there exist a number of ways in which we can degrade the damage caused by fast fashion to our planet.

First and foremost, in addressing the environmental impact of fast fashion, analysts and manufacturers have established the concept of eco-fashion. It is defined by International Standards Organization as "identifying the general environmental performance of a product within a product group based on its whole life-cycle in order to contribute to improvements in key environmental measures and to support sustainable consumption patterns" (in Claudio, 2007). There are several approaches, already taken into consideration by a number of manufacturers, which meet the standards of eco-fashion in production processes.

One of those approaches is based on using sustainably grown fibres, such as cotton and bamboo, which require a lower level of pesticides and other deleterious inputs (Claudio, 2007). There are a number of drawbacks in this approach, however. Not only is it significantly more costly to produce, it also requires a substantial amount of energy for postpurchase care, namely washing and drying. Alongside with organic fibres, more innovative ways of ecologically friendly manufacturing textiles are being utilized. For instance, the world is witnessing an increase in the use of fleece - a fibre made from recycled plastic bottles (ibid). In particular, Patagonia has been the most renowned producer of fleece since 1993. This method, although sustainable, also requires expensive inputs and, therefore, is rather insignificant to the solving of fast fashion

damages.

Another approach is to use synthetic fibres made from plant-based materials (ibid). The example of such fibres is a polymer produced with corn by-products, which was developed and trademarked by Cargill, Ingeo. Designer clothing firms often use such polymers, including the House of Versace.

There are plenty of other methods within the concept of eco-fashion which, however, do not solve the problem of fast fashion for one main reason - they are unable to cope with the current speed of consumption (Kozlowski *et al.*, 2012). That is why the main solution that environmental activists and scientists are concentrating on is altering the consumer behaviour. What needs to be done is a shift back to slow consumption based on real needs and preferences (Schor, 2013). This process of increasing the consumer consciousness is certainly going to be time-consuming and complex but the fruits of it are demanded on the global level and, thus, are worth the invested exertion.

Overall, the fashion industry has been under the spotlight for a few decades now for being one of the most environmentally damaging. In particular, the concept of fast fashion is being discussed as a significant contributor to the ecological issues of the present world. Almost every stage of a clothing lifecycle augments the detriments to the overall environmental harm of the industry. There are several approaches that may reduce the harmful effects of production of apparel. However, they have insignificant impact on the overall ecological damage. Therefore, the foremost change that is required, in the opinion of many experts, is the shift in consumer behaviour and an increase in environmental awareness of purchasers.

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