

Environmental Consequences of Fast Fashion

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The Issue

16,030 tons of textiles were sent to landfills in 2015. One might think to solve this problem by donating old clothes to charities, but most of the clothing being sent there is in such bad condition already that it is inevitably discarded or incinerated (Statista, 2019).

63,690 metric tons of carbon dioxide were released by the popular clothing company H&M in 2017. Although this number pales in comparison to the previous year, 63,690 metric tons is still a large amount (Statista, 2019). Greenhouse gases are bad because they contribute to global warming.

One of the many solutions to global warming is dealing with the lack of sustainability in the fast fashion industry.

Findings

The current fashion industry is hazardous to our planet and exploits people in developing nations. The current process for making clothing is water and chemical intensive. Chemicals are used throughout the whole process of making clothes, from growing crops such as cotton, to treating and dyeing materials. Chemicals then leave factories through untreated waterways and wreak havoc on the surrounding environment and people. For example, residents abandoned Orathupalayam, a town in India, when their water source started to poison them, their food sources, and local wildlife (Matthews, 2015). This is not exclusive to this town; most apparel factories locate in developing areas, so they can keep their profit high rather than their workers and planet healthy.

Most people think the solution is donating unwanted clothing to charities, but the quality of most clothing today is so poor that charities inevitably send most donations to landfills or developing nations, where eventually they end up being burned, which releases toxic fumes. (CBC News, 2018)



Manufacturing the clothing

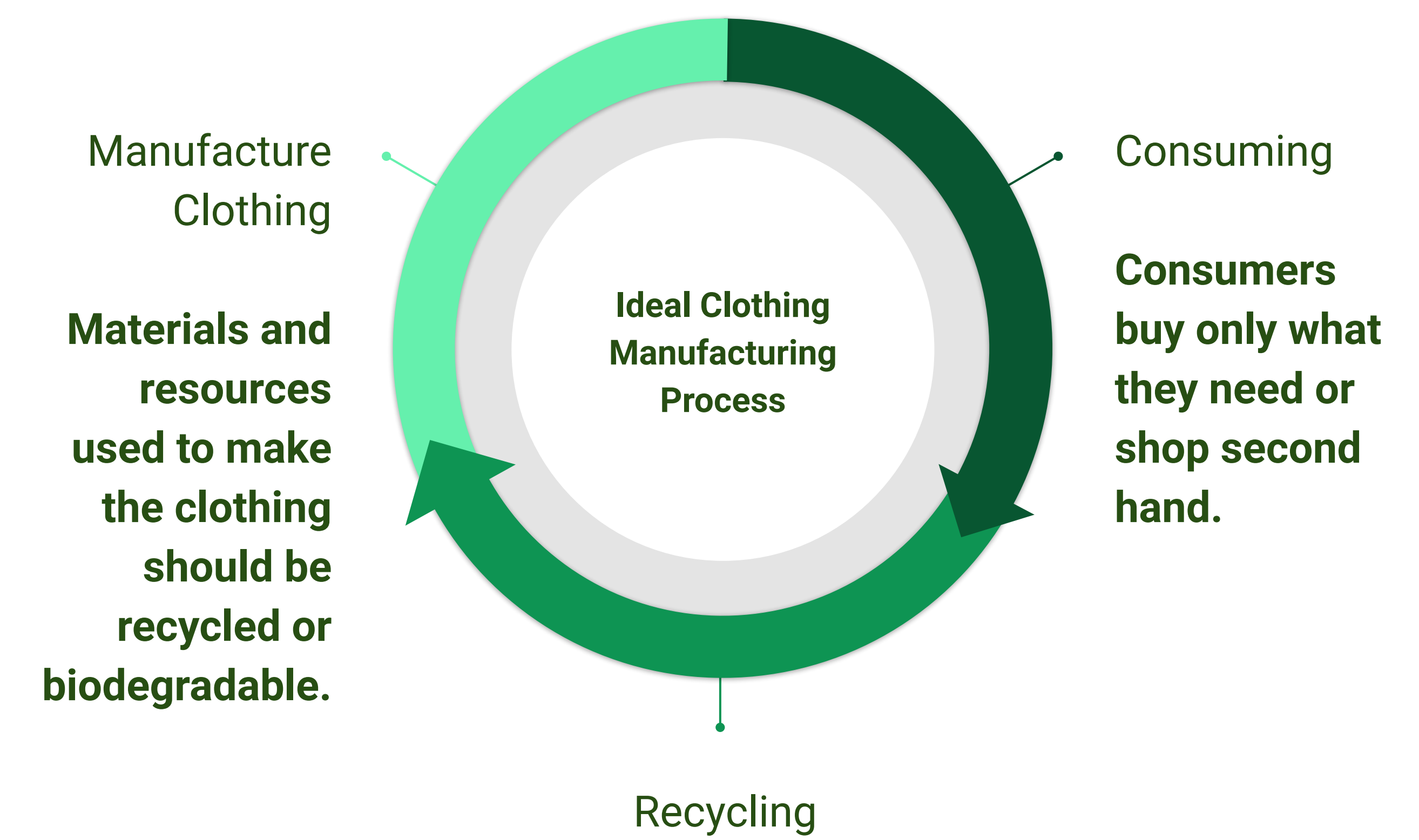
New resources are used to make the clothing. To make the process cheap and fast, many chemicals are used and disposed of in an unsafe manner

Consuming the Clothing

Consumers buy into the fast fashion trends. They buy clothing they don't necessarily need—and a lot of it

Disposal

Current clothing disposal methods consist of mainly landfills and incinerators, and both are harmful to the planet since they release toxic greenhouse gases.



The old and unwanted clothing is recycled and repurposed.

Next Steps

There is no simple solution to this problem because it is the combination of an overly materialistic consumer mindset and the current toxicity of the production cycle. But some companies have started to tackle this issue. Patagonia, though a retailer, sends out an anti-consumer message to buyers and is willing to repair broken items for free (Patagonia).

Reformation and People Tree, on the other hand, target the manufacturing processes. Reformation allows materials to influence its final design because the company won't use materials that do not fit its criteria of sustainability (Reformation). People Tree focuses on the same issue as Reformation but addresses it in a different way. People Tree focuses on making fair trade a priority issue, which tends to lead to more environmentally friendly production of items, since the company doesn't want to harm its workers (Morgan, 2015).

But companies are not the only ones at fault here, since consumers--you--also play a role in this issue. When you consume items, you show companies what they have to do to keep your business. So use your purchasing power to let companies know what you want (Morgan, 2015).

Problems

- Overly materialistic consumers / the culture of fast fashion
- Marketing tactics used to lure in consumers
- Unwillingness of companies / industry as a whole to adopt new innovations
- The lack of longevity of the clothing / Quality issues

Solutions

- Don't buy into consumerism / fast fashion culture
- Choose ethical brands:
 - Reformation
 - People Tree
 - Patagonia
- Encourage industry to adopt new innovations, such as algae based fabrics / biodegradable materials
- Buy second hand / repurpose / revive / trade old clothing

Conclusion

The environmental consequences of the fashion industry are devastating to the environment. Both the current climate of companies and consumers have poor sustainability ethics. Most companies are unwilling to embrace new environmentally friendly innovations. Consumers keep buying into the culture of fast fashion and do not realize the impact of their shopping habits on the planet. Both parties have to change habits if real change is to occur.

Citations

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