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What is Fast Fashion?

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Abstract:

When most people think of fast fashion, they probably picture a company like Shein or Forever21. But what exactly is fast fashion? And when did it first emerge as a term? I tracked the evolution of what is called fast fashion by examining different sources in which the term has been mentioned. Many have accepted that the *New York Times* coined the term in 1989, but I discovered even earlier mentions, suggesting the importance of fact-checking widely accepted attributions. In total, I gathered 75 definitions of fast fashion and combined them into a composite definition: fast fashion is when designers copy other brands, and the clothing itself is made quickly, cheaply and tailored to consumer needs, which then allows consumers to buy and throw their clothing out, impacting the environment. By analyzing many definitions of fast fashion, we come to a deeper understanding of what we are talking about when we are talking about fast fashion.

Old t-shirts from bands I no longer listen to, shirts with cheesy quotes from once favorite tv shows, dresses I would now loathe wearing, and frumpy sweaters- my closet is like a time capsule of past identities. Clothing has been the primary way I have expressed my evolving identity throughout the years. If I liked something, I probably had a t-shirt of what I was currently obsessed with. And as someone who is different from the high schooler who wore metal band t-shirts and dresses, I am grateful to have access to clothing that allows me to express my evolving identity at an affordable price. And that is where fast fashion comes in. The critiques of fast fashion are vast. I am not here to critique this model, only to offer a better understanding of what it means and how it plays a role in our identity expression. But first, we have to understand what exactly we mean when we say fast fashion.

Going into this research, I assumed that I knew what fast fashion was: stores like Forever21 and H&M, selling relatively inexpensive clothing that only lasts on the shelves for a few weeks before being replaced with newer things. However, when I looked up fast fashion online to lay the groundwork for this research, I discovered a list of fast fashion companies and was surprised to find some brands that I did not consider fast fashion on that list. And when I discussed this research with others, it seemed that they too had their own definitions of fast fashion. But what exactly does this phrase mean? When was it first used and how has it evolved? And how have others defined it?

Methods

To answer these questions, I decided to look at definitions from different sources, from newspapers to law reviews. Definitions allowed me to see what aspects of fast fashion were being highlighted and what contexts the phrase was being used in. I was able to see emerging

themes, such as which characteristics are being highlighted the most. I gathered 75 unique definitions.

The New York Times and Google Ngram

I searched the phrase “fast fashion” in the *New York Times* Historical Collection, which dates from 1851-2018, to track the evolution of the phrase. There were 403 results and over half of the mentions of fast fashion were from 2010-2018, which might show how the phrase has gained more popularity in just nine years. I also searched “fast fashion” in *Google Ngram*, a database that shows the number of times a phrase has occurred in various books over time, to track the evolution and popular mentions of the phrase. I went through each of these results to find mentions of fast fashion, disregarding articles that used the phrase in irrelevant contexts, such as those that described sports teams scoring quick wins. I also omitted articles that described certain brands as fast fashion without offering an explanation to back up their claim. *The New York Times* and *Google Ngram* allowed me to see how the phrase was mentioned throughout the years from different perspectives communicating to a wide audience, including those who are familiar with the fashion industry and those who are unfamiliar.

Dictionaries

I looked at four dictionaries and searched the phrase “fast fashion” to lay the groundwork for the part of this research focused on definitions which were Merriam-Webster, Investopedia, Cambridge Dictionary, and Dictionary.com. I chose these dictionaries because they are easily accessible and offer reliable definitions.

Law Reviews

I used the database LexisNexis to search for how fast fashion was defined in the legal world. I chose law reviews because they offer in depth definitions of certain topics. I searched

the phrase “fast fashion” using the law reviews filter and selected the widest range of dates (1700-2022). This yielded 171 results. I went through these results and used the same approach as I did when omitting certain articles from the *New York Times*, disregarding those that did not define fast fashion or were irrelevant to the context of fashion. I gathered 31 definitions of fast fashion. Many of these definitions were neutral, explaining the production of clothing as quick and the clothing itself as inexpensive. Some of these definitions were negative when discussing intellectual property because some “fast fashion” brands are known to copy other brands’ signature styles, which is viewed negatively when trying to defend against piracy. Another negative definition framed fast fashion as a problem.

I also searched LexisNexis for federal and state cases hoping to find instances of libel, where a brand labeled as fast fashion insists that they are not, to see how they define themselves in opposition to fast fashion. I used the same search phrase, “fast fashion,” and the same range of dates (1700-2022), but the only cases I discovered were focused on brands copying others. These cases did give definitions of fast fashion, though.

Books

To ensure a wide range of definitions, I went on Amazon and searched “fast fashion” in the book section. I was granted a stipend and selected eleven books ranging from self-help books encouraging others to stop buying fast fashion to books on clothing production. I chose these 11 because they allowed me to see fast fashion definitions from different perspectives, from the consumers to those more familiar with design and production, to gather a range of definitions that might be negative, neutral, or positive.

ProQuest

At this point, I had 45 definitions, which included what I found on LexisNexis, in the dictionaries, and in the books I bought. I believed that a larger number of definitions would allow me to see emerging themes and so I searched “fast fashion” on ProQuest to gather more definitions. I used ProQuest because of the variety of sources available on the site. There were 2,383 hits and I excluded irrelevant sources and those that were not open-access. The only criteria was that the source had to have a definition of fast fashion. I stopped when I gathered 75 definitions, which included 31 from LexisNexis, four from different dictionaries, ten from various books, and 30 from ProQuest. I stopped at 75 because it was a manageable number for the time I had to complete this research. I was able to see emerging themes, similarities, and differences. In the future, others could finish going through all the results on ProQuest to gather more definitions.

Sociological Theory: How Simmel and Blumer Define Fashion

Georg Simmel was one of the first sociologists to take fashion seriously. Even though his work is over a hundred years old, many of his ideas are still relevant.¹ Simmel’s theory goes beyond the scope of fashion, speaking to human nature and how we interact with others. Despite Simmel’s shortcomings, such as the importance he put on class differentiation being a driving factor in fashion, when that is not always the case, his ideas still allow us to better understand fashion today. Another sociologist, Herbert Blumer, engaged with Simmel’s work while adding his own ideas.² He criticized how scholars had written about fashion previously and offered a more contemporary perspective on fashion, one that can be applied to current times. By looking at

¹ Georg Simmel, “Fashion,” *American Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 6 (1957): 541-558.

² Herbert Blumer, “Fashion: From Class Differentiation to Collective Selection,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1969): 275-291.

their individual works, we can come to understand and apply their ideas to the current world of fast fashion to better understand fast fashion and how we present our identities.

Simmel described fashion in terms of dualities and offered insight into what he called the tempo of fashion.³ Fashion enables and constrains us. We can only choose from a set amount of clothing, but we are able to choose exactly what we want to wear from what is available and affordable. And we participate and form the society that creates that set of clothing. Fashion controls us in the sense that we are told what is fashionable and what is not, but we exercise freedom in what we inevitably choose to wear.

According to Simmel, it is natural to imitate and to individualize.⁴ We want to conform while also differentiating ourselves from others, and fashion allows us to do this. We wear clothing because that is what is expected of us, but we might choose to wear unique pieces that allow us to preserve our individuality. Simmel also focused on how fashion unifies those within a social group while differentiating that social group from another.⁵ When the upper class sets a fashion trend, and another class imitates it, the upper class, which does not want to be unified with a lower class, abandons the trend and moves on to another.⁶ Simmel's ideas on imitation and differentiation can also be seen among those producing fashion. One company might imitate a design that another company is producing, making it more available for everyday people. The company that produced the original design might move on to another design once they see non-elites wearing that design.

Simmel also described fashion as being exercised by a small part of a group, and once most of the group adopts that fashion, then it is no longer deemed fashionable by the few who

³ Simmel, "Fashion," 541.

⁴ Simmel, "Fashion," 542.

⁵ Simmel, "Fashion," 544.

⁶ Simmel, "Fashion," 545.

first deemed it so.⁷ A recent trend that exemplified this idea was the Hockney dress, a green knit with a lily pad pattern from the brand House of Sunny. The dress was popularized in 2020 by Kendall Jenner, whom many saw wearing the dress on social media and decided to buy it. According to Simmel, those in the same social group imitate and differentiate themselves from others. Those who had this dress on social media were deemed as being on trend and popular, and those who did not were out of fashion. House of Sunny produced more dresses to keep up with the demand and other companies imitated the Hockney dress and sold it for a lower price. These imitations, or “dupes,” are often very similar, if not exact copies, of the originals. I found a House of Sunny dupe on Amazon for \$25 and many attested to its exactness to the original and the quality of the material. These imitations allow many to be able to afford the dress at different price ranges. Simmel wrote that fashion dies once it spreads, and the Hockney dress was deemed unfashionable once it spread to a larger group of people. The trend died out and was quickly replaced with a new one. However, Simmel’s idea of the elite moving on once the lower class imitates their trend does not hold up here, as House of Sunny still sells the Hockney dress on their website. They were benefitting from this trend and were not concerned with others wearing their clothing since it meant an increase in sales.

Social media has influenced the increased pace at which trends are adopted and abandoned for another. Simmel offered insight into the speed of fashion, which he called tempo. The more fashion changes, the more demand there is for an affordable version.⁸ If you want to be fashionable, and trends are ever changing, then you need to be able to afford to buy clothing whenever fashion dictates it. This is where fast fashion comes in. One aspect of fast fashion is

⁷Simmel, “Fashion,” 547.

⁸ Simmel, “Fashion,” 556.

that it is often cheaper than luxury brands. If you are wanting to be “on-trend,” and the Hockney dress is gaining popularity, then you would be motivated to buy it. Unfortunately, it is out of your price range, and so you go on another website which might offer a similar dress. Fast fashion offers more affordable imitations of what is fashionable. So, you buy an imitation of the Hockney dress, and you might wear it for a week or two before it is no longer trendy, and then you are back online buying the next trend. Because fashion changes quickly, affordable clothing is available so people can afford to buy more to keep up with the trends.

According to Simmel, ever-changing fashion benefits those who are rapidly developing their personalities.⁹ Those who go through different phases with their clothes and like to try out different styles would benefit most from fashion that rapidly changes. Young people whose identities are in flux could use fast fashion to explore their identity through lots of clothing. If clothing is expensive, then one would be stuck with clothing that does not reflect their developing personality.

Blumer offered a different look at fashion and distanced himself from Simmel’s analysis. Whereas Simmel described fashion as the mechanism of differentiation between elites and non-elites, Blumer argued that fashion is a relationship between the consumers and those that create the designs.¹⁰ Simmel asserted that non-elites copied the elites until the elites moved on to another fashion to preserve the differentiation between themselves and the non-elites. But Blumer wrote that fashion is not about the elites setting the fashion, but that it is set by those creating the designs as well as the consumers. It is not about the elites, but about being in fashion, and being in fashion is not always the same as what the elites are wearing.

⁹ Simmel, “Fashion,” 556.

¹⁰ Blumer, “Fashion: From Class Differentiation to Collective Selection,” 278.

Consumers ultimately decide what they want to wear based on personal tastes, which are formed through experience and in the context of interaction with others, rather than simply what elites are deeming as fashionable.¹¹ Simmel argued that fashion dies out once the elite discard it, but Blumer believed fashion dies when there is something that better caters to what consumers like to replace it. Tastes change and fashion changes with it. We see this today with trends being set not by elites, but by people on social media. Social media users popularized wearing corsets and promoted earthy color palettes. Blumer argues not for Simmel's ideas on differentiation, but for collective selection.

Collective selection is Blumer's term for consumers choosing what style of clothing they like best. If you go on TikTok and see others wearing corsets, but you do not like that style, you are free to choose another style that best matches your taste. However, because many on social media are setting a trend and participating in it, those who design clothing are likely to take note, which adds to Blumer's idea of both the designers and consumers deciding what is fashionable. We help form the society that produces certain clothing, and from that clothing we can choose exactly what we like. Fast fashion also plays a role in collective selection. Fast fashion offers a vast array of clothing that people can filter through to find what they like. While consumers and designers create fashion, ultimately it is up to the individual to decide what to wear.

Simmel described fashion's movement in terms of tempo. Blumer captured this idea of movement in fashion in terms of fashion's societal role. Fashion is always modern and is constantly moving away from the past, allowing for change, and preparing us for the future.¹² But how would Blumer have explained clothing associated with a previous decade becoming

¹¹ Blumer, "Fashion: From Class Differentiation to Collective Selection," 284.

¹² Blumer, "Fashion: From Class Differentiation to Collective Selection," 289.

popular again? He asserted that fashion allows us to get rid of the past and move into the future, but often we revisit the past when trends are recycled. Take flared leggings, a spin on the flared pants from the 60s and popularized in the early 2000s. They fell out of style but have recently made another comeback. Blumer discussed how taste is formed when a group responds to the “spirit of the times,” and this can be impacted by what happens in a society.¹³ The pandemic has caused many to prioritize comfort, and flared leggings offer that, and so the trend has come back. Often, trends are rebranded or reimagined, so while the past is revisited, fashion still allows for change. In the early 2000s, flared leggings were actually called yoga pants and so this trend has been rebranded for a new audience. New versions of flared leggings include ones with cut-outs, with belts, and cinched waistbands. Because of these new versions, the trend feels new again. So, while the past is revisited with these trends, they are simultaneously reimagined for modern taste. Flared leggings are not considered archaic because they have been adjusted to fit in with current times. According to Blumer, fashion is suited to whatever life demands, and flared leggings, despite being a trend from the past, allow consumers to adjust to an everchanging world, to feel comfortable and stylish.

Simmel and Blumer offered different ideas on fashion. Simmel described fashion as the way we generalize and individualize by wearing clothing while also trying to stand out. Groups differentiate themselves from others through distinct fashions. Elites set the fashion and once the lower-class copies them, then the elites move on to set a different fashion. Blumer argued against Simmel’s ideas on the elite. Both the consumers and those that design the clothing decide on what is fashionable. And fashion is replaced with whatever reflects current times and people’s

¹³ Blumer, “Fashion: From Class Differentiation to Collective Selection,” 283.

collective taste. Fashion is, according to Blumer, less driven by the elites than what Simmel believed.

Part of this research seeks to discover how scholars have defined fast fashion. Simmel and Blumer were not exactly describing fast fashion in their analyses, but their ideas can be applied to better understand its mechanics. Simmel gave an explanation on why cheap fashion needs to be available, and one of the descriptions of fast fashion is its inexpensive price. Because trends are adopted and discarded so quickly, cheaper fashion needs to be available, and fast fashion offers affordable clothing so consumers can still be fashionable with everchanging trends. Blumer gave an explanation on consumer behavior that fast fashion brands take into consideration. He explained that ultimately consumers decide what is fashionable and because of this fast fashion brands offer lots of different styles for people to discover exactly what they like. Simmel and Blumer lay the foundation for us to better understand fast fashion and how consumers interact with it.

Emergence and Evolution of the Phrase Fast Fashion

Scholars suggest that the *New York Times* coined the phrase fast fashion when describing the company Zara in 1989. Fashion reporter Anne-Marie Schiro quoted the head of Zara's United States operation that "the emphasis is on fast fashion... 'Every week, there's a new shipment from Spain... The stock in the store changes every three weeks. The latest trend is what we're after. It takes 15 days between a new idea and getting it into stores.'"¹⁴ However, I believe that the *New York Times* was not the first to use the phrase fast fashion to describe

¹⁴ Anne-Marie Schiro, "Two New Stores That Cruise Fashion's Fast Lane," *The New York Times*, December 31, 1989.

fashion companies. In 1986, *The Sun Sentinel* described Liz Claiborne's designs as "fast-fashion interpretations of the latest trends... that the average woman can enjoy, wear and, perhaps most importantly, afford."¹⁵ And in 1975, *The Times*, a London-based newspaper, asked the head of the womenswear division of the Burton Group, Cyril Spencer, "How would he purvey cheap, fast fashion to the dollies who frequented Top Shops?"¹⁶ He explained that this business model is about working quickly with retailers and manufacturers, highlighting the advantage of being flexible to meet consumer demands. While I do not know exactly when the phrase fast fashion emerged, or when it became pejorative, what follows is the best summary I can give of its evolution.

In 1938, fast fashion was described in terms of how quickly clothing, particularly shoes, could be made for consumers.¹⁷ In the 60s and 70s the phrase fast fashion appeared more frequently in the *New York Times* to describe the speed with which clothing is made and the frequent changes in what styles were deemed fashionable.¹⁸ In the 80s, fashion brands played on the theme of fast food, using this to drive up interests and sales.¹⁹ Men's wear manufacturers used McDonald's golden arches to entice consumers to buy their clothing.²⁰ When asked about the speed of fast fashion, companies took advantage of the foot traffic from fast food restaurants.²¹

In the 90s, fast fashion continued to be described in terms of speed. "To slow down is to die," said Amy Spindler, a writer for the *New York Times*.²² Yet critiques also became more

¹⁵ Karyn Snead, "Liz Claiborne A Designer Original," *The Sun Sentinel*, September 16, 1986.

¹⁶ Prudence Glynn, "Fashion," *The Times*, October 21, 1975.

¹⁷ Special to The New York Times, "Shoes are Bought in Fast Fashions," *The New York Times*, June 8, 1938.

¹⁸ Robert Walker, "Gernreich Views Op Art as Head-to-Toe Fashion," *The New York Times*, May 5, 1965.

¹⁹ Rita Hamilton, "USA Men's Wear Is 'Fast Fashion,'" *Business America*, October 18, 1982; Nancy McKeon, "Consuming Passions," *New York Magazine*, May 13, 1985.

²⁰ Rita Hamilton, "USA Men's Wear Is 'Fast Fashion,'" *Business America*, October 18, 1982.

²¹ Nancy McKeon, "Consuming Passions," *New York Magazine*, May 13, 1985.

²² Amy Spindler, "Patterns," *The New York Times*, September 5, 1995.

frequent. Valerie Steele, an author of *Fashion Theory*, which is an academic journal covering the study of fashion, described fast fashion as having “mediocre products combined with suspect and possibly harmful methodologies and materials.”²³ In the early 2000s, speed was still described in terms of quickly producing clothes tailored to consumer needs, and many companies were pushing against any critical views on fast fashion. Nordstrom’s president of merchandise explained that “fast fashion implies cheap, and that’s not what we’re after. It wasn’t about how we sell a bunch of really cheap T-shirts. It’s about how we deliver credible new fashion to the customer.”²⁴ Fast fashion was described in terms of democratizing fashion, making it more obtainable. Julie Satow quoted Jeffrey D. Roseman in the *New York Times*, who insisted that discount stores were not appealing and that by creating “a leveling of the whole shopping experience... Fast-fashion stores have made discount shopping sexy.”²⁵ Hiroko Tabuchi explained that fast fashion was also defined as copies of runway designs, making clothing more wearable and more affordable for the average consumer.²⁶

I have used the *New York Times* and other newspapers to document a timeline of the evolution of fast fashion from the 1930s until 2018. These descriptions of fast fashion are mostly concerned with speed, while more recent ones are criticizing it or defending its benefits. The *New York Times* database covers dates from 1851-2018, and so future research could be done to fill the gap from 2019-2022, to see how the phrase fast fashion has further evolved.

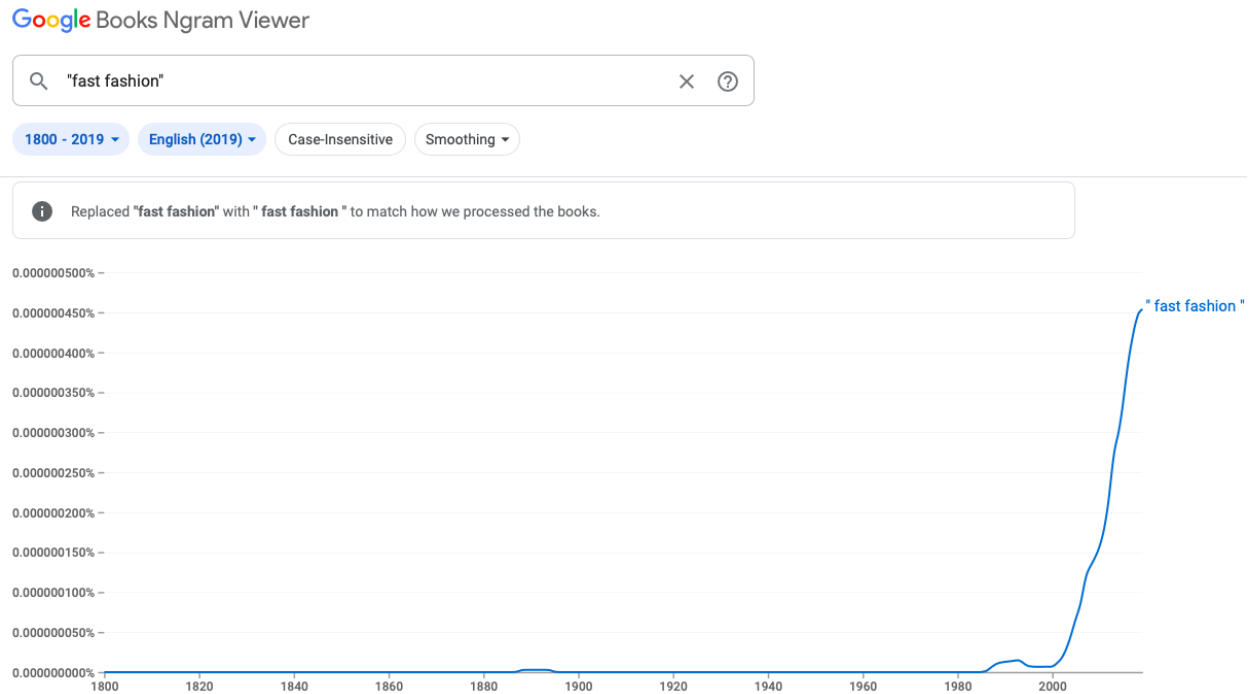
²³ Valerie Steele, “Fashion Theory,” *Berg*, September 15, 2008.

²⁴ Stephanie Clifford, “Nordstrom, in an Unlikely Alliance, Is to Carry Topshop Apparel,” *The New York Times*, July 13, 2012.

²⁵ Julie Satow, “Discount Stores Crop Up in Manhattan’s Elite Neighborhoods,” *The New York Times*, October 13, 2010.

²⁶ Hiroko Tabuchi, “With New Chief, American Apparel Shifts Focus,” *The New York Times*, February 9, 2015.

Google Ngram Viewer Showing the Popularity of the Phrase “Fast Fashion”



Source:

https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=%22fast+fashion%22&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=3&direct_url=t1%3B%2C%22%20fast%20fashion%20%22%3B%2Cc0

What is Fast Fashion?

I found commonalities and differences among the definitions I gathered, which allowed me to group them into five themes: Fast Production and Fast Turnover Rates, Inexpensive and Trendy, Copying Others, Mass-Produced and Disposable, Wasteful Consumption and Environmental Impacts. Some definitions multiple themes.

The definitions I grouped in the first theme, Fast Production and Fast Turnover Rates, described fast fashion in terms of its speedy business model. The time from when the clothing is designed, made in factories, and brought to stores has been minimized to be as quick as

possible.²⁷ This whole process, from designing clothing to seeing it in a store, can occur in as little as three weeks, a speed that has been described as “lightning” fast.²⁸ Fast fashion has been described as having fast production as well as fast turnover rates, meaning that companies can quickly respond to what sells and provide more of what is popular while letting go of unpopular items.²⁹ Fast fashion companies are able to sell and restock their products quickly in response to consumer behavior.³⁰ These definitions are neutral when discussing the business model that fast fashion utilizes, simply describing it in terms of speedy production and delivery rates. Fast production also helps to keep fast fashion inexpensive.³¹

The second theme I grouped definitions in described fast fashion as inexpensive and trendy. The price of clothing and accessories is low. Many definitions used “cheap” to describe fast fashion clothing and accessories. This could be seen as a positive attribute, as consumers can keep up with trends at a lower cost, but it can also be seen as negative, as most do not want to buy products that are poor in quality.³² Along with descriptions like “minimal cost,” and “discounted prices,” fast fashion also responds to trends.³³ These trends can be set on the

²⁷ Duygu Turker and Ceren Altuntas, “Sustainable Supply Chain Management in the Fast Fashion Industry,” *European Management Journal* 32, (2014): 837-49.

²⁸ Peggy Blum, *Circular Fashion* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2021), 13; Kristin Sutor, “In Fast-Fashion, One Day You’re In, and the Next You’re Out,” *Michigan State Law Review* 853, 2020.

²⁹ Hasnah Hassan Siti, Jasmine A. L. Yeap, and Nabil Al-Kumaim, “Sustainable Fashion Consumption: Advocating Philanthropic and Economic Motives in Clothing Disposal Behaviour,” *Sustainability* 14, no. 3 (2022): 1875.

³⁰ Carmen Cristófol, Rodríguez, Kalem Mcquillan, and Jes Segarra-Saaavedra, “Sustainability Communication as a Sales and Social Change Tool: Fast Fashion vs Slow Fashion,” *Revista De Comunicación De La SEECI* no. 54 (2021): 17-36.

³¹ Elizabeth Poland, “Fashioning Compliance: The Fashion Charter for Climate Action and Strategies for Forming a More Effective Fashion Industry,” *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law* 49, no. 407 (2021).

³² Dayoung Chung, “Law, Brands, and Innovation: How Trademark Law Helps to Create Fashion Innovation,” *The John Marshall Law School Review of Intellectual Property Law* 17, no. 493 (2017). L.R. Morgan and G. Birtwistle, “An Investigation of Young Fashion Consumers’ Disposal Habits,” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 33 (2009): 190-198.

³³ Mark Brewer, “Fashion Law: More than Wigs, Gowns, and Intellectual Property,” *San Diego Law Review* 54, no. 739 (2017); Carrandra Elrod, “The Domino Effect: How Inadequate Intellectual Property Rights in the Fashion Industry Affect Global Sustainability,” *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 24, no. 575 (2017); Olivia Suraci, “The Best-Dressed Polluter—Regulation and Sustainability in the Fashion Industry,” *Hasting Environmental Law Journal* 27, no. 225 (2021).

runway.³⁴ Yet fashion trends can also respond to consumer needs.³⁵ Trendy is not necessarily a negative characteristic as many desire to be on-trend and fashionable. Critics of consumption might view this as negative because the fast-paced adoption and abandonment of trends encourage people to buy more clothing. Some definitions described fast fashion in terms of copying trends from others, which can also be perceived as negative.

The third theme mentioned fast fashion companies copying others such as runways and celebrities. These “imitations” can be seen as lower quality compared to the originals.³⁶ One definition described runway copies as “knockoffs,” which could be perceived as negative.³⁷ But another described fast fashion products as replicas, which is a more positive way to frame copying.³⁸ One definition from a law review explained that fashion designers believe that fast fashion’s ability to copy designs denies them profits and suppresses creativity. Fast fashion allows people to buy clothing they see on the runway for a cheaper price, which would be a more positive way to view copying. However, many believe that this model has increased consumption.³⁹

Fast fashion has also been defined in terms of mass-production, where a large amount of clothing is produced, which encourages people to buy a lot and dispose of their clothing at higher

³⁴ Tyler Little, *The Future of Fashion* (Potomac: New Degree Press, 2018), 111.

³⁵ Arina Nahya Nurnafia, Carrisa Ghassini Chandra, Surya Nanda Marion, and Artha Sejati Ananda, "Instagram Marketing Activities of A Fast Fashion Brand in Response to Covid-19 Pandemic," *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education* 12, no. 10 (2021): 4357-4375.

³⁶ Kari Heyison, “Intellectual Property Comment: If It’s Not Ripped, Why Sew It? An Analysis of Why Enhanced Intellectual Property Protection for Fashion Design is in Poor Taste,” *Touro Law Review* 28, no. 255 (2012).

³⁷ Robin Nagel, “Tailoring Copyright to Protect Artists: Why the United States Needs More Elasticity in its Protection for Fashion Designs,” *University of Richmond Law Review* 54, no.635 (2020).

³⁸ Tedmond Wong, “To Copy or not to Copy, That is the Question: The Game Theory Approach to Protecting Fashion Designs,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 160, no.1139 (2012).

³⁹ Jeanger Juanga-Labayen, Ildefonso V. Labayen, and Qiuyan Yuan, “A Review on Textile Recycling Practices and Challenges,” *Textiles* 2, no. 1 (2022): 174.

rates.⁴⁰ Once something is no longer trendy, or in fashion, fast fashion encourages consumers to dispose of once-trendy clothing (which has only been worn a few times) to buy what is now popular. One definition described this as “throw-away culture.”⁴¹ This mass-production and high levels of consumption and disposability have been deemed wasteful by those focusing on the environmental impacts of fast fashion.

The definitions describing fast fashion’s environmental impacts are the most negative out of the five categories. Fast fashion “wrecks” the environment and because of mass-production and ever-changing trends, clothing is wasted because it is often thrown out.⁴² Fast fashion also impacts greenhouse gas emissions.⁴³ Much of the fabric that is used to make the clothing is also non-renewable and pollutes the environment.⁴⁴ The definitions I gathered in this category seem to be critiquing both the model and those who participate in it. Fast fashion rapidly produces a variety of products in a way that might impact the environment in negative ways, but those who buy and throw out clothes also play a role in affecting the environment.

These five themes found in the definitions highlight some of fast fashion’s characteristics. Many of these definitions shared the same characteristics. Out of 75 definitions, 42 described fast fashion as cheap, in terms of inexpensive or poor quality clothing. Thirty-four definitions mentioned trends and 32 mentioned production in terms of speed. Additionally, there were no mentions of the people who make the clothing and accessories nor were there any

⁴⁰ Sonia Herrero-Luna, Marta Ferrer-Serrano, and María Pilar Latorre-Martínez. "Circular Economy and Innovation: A Systematic Literature Review," *Central European Business Review* 11, no. 1 (2022): 65-84.

⁴¹ Sandra Juradin, Frane Mihanović, Nives Ostojić-Škomrlj, and Ela Rogošić. "Pervious Concrete Reinforced with Waste Cloth Strips." *Sustainability* 14, no. 5 (2022): 2723.

⁴² Elizabeth Cline, *The Conscious Closet* (New York: Plume, 2019) 2; Verity Jones, Ruth Millett, and Jessica Pykett. "Sustainable Threads: Using Immersive Narratives to Teach about the Impacts of Fast Fashion," *Teaching Geography* 47, no. 2 (2022): 79-82.

⁴³ Cesarina Mason, Michela, Rana Muhammad Umar, and Rubens Pauluzzo, "Recycling Habits and Environmental Responses to Fast-Fashion Consumption: Enhancing the Theory of Planned Behavior to Predict Generation Y Consumers’ Purchase Decisions," *Waste Management* 139, (2022): 146-157.

⁴⁴ Paulina Szmydke-Cacciapalle, *Making Jeans Green* (Oxfordshire, Routledge, 2018), 99.

mentions of the benefits that this model might have for consumers other than the low cost of the products. Only two definitions mentioned a target demographic. One definition explained that fast fashion was targeted to mostly young women, and another described fast fashion as the economic behavior of younger generations.⁴⁵ While there were similarities, every definition was unique. To combine these themes into one definition, fast fashion is when designers copy other brands, and the clothing itself is made quickly, cheaply and tailored to consumer needs, which then allows consumers to buy and throw their clothing out, impacting the environment.

Conclusion

When I started this research, I assumed that I understood what fast fashion was. I shopped at stores that supplied me with new, trendy clothing, all within my budget, that allowed me to express myself. Despite my involvement, I was quick to criticize fast fashion instead of exploring its characteristics. I assumed that others had similar ideas about fast fashion as I did. By analyzing definitions, I offer a deeper understanding of what we mean when we say fast fashion.

Simmel and Blumer offered explanations of fashion in general. I was able to apply their ideas to fast fashion to better understand why fast fashion exists in the first place and how it operates. Simmel asserted that the elites determined what was fashionable, and while this is not so prominent today, this still happens, with people buying what celebrities and social media influencers wear. He explained the tempo of fashion, which is how fast what is fashionable changes, explaining why it needs to be cheap for people to remain fashionable amongst fickle trends. Blumer engaged with collective selection, which speaks to how trends are adopted and

⁴⁵ Kathleen Horton, Paige Street, and Erin O'Brien, "When Women Owe Women: Framing Consumer Responsibility in the Context of Fast Fashion," *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 11, no. 2 (2022): 116-128; Dieuwertje de Wagenaar, Joris Galama, and Siet J. Sijtsema, "Exploring Worldwide Wardrobes to Support Reuse in Consumers' Clothing Systems," *Sustainability* 14, no. 1 (2022): 487.

abandoned by consumers and designers together. Their ideas helped me to realize that fast fashion has many characteristics and has a reason behind it. By connecting their ideas to more current events, I add to their analysis and assert that many of their ideas are still relevant and important to understanding the definition of fast fashion today. I also tied their analysis to identity and how people can use the large amount and large variety of fast fashion to express an evolving identity.

In the future, others could expand one theme of fast fashion's characteristics or add another that I did not discover. In terms of the evolution of the phrase fast fashion, the *New York Times* was not the only place I could have looked to see this development, but it offered glimpses into the different ways fast fashion has been defined. And while this database gave many outsider perspectives from those who were not involved in the fashion industry, one might want to see how everyday people are interacting with fashion and how they define it, along with how they use fashion to express their identity. Discussion boards from websites such as Reddit would offer this insight, as they allow for people to offer their own thoughts and opinions. There are many fashion communities on Reddit that discuss their interactions with fashion. Others could move out of the scope of definitions to see how certain communities are interacting with fashion and what fashion means in terms of identity. Or they could explore identity expression outside of fashion. Another suggestion would be to explore slow fashion, which has emerged as a response to fast fashion.

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