



Fact file

Over 2000 stores worldwide [1]

Third largest fast fashion brand

As one of the world's leading producers of fast fashion, Zara caters to consumers' seemingly insatiable desire for novelty. The fast fashion business model involves producing cheap, low-quality garments with very short shelf lives. For instance, the average price of a Zara product is just over 35 euros [2], and the company introduces 24 new clothing collections each year [3]. Moreover, such garments are designed to be worn less than 10 times [4].

The rise of fast fashion has fueled a huge increase in clothing purchases in Europe, with the number of garments bought in the EU rising by as much as 40 percent in just a few decades [3]. In 2015, EU consumers purchased over 6 million tons of clothing, which represents as much as 10 percent of the impact of consumption on the environment [3].

The production of clothing damages the environment in a number of ways. First, production requires vast amounts of water (79 billion cubic metres in 2015) [3], with cotton, which accounts for over 40 percent of the fibres used in the EU, being particularly resource-demanding in this regard. Polyester, which makes up around 15 percent of clothing fibres, requires much less water to produce. However, it is manufactured from fossil fuels, is non-biodegradable and can leach microfibers into the environment [3]. During production, garments are also treated with numerous chemicals to dye them a specific colour or increase shine or durability. A total of almost 2000 chemicals are used in clothing production, of which over 150 are classified as hazardous to the environment or human health. Finally, cut-offs resulting from the production phase represent approximately 20 % of the clothing sector's fabric waste.

The use phase of garments, in turn, is considered to have the largest negative environmental impact due to washing and garment care, including tumble-drying and ironing [3]. Then, when garments come to the end of their lives, less than half are recycled, with the remainder incinerated or placed in landfills. Furthermore, most clothes that are recycled are recycled mechanically, which shortens the fibres and reduces their value by around 75 %, rendering them largely useless for further clothing production [3].

References

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[3] Sajn, N. (2019). Environmental impact of the textile and clothing industry: What consumers need to know. *Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service.[Google Scholar]*. The quotes below are from this

[4] McNeill, Lisa, and Rebecca Moore. "Sustainable fashion consumption and the fast fashion conundrum: fashionable consumers and attitudes to sustainability in clothing choice." *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 39.3 (2015): 212-222.