



DARK SIDE OF FASHION

E-BOOK BY

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TIME IS TICKING

BY MELANIE DE VRIES

Did you know that the fashion industry is the second most polluting industry in the world? Research by Ellen Macarthur Foundation shows that the greenhouse gas emission from textile production, 1.2 billion tons annually covers more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined ([Foundation, 2017](#)). The hazardous working conditions at the factory are a threat to the health of employees, even if they wear protective equipment. Besides, clothes release plastic microfibers that eventually end up in the environment that equals half a million tons that ends up in the ocean every year. Trends indicate that the impact of the current fashion industry will increase dramatically. If nothing changes, there will be great catastrophic consequences in the future. Shocking right?

Now that I have your attention, I would like to tell you something about this E-book. Hi, my name is Melanie and I am a graduation year student at Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences Business School. Since I was young, I have been interested in the fashion industry. Therefore, a couple of years ago, I started to work as a sales assistant with one of the largest fashion brands in the World. We sold many clothes, especially during sales. Sometimes clothes were sold for only 3 euros, you don't want to miss that, right?

After a while, I asked myself, how is that even possible? Is it so cheap to produce clothes? Due to my curiosity, I started to read more about the industry, this was the beginning of my guilty feelings. From that moment, I realized the actual reality of the fashion industry. My guilt became bigger, and I felt the need to do something about it.

Through the minor Circular Economy and Business Innovation, I learned that there are also opportunities for change. And yes change is necessary. My goal? Contributing to the transition in the fashion industry by helping to raise awareness among consumers and brands.

You may be wondering why this is necessary and how you have been involved. This E-book will answer these questions and will reveal not only how bad the fashion industry is, but also how we can improve it. In the final chapter, I will elaborate on how you can contribute to the transition in the fashion industry by providing useful tips.

*"Each one of us can make a difference.
Together we make a change"*
- Barbara Mikulski

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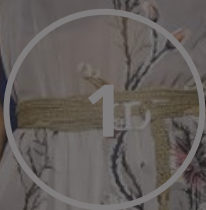
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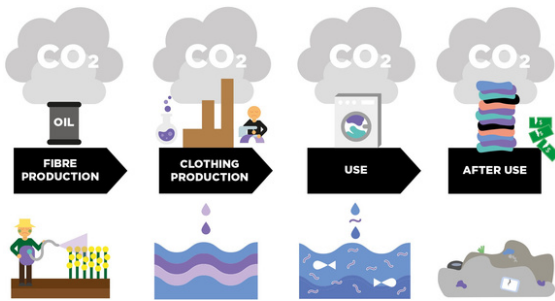


INTRODUCTION "THE FASHION INDUSTRY"

CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND BUSINESS INNOVATION

INTRODUCTION "FASHION INDUSTRY"

A world without clothes does not exist, everyone uses it. Clothing provides protection and comfort. Additionally, clothes are part of someone's identity. The fashion industry is known for its trend-driven clothing. Therefore, the textile industry is a major sector in the general economy, involving more than a milliard of people. Fashion has shown significant changes in recent decades. Not only the design of the clothes changed but the entire industry, including our behavior towards fashion, has transformed over time. At this moment, we discovered that the ecological footprint of the current fashion industry is too large for the environment and people area. The problem keeps getting worse and we can no longer ignore them. But what does the fashion industry look like now? How did the fashion industry become one of the most polluting industries?



Picture: The current clothing system puts pressure on sources and creates negative environmental and social impacts. (Foundation, 2017).

The fashion industry operates according to a system. The current system of the fashion industry is almost entirely linear. Non-reusable raw materials are used for clothes, then only worn for a short period and eventually thrown away and ending up in a landfill or incinerated. The chain consists of the following steps: production phase → retail phase → use phase → disposal phase. More and more comments emerge in the current textile system. Large amounts of non-recyclable materials are exhausted to make clothing, then we wear the clothes but for a short period and eventually end up in the landfill or incinerated (Foundation, 2017). This type of model, take-make-disposal, has huge pressure on resources, the pollution of the environment, and negative social impacts.

FAST FASHION AND GLOBALIZATION

Two main causes have led to the current industry, namely globalization and fast fashion. Globalization is a movement that has led to the bringing together of countries and has an impact on every sector. Trade between countries became increasingly easier due to technological developments in the world of information and communication. As a result, trade worldwide is still conducted, and therefore, most products are not produced and consumed in the same country. This globalization has also affected the textile industry, leading to pros and cons.

Globalization is a main cause of the current industry and it arose from outsourcing. An advantage could be that clothes become much better when sharing knowledge. However, there are also major drawbacks, the consequences of which are now visible. An important impact of globalization is outsourcing. Companies, mainly developing countries, outsource their manufactures and other parties to other countries (generally developing countries).

Outsourcing is much cheaper, hence, it allows companies to develop even cheaper clothes (Fibre2Fashion, 2012). As a result? A misrepresented growing system in the industry, in which developed countries use and exploit developing countries.

On the other hand, fast fashion is also the main cause of the current industry. Fast fashion is an upcoming term and is still being explored about the possible consequences. But first, what does fast fashion mean?

Fast fashion is a phenomenon that contributes to the negative pressure of the linear system in the fashion industry. Fast fashion can be described as a particular culture and can be divided into two perspectives: business model (companies) and consumption (consumers). Companies deliver faster and fast as a result, the number of collections is very much increased. Clothes are made for a short life span based on the quality and fashion related items. Additionally, people buy and dispose of clothes easier and more often than before. We get easily bored with fashion and feel the desire to buy new clothes. On average, 100 billion garments are produced every year which can be compared to 14 pieces of clothes per person on earth (Google, 2020a).

LET'S START A QUIZ

Test your knowledge



Or Click Here

Several mechanisms maintain fast fashion. Nowadays if you want to buy clothes, it is very easy. There is a wide range of companies and brands to choose from. Due to the wide variety, the fashion industry is a highly competitive market. Additionally, a price war occurs and forces companies to lower the costs and have less respect for environmental and social aspects. The industry is based on elongated and interwoven chains. The connections are diverse, which makes it difficult to create impact and distinguish. The last mechanism, as I have already mentioned, is consumerism. Due to the combination of an increase in spendable income and lower prices, there has been a boost in the purchase of products. When it becomes so convenient to buy, it is doable to replace clothes even if there are not used for a long time. In other words, we attach less value to our purchased products. Fast fashion is a negative spiral that goes hand in hand with extremely negative consequences for the people and the environment.

The main issues are now the negative effects of the current activities of the fashion industry. This can be divided into environmental and social impacts. The environment suffers from the industry and the working conditions for industrial workers (mostly in developing countries) are also shocking. Why change now when we also have to deal with the pandemic, COVID-19 today? To clarify, the problems in today's industry can also be seen as pandemic and have drastic consequences if nothing changes. Before COVID-19, the fashion industry was already on an unsustainable road to ruin (Thompson, 2020).

Furthermore, COVID-19 has a massive impact on the industry. The changes in society, such as the lockdown, hit many major retail brands hard. However, COVID-19 has put a halt to overproduction and overconsumption and becomes a huge turning point. It creates an opportunity to temporarily stop and start to realize a more sustainable and slower fashion culture, which is entirely devoted to the reduction of raw materials. A fashion culture of comfort, quality, and climate is more important than flashy and hot trends (Thompson, 2020). Now that we are at this intersection, do we choose the old habits or the new habits where fashion is sustainable? To clarify, it is important to know how urgent this decision is. The next section of this E-book elaborates on the impacts that the current industry will have on the people and the environment.



Picture: During a fashion show, we don't realize the effect on the environment. From: Futurelearn

2

THE SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

THE SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

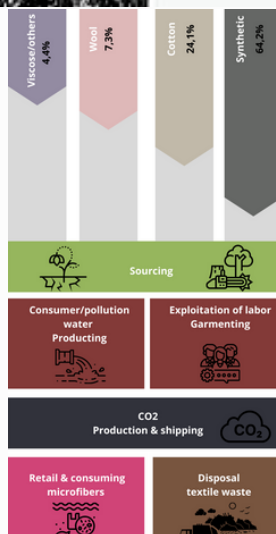
Pizzarello: the hellhole of the earth. Made by W. Mazzanti

When it comes to fashion, we need to be more conscious of our behavior and actions and try to reflect on ethical standards. The daily decisions that we make concerning clothes have negative effects, and we need to reconsider these. The first step is to understand the problem. Have we ever thought about the real impact of the fashion industry? What and how big are these impacts? And the most important question is what are the consequences of these negative impacts? The section will answer these questions and help you to realize what the disadvantages of the current system of the fashion industry are. But how do we change our behavior and our actions? This requires big changes and goals which are necessary to achieve this. Fortunately, we don't have to start from scratch. Many developments are already taking place which contributes to the growth of the sustainable fashion industry. But it is still not enough. During the past decades, the cost of clothing has decreased, but the costs have to be collected somewhere. Let's discover the price that the planet and society are paying for us.



Before you continue reading, check out the video made by The Economist supported by The Woolmark Company.

(Click on the video)



Picture: Infographic about the current clothing system and their environmental and social impacts. Made by myself

THE INDUSTRY: THE ROLE OF THE MANUFACTURES

The production of clothing is done by manufacturers. These are spread all over the world, mainly in countries where it is the cheapest to produce. Maybe you think your t-shirt is made in one factory. That is not true. The supply chain of the textile industry is a bit more complicated. All factories make their contribution to the development of a garment. The image shows the flowchart of the textile industry's supply chain.

Raw material suppliers

The first step in the supply chain is the raw materials. Your clothing can consist of two types of fibers, namely natural fibers (cotton, wool, silk) and man-made fibers (synthetic) (rayon, polyester, nylon).

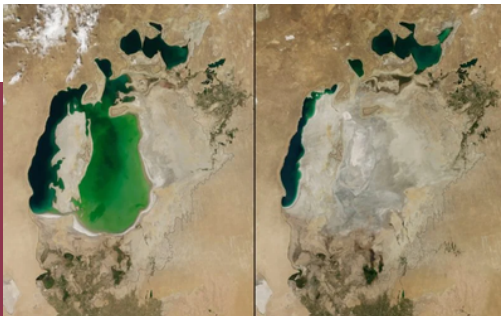
Natural fibers are made on land, such as cotton and man-made fibers are made from oil. One of the big negative impacts of the current fashion industry system is the depletion of resources. A major challenge for the textile industry is resource use, which leads to exhausting the raw materials. As I mentioned before, the system is completely linear. Combined with the fact that the raw materials are mostly non-renewable, there is a threat of a shortage of raw materials.



Picture: Thousands of hectares of forest are cut every year. Made by myself

Another use of environmental impact caused by the consumption of materials is soil degradation and desertification. The fashion industry plays a major role in contributing to soil degradation. To begin with, one of the natural materials used in clothing is wool which comes from goats. The overgrazing of the cashmere goats leads to desertification. Also, another popular material is cotton. This grows on a cotton plant. However, chemicals are used during cotton growing. These chemicals end up in the soil, which leads to major problems. Finally, as mentioned above, deforestation also leads to further drying of the soil. But why is this impact so severe? To begin with, the soil is a fundamental part of our ecosystem. The soil is necessary to grow our food, but the soil also ensures CO₂ absorption. As a result, this impact poses a major threat to the global food supply and contributes to global warming.

One of the main components of our clothes exists in chemicals. Chemicals are used during the whole supply chain. But especially during the production of cotton, a lot of bad chemicals are used. This has a huge impact on social life. The farmers are exposed to the chemicals daily. This leads to illnesses and even deaths among cotton farmers ([Sustainyourstyle, 2020a](#)).



An image of the Aral Sea. Left: 2000. Right: 2014. source: NASA

Even though we know that the resources are not infinite, resource consumption continues to rise. In 2015 the amount was 98 million tonnes per year. This is expected to increase to 300 million tonnes. At this moment, less than 1% of the clothing materials are recycled and converted into new textiles ([Foundation, 2017](#)). This means that a huge amount is still produced with raw materials.

According to the Pulse of the Fashion Industry report, natural fibers have the most environmental impact ([Lehmann, 2019](#)). One of the big impacts of huge resource consumption is the destruction of the rainforest. According to Sustainyourstyle, 70 million trees are cut each year to make our clothes. You may be wondering why trees are cut down to make your clothes. Namely 30% of your clothing that consists of rayon and viscose comes from an endangered and ancient forest. These fabrics are wooden-based materials. A total of 5% of the global apparel industry uses forest base-fabrics ([Sustainyourstyle, 2020a](#)). Thousands of hectares of forest are cut down every year and this has serious consequences for the ecosystem.



Picture: soil degradation causes big problems
From Businessinsider

Water consumption is also very high during the development of raw materials, such as cotton. A country that produces a lot of cotton in India. They have a huge footprint on the consumption and pollution of water. Producing 1 kg of cotton consumes 22,500 liters of water. This means this water cannot be used for anything else. You might not realize but 100 million in India do not have access to safe water ([Leahy, 2015](#)). Not only during the development of raw material, a lot of water is used but also during the production process. And that is the next step in the supply chain that we will be investigating.

Textile and apparel manufactures

In addition to the major impacts on the use of raw materials, there are also major impacts during the production process of clothing. After the materials have been extracted, it goes to a factory that spins them into a thread. The yarn is then sold to another factory that weaves the yarn into a piece of fabric. As you look in your wardrobe, it consists of a rich number of colored items. This also means that the fabrics still have to be colored. The fabrics are then sold to another factory that eventually turns them into garments. The biggest negative impacts are in this phase of the entire textile industry ([Taylor, 2018](#)).

As I mentioned before the fashion industry is a major water consumer. A lot of clean water is used during the dyeing and finishing of clothes during production. The size of the water use in numbers can amount to 200 tons of freshwater per ton of dyed fabric. In total, 1.5 trillion liters of water is used by the fashion industry every year ([Sustainyourstyle, 2020a](#)). To give a good example of the footprint of water use and pollution can be made with cotton, 1kg cotton stands for 10.000 liters of water ([Leahy, 2015](#)). Maybe that doesn't mean much to you. But let's take an example, jeans. Because yes, the Netherlands is the denim country. There is no country where so many jeans are bought per capita. During the production of jeans, an average of 8,000 liters of water is used ([NOS, 2020](#)). In other words, that's equivalent to one person drinking 8 cups of water a day for 10 years ([McFall-Johnsen, 2019](#)). How many pairs of jeans do you have in the closet? So do the math on how much water is consumed in total what is in your closet.



Image of the water pollution. From Smartwatermagazine blog Fast fashion: Toxic clothing

Another impact on water is its pollution. In general, the fashion industry is responsible for 20% of all industrial water pollution worldwide ([McFall-Johnsen, 2019](#)). A lot of water, including dyes, is used in the production of washing, dyeing, and bleaching. This creates wastewater. It is almost impossible to purify this wastewater with a treatment method. According to, article fast fashion: toxic clothing, is textile wastewater one of the most polluted wastewater due to its high chemical oxygen demand, intense color, high temperature, high PH, and low biodegradability. Mostly the wastewater will end up in the rivers and eventually in the ocean. According to Sustainyourstyle, 90% of the wastewaters in developing countries are discharged into rivers without treatment ([Sustainyourstyle, 2020a](#)). This is very harmful to marine animals due to the toxic effects. Marine animals are in our food chain. We also end up eating marine animals that come out of the polluted water, so that the chemicals from the water also enter our bodies. But that is not all, there is also a social problem in that area. The wastewater can lead to health problems such as allergies and skin irritation. Millions of people are living nearby those toxic rivers ([Mersin, 2020](#)).

As I mentioned before, a lot of chemicals are used in the textile industry. Some of them are very bad for people and the environment. Also during the process of washing, dyeing, and finishing toxic chemicals are used. 1 kg of chemicals is needed to produce 1 kg of textiles ([Sustainyourstyle, 2020a](#)).

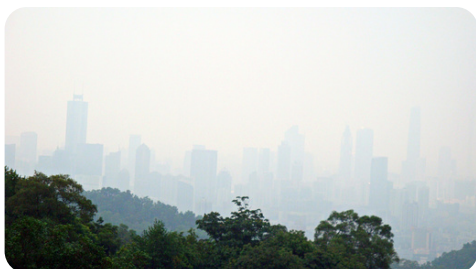


Image of the CO2 emission. From Carvra

The next topic I want to discuss is essential. That is the emission of green gases. That the climate is changing is a fact. The damage to the ecosystems does already exist. Now we need to reduce it, by taking measures per sector. In the field of CO2 emissions, the fashion industry is also under big pressure. In 2015 the CO2 emissions of this industry amounted to 2% of the total world emissions. Now it 10% of the global CO2 emissions ([Janssen, 2020](#)). However, if the trend continues, it is expected to be 26% of all emissions in 2050. As a result, the Earth will continue to warm with catastrophic consequences ([Foundation, 2017](#)). If there is no change in the current system to reduce the emissions of the greenhouse gases that cause climate change, we can expect crises. You can think of rising sea levels, heatwaves, and further damage to ecosystems that are essential for life on earth ([Berg, 2020](#)). One of the causes is the increase in production. The companies responsible here: brands and retailers. In the next section, their influence on the negative impacts becomes clear.

Ecological footprint



Overview environmental impact of the fashion industry. Made by: myself



**RAINFOREST
DESTRUCTION**



**WATER
CONSUMPTION**



**CHEMICALS
ADDICTION**



**GREENHOUSE GASES
EMISSIONS**



**SOILS DEGRADATION
AND DESERTIFICATION**



**WATER
POLLUTION**



**MICROFIBERS IN OUR
OCEANS**



**WASTES
ACCUMULATION**

THE INFLUENCE OF FASHION BRANDS & RETAILERS

The next step in the chain is fashion brands and retailers. They, directly and indirectly, drive the fashion industry. They manage the factories and determine what you can buy. As I mentioned in the introduction of the E-book, several starting points have led to the current fashion industry. A fashion brand and retailers each have their business model. There is stiff competition. As a result, many companies compete with offering low price clothing, also known as a price war. The rise of fast fashion means that twice as much is produced. Besides, the price must also be as low as possible. This has drastic consequences for the factories, especially on a social level. When we look at the impact of the fashion industry, it is often about how bad the environmental aspects are. But there is another important part that is often forgotten or neglected but is just as negative as the environmental effect, namely the social impact.



WAGES



WORKING HOURS



HEALTH & SAFETY
CONDITIONS



CHILD LABOUR



FORCED LABOUR



RESTRICTION OF FREEDOM
OF ASSOCIATION

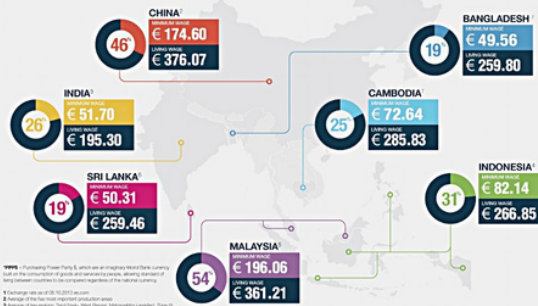
Overview social impact of the fashion industry. From: Sustainyourstyle.

We almost forgot that there are human beings behind the clothes that we wear. The consequences are that there are often poor working conditions in the factories. According to Lucy Siegle: "One of the biggest and most profitable industries in the world, why is it that it's not able to guarantee their safety, which is an essential human right ([Ourgoodbrands, 2020](#))? To date, we struggle to answer this question. The high cost and time pressures can lead to workers suffering poor working conditions with low pay and long working hours. In some instances, modern slavery and child labor. The social impacts are based on several topics ([Sustainyourstyle, 2020b](#)). In the picture below the topics are shown.

Fashion brands communicate to consumers that the people who made their clothes are at least paid by the minimum legal wage. But what does that mean? First let me explain that there are two different types, namely the legal wage and the living wage. The living wage is the minimum income that a family must have to meet basic needs, such as food, school, healthcare. The Clean Clothes Campaign investigated how big the difference is. An overview can be seen in the image. This means that the workers earn 5 times less than they need to live well ([Sustainyourstyle, 2020b](#)). And this is just the tip of an iceberg.

MINIMUM WAGE VS LIVING WAGE

The difference between the minimum wage¹ and a living wage.
To say instead - The Living Wage is based on the Asia Floor Wage 2013 version of FPP/725.

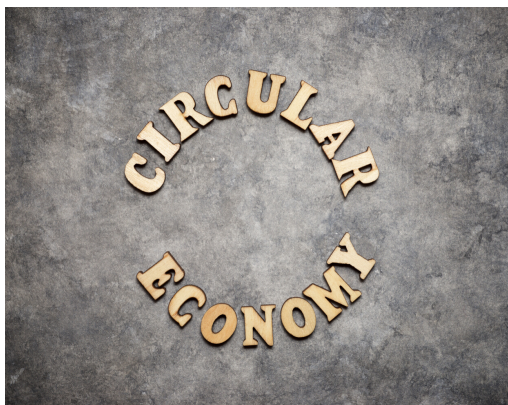


Picture of the minimum wage vs living wage in different countries. y. From: Sustainyourstyle.

Did you know that an average of 169 people is involved in the production of one garment and 86 people made your garment?

How can it be that a t-shirt is in the store for 5 euros at the discount?

More and more fashion brands are recognizing the importance of their current business model becoming increasingly heavy. It is time for a change. Fashion companies are therefore constantly working on making their supply chain more sustainable. This means that they look for suppliers (factories) that deal with the environment and people responsibly. So factories that limit the above environmental and social impacts as much as possible. More sustainable materials are being developed with new technological innovations, but changes are also being made in the production process. As an example to save water in the production process (washing/coloring/finishing), laser techniques are used. Fashion brands thus become more sustainable through the choices in the factories. In doing so, they pay attention to both the environmental aspect and the social aspect, so that child labor and poor working conditions are ultimately banned. Another way in which they make the fashion industry more sustainable is through changing the current system is by adopting a circular economy. The current system of linear production is changed in a circular system, whereby textile waste is used as new raw materials for making your clothing. There are various starting points for reducing the environmental impact, also known as the circular economy principles: reduce, delay, and circular (recycle). This requires a lot from fashion brands and retailers. These principles change current business models. But that is also the intention because as I had already said with the current way of operating, we will not be fully sustainable.



Picture of circular economy. From Canva.

At this moment various steps are taken to move forward as an industry, by using various strategies. It is also known as a guide, leading to the transition in the fashion industry. This has especially influence on the pillar planet, where negative impacts on the environment are reduced Textiles Programme - Circle Economy (CircleEconomy, 2020). A step towards sustainable fashion is by reducing the number of clothes that are annually produced. So in other terms, this means ending the phenomenon of 'fast fashion'. As I mentioned before, the number of collections on offer has doubled in recent years. More and more fashion brands are becoming more aware of the fact that this is a heavy burden on people and the environment. As a result, more and more fashion brands are turning their back on fast fashion and are reducing the number of collections they produce per year. This term is also called slow fashion. These collections will be much more sustainable. How? The collections that are then offered are less trend-sensitive, so they also last longer. But it is very difficult for brands to adapt to the business model and producing less. This requires major changes that are sometimes not financially possible. Another development based on reducing the number of clothes is by not selling clothes but instead leasing. This new business model is shaking up the current system at fashion companies. It is a completely different way of generating sales.

Another way in which sustainability is integrated by fashion companies is to extend the life of clothing by designing for longevity, implementing second-hand market clothing, and repairing/refurbishing broken clothes. The last circular principle is to make the chain circular by taking back clothing and giving it a new life, for example by having the clothing recycled (Foundation, 2020a).



However, this is not enough. A report of the sustainability performance of the global fashion industry, called Pulse of the Fashion Industry 2019 update, describes that the fashion industry has improved its environmental and social performance in the past year, but it is at a slower rate than the previous year (Lehmann, 2019). Despite the progress from fashion brands and the accompanying supply chain, we are far from a sustainable industry. The fashion brands and retailers are not pushing enough and implementing sustainable solutions not fast enough to counterbalance the social and environmental impacts. Cause: too large and fast-growing industry. As a result, the fashion brands and retailers will not meet the requirements and ultimately the SDGs will not be achieved. This is further explained in the next section. Brands and retailers must push harder to make their supply chain more sustainable. As a result, factories will all eventually produce sustainably and take better care of the workers. This must focus more, work in a coordinated manner, and be transparent. Fashion brands and retailers should be more taken action by changing their supply chain and business model, according to the guidelines of circular economy principles. And thinking entirely from sustainability concerning the life cycle of a garment, reducing both environmental and social impacts. However, fashion brands and retailers cannot make the transition alone. They depend on the consumer. After all, the consumer brings in money so that fashion brands and retailers can design clothes. To make the transition, consumer behavior must also be changed. Because yes, the consumer also has a large environmental and social footprint in the chain of the fashion industry.

IT'S TIME FOR ANOTHER QUIZ

THE BEHAVIOR OF CONSUMERS

After a garment has been sold, the consumer has become the owner of the garment. From this moment on, the clothing fulfills its purpose: namely to be worn. A garment already carries a huge footprint. However, that has not stopped yet. During the consumer phase of the garment, there are certainly negative social and environmental effects. The JRC study shows that the biggest environmental footprint in the lifecycle of clothing is in the consumer phase (Šajin, 2019). So that means that you print the largest footprint on a garment. This is usually caused by washing, ironing, and drying. Of the overall environmental impact of EU consumption, clothing accounts for between 2% and 10% of the total percentage (Šajin, 2019).



[Or Click Here](#)

The first negative impact of this phase is the number of microfibers entering the ocean. You may be wondering how? The 2017 report from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) shows that a large part of the microplastics that end up in the sea comes from particles from synthetic clothing (Nature, 2017). You may know that entire floating blocks are made of plastic floating in the ocean. Because yes, plastic waste is also one of the biggest problems in the world. But what you may not have known is that there are also mini particles of plastic floating in the ocean, called microplastic. But how do they end up in the sea from your clothes? It all starts with the clothing material that you wear. Polyester and nylon for example. This material consists of plastic, which allows microplastics to come loose during wear. The second step is washing and drying. By washing and drying your clothes, the microplastics are released from your clothes and are flushed with the water, which eventually ends up in the ocean. To make it more clear, every time we wash a synthetic garment (which consists of polyester, nylon, etc.) approx. 1,900 individual microfibers are released into the water. In total 190,000 tons of textile microplastic fibers end up in the ocean every year (Sustainyourstyle, 2020a). In the end, the microplastics will also end up in our food, called plastic in our food chain.

Another important environmental impact is the rise of waste fashion. Globally the fashion industry generates more clothes and the clothes are no longer made to last. Due to the low price handling, the quality of the garment decreases. Also, the clothing is designed so trend-sensitive that it quickly goes out of fashion. In combination with our consumer behavior, clothing is thrown away at a rapid pace. We do not throw away our clothes when they are no longer usable, but when they lost their social value or are no longer fashionable. Clothing is massively underutilized. A garment is worn only 7 to 10 times before being thrown away (Foundation, 2020a). The average lifetime of a garment is 3 years (Sustainyourstyle, 2020a).

We just throw away our clothes without realizing the consequences. The result of our behavior? Huge clothing mountains. Did you know that synthetic fibers, such as polyester, can take up to 200 years to decompose (Sustainablefashionearth, 2019). And then I did not even mention that a big part of the clothes is ending up being incinerated. On average per family 30 kg of clothing is throwing away each year. Nowadays every second a truck full of clothes (2,625kg) is burnt or buried in a landfill (Foundation, 2020b).



Picture of a waste mountains in landfills. From Groundsure

THE DRIVERS OF CHANGE BY POLICYMAKERS & INITIATIVES



Picture of the SDGs. From Google.

There are various operations initiate movements, such as international NGOs and trade unions. Non-governmental organizations play a vital role in developing society, improving communities, and promoting civic participation. They contribute to the change in the fashion industry while generating data to show accurate risks and negative impacts. But they also form a strong voice to inform people about the topic (Maureau, 2018). Trade unions are organizations consist of workers from the field. The aim is to protect and advance the interests of employees in a sector. For the fashion industry are trade unions very important, because of the negative social impacts. Other initiatives also work towards a sustainable fashion industry. Examples are Fair Wear and Ethical Trade.

The government has also set sustainability goals for the fashion industry. This is done through a punishment and reward system. Where stricter laws and regulations put pressure on the current system. As a result, the fashion industry must convert to a sustainable system. Also, the government motivates sustainable initiatives through subsidies. At the time, they worked with the systemic change that brought about sustainability in the entire supply chain (Janssen, 2020). In the Netherlands, the aim is to achieve a circular economy by 2050. One of the goals is that the government aims to reduce the use of primary raw materials by 50% by 2030 (Rijksoverheid, 2016). This also means the end of the depletion of the raw materials for producing clothing. However, to achieve this, many actions have to be taken. All parties must understand the importance and be willing to adapt.

The change is therefore being set in motion from the policymakers, among others, but unfortunately not enough.

Peter McAllister, Executive Director of Ethical Trading Initiative, comments: "The time is long overdue to raise the bar and take bold action. We know that previous initiatives have had some impact, and we can learn from, and build on that. But the approach so far has been too fragmented, and piecemeal" (FairWear, 2021).

More action needs to be taken, and it will come. Various parties, global leaders, and stakeholders including garment brands, manufacturers, trade unions, and international organizations from consumer and production countries are joining forces, whereby a targeted action plan will be drawn up to make the chain more sustainable. One of the interesting comments from Alexander Kohnstamm, Executive Director of Fair Wear, is: "There is momentum for an irreversible move towards a true people- and planet-positive garment sector. Investors want to see it, governments, retailers, media, consumers, workers of course – as do brands and factories. It is now up to us, collectively, to make that lasting change. Moving from scattered initiatives to catalytic collaboration. Let's join forces as a sector, and lead the way in contributing to the SDGs by implementing the UNGP guidelines and ILO standards through the OECD guidelines" (FairWear, 2021).

So big change starts with small steps. To change the industry every party has to be involved and onboard. Everyone must take responsibility and take action. The stakeholders within the industry continue to implement the change towards the growth of the sustainable fashion industry. However, they cannot do this alone. They need your help. Besides, the consumers have the most environmental footprint of the lifecycle of a garment. Our current behavior does not contribute to making clothing more sustainable. And as you have now read, it is not only the fault of the fashion brands, the factories, and the government. You also contribute to pollution. It is necessary to hold up a mirror. Some wonder how they can contribute then. And that is certainly a good question. That is why the next part of this E-book consists of how you as a consumer can contribute to making the fashion industry more sustainable.

3

YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO
SUSTAINABLE FASHION

YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE FASHION

To change the current system, more initiative must be shown from different angles. Fashion companies and the government cannot make the transition on their own, they also need the help of the consumers. So you can also contribute to a better fashion industry! How? In this chapter, you can read which actions you can take, as an individual to the creation of new and better fashion. In other words, a guide on how to achieve a more sustainable wardrobe.

A garment has various phases in which it is continued throughout the entire chain. You can have an impact on each one phase.

THE PRODUCTION PHASE

The first phase is the production of the garments by brands. Most people think they only can make an impact on something when it is closed by. In this case, you owned the garment. Absolutely, but you can also create an indirect impact where you have an indirect influence on the behavior of fashion brands. How? By creating your knowledge of sustainable fashion. And yes you are doing it right now, by reading this E-book. Fashion brands are always looking for the best connection with their customers. If the customer behavior is changing, they will change too. So that means if you can give brands a push in the right direction, you as an individual can also contribute to lowering the environmental impact. Citrate from Elly Strang: "Personal choices can impact our own lives and homes, but we also have to motivate the bigger changemakers to take action, too" (Strang, 2021).



Picture with question about throwing away clothes. Made by myself

Do your research

In chapter 2 I already described that there are major developments in making fashion more sustainable. Many brands are already making the transition and trying to adapt their business model. So before you buy a new garment, do some research. What determines your choice of brand or garment?

Research brand

When people are doing research, I often get the question: how can you know if a brand is sustainable? Because yes, Green Washing exists. (Mondalek, 2020). You cannot be 100% sure, but having confidence in a brand is required. Most sustainable brands often have a sustainability page on their website describing their goals. Also, platforms are now upcoming where you can see how sustainable an organization is and you can compare them. A good example is the platform Good On You, which includes an app where you can discover ethical brands and see how they measure up. Support brands that are sustainable businesses and encourage your favorite brands to make more ethical decisions (GoodOnYou, 2020).

Did you know that on average a person owns 173 items of clothing in the wardrobe, of which 50 pieces were not worn last year and only 7 pieces are second-hand?



Picture with a question about the amount of clothing in a wardrobe. Made by myself

Research garments

When you are online or offline shopping, focus also on the different clothing items that brands offer. Because not every item of a brand is sustainable, some are more than others. If you are looking for the quality just in the products, it is not enough. You also must look broader and be sure that the quality is also in the lives of the people who made your product. Hereby you have to pay attention not only to the environmental part but also to the social part.

Read the tags.

As a bridge, reading tags on garments is therefore also important to be sure how sustainable a garment is. Fashion brands put tags on their clothing, in which they explain how durable the garment is. A good example is H&M hang tags, which indicate that a garment contains recycled polyester. Sustainable cotton is also often indicated. If you shop online, you can often filter for sustainable collection at companies. Tip: also pay attention to the icons that are used, such as the icon of organic cotton.

If you decided to buy new clothes, choose wisely. Start buying smarter and more sustainable. How? Choose clothes that are better made, easy to care for, and made to last (*LoveYourClothes, 2020*). The steps from the production phase will help you. Besides that, you may not want to hear it, but we all have to change our purchasing behavior.

RETAIL PHASE

Don't let deals fool you.

When you hear the word sale, don't you get excited? An example that many people look forward to is Black Friday. You don't want to miss all that discount. All those e-mails of offers increase the urge to buy it. I notice that it even makes me greedy, both online and in stores. Eventually, you will end up with more stuff that you do not want or need. But remember someone has to pay for the rest of the prize. If everyone is going to buy clothes for the sale, fashion companies will also keep cutting back on costs. This is due to working conditions and the environment and in the end, no one is happy. Besides that, many deals are misleading. Experts explain that there is a psychological factor behind our behavior. It is quite similar to drugs. Eventually, it will be almost impossible for you to resist a unique offer from your favorite brand. We have been so influenced by fashion companies that we don't know the value of clothing. The shocking part is that fashion companies know when, how, and what customers buy, especially when it comes to a sale. For example, they already calculate the sale price in their discount price. There are even companies that increase the selling price and offer the original price as a discount price to convince you to buy (*Benton-Collins, 2020*).

Consume responsibly: rethink, refuse and reduce

Fashion-conscious clothing is important. It is part of your identity. To keep up with the times and belong somewhere, you follow the fashion trends. And that's fine. But do you need to have new clothes every week because others have them too? No of course not. Remember identity comes from within yourself, not from the outside. The clothes only add to who you are, it doesn't define it. So consume responsibly. When you are buying clothes, think about how often you will wear the garment, where you will wear it, how you want to wear it, and not to mention how much do you already own. These questions clarify your purchase choices and reduce impulse purchases. Because let's face it, everyone has bought clothes that you regret afterward?

The best strategy is to buy basics with a few statements. This makes combining fun and easy and you always look on-trend. Nobody knows if those basics are new or not, right? With a few statements in your closet, you can participate in the trends and help reduce the impact.

If you want to buy clothes, rethink and refuse. Be aware of your purchases and think in terms of sustainability instead of price. Reducing your purchases helps to slow down fast fashion.

The most important part is the consideration you make when purchasing clothing. The fact is that sustainable clothing is more expensive. If the environmental and social impact is included in the price and you have to pay the actual price of an item, you will have to spend more money on a garment. So the most important question: are you willing to pay more for your clothes? When you buy something but you want to be sure it is worth the cost? Take the price and divide it by the number of often you will wear the item ([Google, 2020b](#)). This calculation helps your decision.

USE PHASE

You did buy a garment and you are now officially the owner of the garment. This now also means that you have full responsibility. How you handle your clothing determines the value of the garment. So remember, you now have control over the further footprint that the garment has on the world. There are several ways to extend the life of your purchased garment.

Extend lifespan by proper care

Loving your clothes is combined with taking care of your clothes. Keep your clothes to be looking great. In the end, you will be saving money from it. Extending lifespan is all about the quality of the clothing. It already started with quality when the product was purchased. When something already looked very cheap and bad, you know in advance that the lifespan of that item will not be for long. A garment has to endure a lot. It is worn, washed, dried, etc. With a few tips, you can extend the quality of your clothing. The washing has a serious impact on the lifespan of the clothing. Wash your clothes at 30 degrees, it is just as hygienic as 40 degrees. But it saves your clothes, energy, and money. It also reduces carbon footprint and the colors are long-lasting. Microplastics are released during washing and end up in the water. This ends up in the ocean and the soil, which eventually even ends up in our food. Also, drying has a huge influence on the quality of your clothes, but also on the environment. Tumble drying damage your clothes and a lot of energy is being used. So line-dry wherever is possible ([WrapSite, 2016](#)).

Extend lifespan by reuse and repair

Another way to extend the lifespan is by reusing and repairing the clothes that are broken or just not fit anymore. Reuse the materials for something new. Be creative and make a bag from your ripped jeans, for example. Or you can choose to have the garment made. Are you not that handy or do you have no time? Let it be done! There are several companies where you can have your clothes pimped or altered. Did you know that you can increasingly have your broken sweater repaired at fashion brands?

DISPOSAL PHASE

As I mentioned before, there is currently a throwaway culture. Due to the large supply of clothing, poor quality, and the loss of value of clothing, people are increasingly throwing away their clothes.

As a result, the textile mountains will continue to rise. As a society, we have to make the transition to a circular chain by adjusting our behavior if we no longer want the clothes. But how?

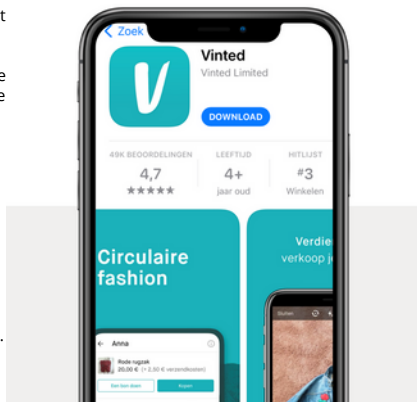


Picture of the amount of textile disposal. Source: visiting sorter (myself)

Give your clothes a second life

If you decide to get rid of your clothes, there must be a reason behind it. Maybe you don't fit them anymore, you don't like them anymore or it is just not wearable anymore because something is broken. Often you put it in the bag and take it to a textile container. That is a good solution anyway. But consider also the second-hand market of clothing. Did you know that you can earn money from your old clothes? Sell them second-hand. Nowadays there are various platforms where you can make someone else happy with your clothes and you immediately earn nice money with it. A good example of giving your clothes a second life is via the Vinted app. This is an app that you can download and then sell and buy your clothes. Why would you buy something new when it can also be used second-hand? In the past, most people did not want to know about second-hand clothes. Who wanted someone else's old clothes? But it is becoming increasingly trendy. Nowadays more and more people are walking in vintage clothing. Second-hand is fully accepted, especially among young people (Sjouwerman, 2020). So what are you waiting for? It's good for the environment, it's cheap and completely vintage. Gradually, more and more fashion companies will also offer second-hand clothing. So why not you too?

Give your clothes a second life



Picture of the Vinted app, secondhand platform. Made by myself.

Dispose of clothing correctly

Sometimes it may be that you are unable or unwilling to sell your clothes. It is essential to dispose of your clothes properly. The reason for this is that even if an item of clothing is broken, it still contains the value. It can be recycled. Everyone unknowingly throws broken socks into the household waste. Shame. Because even those can be reused. For example, the insulation material is made from it or it goes back into the textile industry by making a new sock out of it. Remember, once a garment gets dumped in the garbage, it's garbage. So collect your old clothes in a waterproof bag and take them to a textile bin in your municipality. Because only then, we can reuse the materials.

So there are multiple fun and challenging ways to contribute to more sustainable fashion industry. Because it is necessary. Especially think about your choices and actions you do, because every action you do has consequences and unfortunately including negative effects. The most important thing where it all starts is: start loving your clothes. Together we must see the true value of clothing again because clothing is a beautiful and wonderful product.

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