

THE FAST FASHION PRODUCTION MODEL FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SUSTAINABILITY

O MODELO DE PRODUÇÃO FAST FASHION NA ÓTICA DA SUSTENTABILIDADE

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Abstract

The fashion industry is one of the economic activities with the greatest cultural, social, and environmental influence. It is a topic of the highest relevance from the perspective of sustainability, which raised the following research problem: considering the fast fashion production model, is it possible to affirm that this practice in Brazil is responsible for encouraging the excessive consumption of products and services related to the fashion industry, directly affecting the right to sustainability? The general objective of the study is to analyze how the fast fashion production model in Brazil encourages the excessive consumption of products and services related to the fashion industry, directly

Resumen

La industria de la moda es una de las actividades económicas con mayor influencia cultural, social y ambiental. Al ser un tema relevante desde la perspectiva de la sostenibilidad, se plantea el siguiente problema de investigación: considerando el modelo de producción fast fashion, ¿es posible afirmar que, en Brasil, esa práctica es responsable de incentivar el consumo excesivo de productos y servicios relacionados con la industria de la moda, afectando directamente al derecho a la sostenibilidad? El objetivo de la investigación es analizar cómo el modelo de producción fast fashion fomenta el consumo excesivo de productos y servicios relacionados con la industria de la moda en Brasil, afectando directamente al derecho a la sostenibilidad. La



affecting the right to sustainability. Based on the bibliographic research technique, this study used the deductive and monographic approaches. It was concluded that the fast fashion production model is a construct of the consumer society and that sustainability in the fashion industry will not be fast or linear but through changing aspects of the production chain by adopting a new conceptual model.

Keywords: consumption; fast fashion; fashion law; fast fashion; sustainability.

investigación empleó el método deductivo de enfoque y procedimiento monográfico, a partir de la técnica de investigación bibliográfica. Se concluye que el modelo de producción fast fashion es una construcción de la sociedad de consumo y que la sostenibilidad en la industria de la moda no es rápida ni lineal, sino que puede darse a través de la modificación de aspectos de la cadena de producción, con la adopción de un nuevo modelo conceptual.

Palabras clave: consumo; fast fashion; fashion law; moda; sostenibilidad.

Introduction

The fashion industry is one of the most important economic activities in Brazil and in the world, influencing cultural, social, and environmental issues. For being deeply intertwined with the consumer society, brands assume an important role in face of new social transformations. In this scenario promoted by the fashion industry and exacerbated consumption, the fast fashion production model gains prominence, characterized mainly by the short time span between production, distribution, sale, and consumption of products.

However, the practice of fast fashion, when reviewed from the standpoint of sustainability, causes intense and negative environmental impacts due to the development model marked by the capitalist economy. This context provoked the following research problem: Considering the fast fashion production model, one could say that this practice in Brazil is responsible for encouraging the excessive consumption of products and services related to the fashion industry, directly affecting the right to sustainability? This paper aims to review how the fast fashion production model in Brazil encourages the excessive consumption of products and services related to the fashion industry, affecting the right to sustainability.

To address the issue, we elected the deductive approach through the analysis of the fast fashion production model, focusing on the consumer society's point of view, as well as its influence on the purchase of products and services related to the fashion industry. Next, we seek to verify how the fast fashion production model affects the right to sustainability. As for procedure, the monographic method was used based on the bibliographical research technique. Considering

this methodological ground, the article is divided into two sections. The first one analyzes the fast fashion production model through the consumer society, and its influence on the consumption of products and services related to the fashion industry. After that, the second section is aimed at verifying how this production model affects the right to sustainability.

1 The fast fashion production model and the current consumer society: brief considerations

Contemporary society has received several denominations, among them the term *consumer society*, which, as Barbosa (2004) explains, does not have a simple definition, although it is often associated with terminologies such as *consumption society* and *consumption culture*. The concept varies depending on the theoretical approach used, so that this work understands as consumer society that which encompasses “consumption of masses and for masses, high rate of consumption and disposal of goods *per capita*, fashion presence, market society, permanent feeling of insatiability and the consumer as one of its main social characters” (BARBOSA, 2004, p. 8).

The construction of consumer society emerged from the idea of consumption, but after its concretization it started having consumerism as the main basis for its economic and technological development (RUSCHEINSKY; CALGARO, 2010). After the industrial revolution, “with advertising, fashion, mass media and, especially, credit [...] it became possible to promptly satisfy all desires” (LIPOVETSKY, 2005, p. 64), a moment that further fueled the unbridled acquisition of products and services.

Consumption represents the way human beings seek to satisfy their basic and habitual needs. On the other hand, consumerism is a reality imposed by consumer society, being characterized especially by the incessant search for new products and services just for the desire to consume (PEREIRA; PEREIRA; CASTRO, 2010). Bauman (2008) explains that consumerism does not refer only to the purchase and possession of a certain product, but to “being in motion”. In other words, it represents the insatiability for consumption and the vicious cycle that is created, in which social pressure builds a contempt for previous needs and encourages the purchase of new goods.

In this new societal model, the speed of manufacturing and the large-scale production of new products encourage acquisition by the consumer, whether by necessity, vanity or non-satiety (RIOS, 2021). In the words of Bauman (2008,

p. 71, free translation), “the consumer society represents the kind of society that promotes, encourages or reinforces the choice of a consumerist lifestyle and existential strategy, and rejects all alternative cultural options”. Still according to the author,

The short life expectancy of a product in practice and in proclaimed usefulness is included in the marketing strategy and profit calculation: it tends to be preconceived, prescribed, and instilled into consumers’ practices through the apotheosis of new offerings (of today) and vilification of the old ones (of yesterday). Among the ways in which the consumer copes with dissatisfaction, the main one is by discarding the objects that cause it. The consumer society devalues durability, equating the “old” to “outdated”, unfit for further use and destined for the trash can (BAUMAN, 2008, p. 31, free translation).

The fashion industry is deeply intertwined with the consumer society. With the promotion of consumerism, brands have assumed an important role in the transformation of society, changing the different phases of consumption over the years, as well as the production model of this industry branch. In brief, fashion “can be conceptualized as a form of cultural manifestation, which is established in a relationship between the political-social context, time and clothing” (OLIVEIRA; LAGASSI, 2019, p. 92, free translation). No wonder, fashion is considered one of the branches of greatest social influence, involving issues not only of creation, but also cultural, economic and environmental matters.

The fashion industry accounts for more than 2% of the world GDP, with 90% acting in the global production chain; moreover, 7.7 million people in the world work in this industry. Data show the magnitude of the industry that, besides driving consumption and capitalism, is “committed to the cycles of hyper-consumption and inserted in a complex web of temporal relations” (BORTOLUZZI, 2012, p. 17, free translation). Thus, it is common the longing for consumption and the creation of new social stimuli, bringing about an increase in the scale of production and the volume of goods in circulation, especially when related to fashion (DESIRÉE, 2019).

As Zampieri (2023, p. 40, free translation) explains, the consumer society and the “utilitarian look coming from the origin of clothing contributed to the view that fashion is something futile or banal, resulting in an amateurism of the system that ended up by wearing the most valuable things we have today: the soil, water and air”. It is commonplace to launch different collections in the same season and, with the increasingly high demand, every year three to five collections are delivered to the public in a short space of time (SILVA; BUSARELO, 2016). This

practice supports the use of lower quality materials, reducing the cost-effectiveness of production and the useful life of the pieces.

This phenomenon gave rise to important concepts for the understanding of this research, such as fast fashion, which has as its main characteristic the short cycle of time between the creation, production, distribution, sale and consumption of products (OLIVEIRA; LAGASSI, 2019). The fast fashion model, not only fostered unbridled consumption, but created a system in which the idea prevails that products can be easily downgraded. Therefore, “the market increasingly adapts to this demand, since growing in a capitalist system demands production and consumption, since both coexist in a relationship of mutual dependence” (ZAMP-IERI, 2023, p. 78).

Fast fashion is considered a “fashion market system that dictates almost daily new trends, seasonal fashions and produces new collections that feed unbridled consumption” (SEIBEL; GREGORI, 2020, p. 201, free translation). This practice, despite having started in 1970, was only denominated as such later, in 1990. According to Girelli, Kucera and José (2020), currently consumers wear the pieces of clothing considered fast fashion less than five times, generating 400% more carbon emissions. These data show that fast fashion encompasses much more than the launch of the latest trends or more affordable prices, also involving social and environmental issues.

In the fashion market, fast fashion is one of the most prominent and fastest growing sectors globally in recent years. That is so not only because of the faster production model, but also because of social behavior. Individuals in the consumer society “demand attention and creative ways to make the purchase an emotional, sensory and even therapeutic experience in the levels of engagement observed in the society of the spectacle” (BORTOLUZZI, 2012, p. 6, free translation). These factors, coupled with easy access to fast fashion products and the affordable price – most of the time –, allow the consumer, always in search of new trends and novelties, to purchase the product without thinking about the issues that exist behind the production chain.

Numerous retail chains use fast fashion as a business model, including Zara, H&M, Forever 21, Renner, Riachuelo, Marisa, and C&A, which launch new collections on a weekly basis, seeking to quickly and agilely meet the interests and desires of the consumer (OLIVEIRA; LAGASSI, 2019). Some are more concentrated in their continent, although a large part of them have expanded their trade due to their success among consumers. In Brazil, Renner, Riachuelo, Marisa, and C&A are among the most popular ones (CANTORI, 2020).

For Nunes e Silveira (2016), the profile of fast fashion consumers is closely related to financial status and the search for belonging and acceptance. Likewise, consumers of higher economic classes acquire fast fashion for variety and for social, cognitive and emotional factors. For Sapper (2011, p. 699), “the fast fashion consumer is subjected to an ‘ocean’ of trends” that makes this market become increasingly attractive, driven by the desire for the new.

Added to these factors, Sapper (2011) explains that fast fashion companies are considered a fashion self-service. This characteristic contributes to the greater freedom of the consumer at the time of choice and purchase, even if they are faced with numerous social interactions created to directly influence the decision-making. In other words, the strategic environment set up by fast fashion companies facilitates the interaction between the brand and the individual, making the environment and the buying process pleasant and positive for the consumer.

Lipovetsky (2005) explains that the wide transformation of fashion products by brands in a short period, added to the impulse of advertising, are the main characteristics for the incentive to immoderate consumption in recent years. Carvalho (2017) believes that consumer behavior is one of the main factors that fosters companies to produce more and charge less, reducing production time and minimizing product quality and price. Similarly, the fashion industry boosts the massive production of new collections, especially through the disposal of products that are no longer in fashion (CARVALHAL, 2017).

Therefore, capitalism and its corporations have recently changed the world. The incentive to disposable consumption and the manufacturing of new products on a large scale generates a range of different wastes, arising as a major socio-environmental problem. In 2017 the Green Peace stated that about 80 billion cubic meters of water were consumed by the fashion industry in 2015, resulting in the emission of more than 1 million tons of CO₂, and the production of 92 million tons of waste. According to data from the Copenhagen Fashion Summit (CHAMPIONE, 2017), the European Union is responsible for purchasing more than 9.5 million tons of textile products per year, 70% of which are clothing; furthermore, its global consumption is 62 million tons, and could reach 102 million by 2030.

The fashion industry is an extension of capitalism, shaped to promote the prosperity of Big Capital: it is a conglomerate that brings together ephemerality, the instability of trends, temporality and the cult of fetishism, characteristics built and consolidated over time since the first turn of the Industrial Revolution, when craftsmanship ceased to be the standard in the production of clothing with the advent of electricity and the sewing machine; until the leap of the chemical industry occurred after World War II, which consolidated the raw materials of polyester and nylon (ZAMPIERI, 2023, p. 59, free translation).

In this context, economic interests usually end up overriding the environmental and social disasters arising from this industry, prevailing even in relation to human life. The above-mentioned data show the amount of textile waste disposed of in the environment, in addition to other socio-environmental problems that arise from these activities. Nevertheless, the environmental concerns have been progressively gaining prominence, as we will see below.

2 The fast fashion production model and the impacts on sustainability: a necessary reflection

Fashion is among the economic activities of greater proportion in Brazil and in the world, and is considered one of the most polluting industries. According to the Global Fashion Agenda (2017 *header* CUNHA, 2017), it is the fifth most polluting industry in carbon emissions, being responsible for 92 million tons of solid waste per year in the world, accounting for 4% of the 2.12 billion tons discarded annually. In the fashion industry, a large part of the renewable resources to produce the garments is extracted from the environment and used for a short period, with disposal of about 73% of the clothes in landfills. In the twentieth century, the fashion industry was considered the second most polluting activity in the world, generating countless environmental and social concerns (FASHION REVOLUTION, 2022).

Due to the environmental impacts, the global movement Fashion Revolution was created with the goal of making society aware of the negative aspects of consuming fashion items and its consequence to ecosystems. Created after the collapse of the Rana Plaza building, in Bangladesh, the movement is present in more than 100 countries in the world, including Brazil. Fashion Revolution advocates the search for a more ethical and sustainable future for fashion through access to information, proper education and social collaboration and mobilization (FASHION REVOLUTION, 2022).

In this sense, the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988¹ establishes that the ecologically balanced environment is everyone's right, and it is the duty of the State and the community to safeguard, conserve, and protect this asset. The Constitution establishes that economic development "cannot occur disconnected the environment, without any observance and concern about the negative effects that

¹ "Artigo 225 CF/88. Everyone has the right to an ecologically balanced environment, an asset for common use by the people and essential to a healthy quality of life, imposing on the public authorities and the community the duty of defending and preserving it for present and future generations" (BRAZIL, 1988).

may arise, and can only occur in a sustainable way” (SOUZA, 2017, p. 159, free translation). In other words, exploitation and profit should not override the fundamental right to the environment. For Santilli (2005, p. 246, free translation), “socio-environmental assets and the corresponding (socio-environmental) rights can only be understood in their fullness from a holistic, systemic and integrated reading of the bases and foundations present in the constitutional text”. Therefore, socio-environmental assets also include those essential to the maintenance of life and those resulting from human intervention.

The concept of sustainability was first discussed in Sweden in 1972, during the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, or the Stockholm Conference. Later, the World Commission on Environment and Development presented the document *Our Common Future* in 1987, known as the Brundtland Report. The report defined sustainable development as “that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (BRUNDTLAND, 1987, p. 3, free translation).

According to Souza e Delpupo (2013, p. 161, free translation), the definition of sustainability presupposes “economic prosperity (economic development) and social justice (social development) as reconcilable values and determining elements to ensure satisfactory levels of well-being, individually and collectively”. Ecological sustainability is pointed out as an essential principle to rebuild the economic and environmental order, reformulating the bases of production from the ethical pluralities, values and ecological, cultural, social and technological processes (LEFF, 2011).

In Brazil, the Environmental Policy established by Law 6938/1981 is responsible for establishing important concepts for Environmental Law aiming to, among other objectives, the preservation of environmental quality, especially the socioeconomic development, the interests of national security and the dignity of human life (BRAZIL, 1981). The legislation demonstrates, in practice, some of the approaches worked by Capra (2006, p. 23, free translation) in his work *A teia da vida* (The Web of Life), in which he states that “the change from a mechanistic paradigm to an ecological one has occurred in different ways and at different speeds”, although it is not “a uniform change”.

In Law 6938/1981, the concept of sustainable development is exposed in arts. 2 and 4, I, which emphasize the need to ensure the matching of socioeconomic development and preservation of environmental quality and ecological balance (BRAZIL, 1981). The right to a balanced environment, however, assumes the adoption of different measures in the fashion industry. Companies should

comply with their sustainable responsibility, and “the intended changes must originate from the State’s action” (ZAMPIERI, 2023, p. 108).

For Carvalhal (2017), sustainability and the best development of the fashion system require transparency and responsibility, as well as the elaboration of social, environmental and economic commitments. However, it is important to emphasize that, “for fashion to be sustainable, first of all it is necessary that sustainability be understood as a constitutional principle to be applied to the various fields of law that instruct the market’s legal relations” (OLIVEIRA; LAGASSI, 2019, p. 96).

Nevertheless, the “current global challenge is to make the mentioned term generate the change of behavior in all societies to rethink the equation of compatibility of growth and progress” (SOUZA; DELPUPO, 2013, p. 160). In this sense, Carvalhal (2017) argues that the fashion industry needs to review its concepts from creation to the manufacturing process, and only then will it be possible to achieve a sustainable ideal in the production chain.

It is on this path that the United Nations (UN) established the 2030 Agenda, subdivided into 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to “end poverty, protect the environment and the climate, and ensure that people everywhere can enjoy peace and prosperity” (ONU, 2023). The SDGs were “defined by the UN and can be readjusted, according to the need and compatibility with the country’s reality” (ZORZO *et al.*, 2022, p. 163, free translation). Regarding sustainable fashion, the goals 9 and 12 stand out. These goals seek to “build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation” and “ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns” (UN, 2023).

Analyzing the SDG 9, Dias (2020, p. 20, free translation) argues that the use of technology in the textile industry may be able to “develop modern machines and other materials capable of producing the same activity but in a sustainable way”. To achieve this goal, it is essential to strengthen scientific research, stimulating innovation and significantly increasing the number of research and development workers, in addition to increasing the technological capacity of the industrial sectors. In the case of small industries, the goal is to provide easier access to financial services and integration into value chains and markets, making it possible to ensure, in addition to sustainable innovation, an increase in the number of jobs and a sustainable infrastructure supported by human welfare (UN, 2023).

The textile industry, being one of the markets that uses the most natural resources and also one of those that pollutes the environment the most, should seek sustainable and ecological alternatives in its manufacturing productions, since it

is depleting from nature the resources it uses. The immeasurable environmental pollution generated before, during the making of the garments, and afterwards with the inappropriate disposal of solid waste, can be reduced or even avoided by the textile industries if they meet this objective. For this reason, technological innovation should be employed in all industries, so that their production methods are adapted to a sustainable manufacturing standard (DIAS, 2020, p. 20).

In this scenario of search for changes, the figure of greenwashing appeared, a term derived from the junction of the words green and washing. This practice consists of omitting the real impacts that certain activities can cause on the environment. According to Souza (2017, p. 150, free translation), greenwashing “can be practiced by governments, non-governmental organizations, companies, and corporations, from public or private initiatives, or even by people who aim to gain advantages from environmental practices”.

In addition, the term is directly associated with marketing actions promoted by governments, companies, or corporate organizations to emphasize their activities with good environmental practices, minimizing the negative environmental impacts of the production line, or unduly valuing the product or commodity. A false model is created, which misrepresents reality, promotes exaggeration, all to garner environmental benefits from a product (SOUZA, 2017, p. 150).

The practice of greenwashing has become increasingly frequent, as shown by the analysis conducted by the European Commission (2021). After investigating 344 greenwashing claims, it became evident that in more than half of the cases there is insufficient provision of guidance about the product being offered. In 37% of cases, the product only had terms such as “conscious”, “environmentally friendly” or “sustainable”, without actually demonstrating the practices adopted to minimize environmental impacts. These labels convey to the consumer the idea that that product does not have any negative consequences to the environment, but in 59% of the cases, the brands do not provide sufficient evidence of these claims.

Based on the figure of greenwashing, companies “present misleading and malicious information in advertising campaigns, but a critical reading of consumer relations is not promoted [...] [, but] mistaken readings of the concepts of sustainable development and sustainability” (SOUZA, 2017, p. 169, free translation). Given this scenario fostered by the advertising market and the capitalist economy, some authors understand that this phenomenon should be tackled through ecocriticism, a system that encourages a critical relationship between culture and the environment through reflection-action methods (SOUZA, 2017). Thus, “the role of ecocriticism is to interrogate the world, whether at the local and/or global level, always based on the analysis of the

contemporary environmental crisis” (SOUZA, 2017, p. 165).

Ferronato e Franzato (2015, p. 106, free translation) explain that “proposing sustainable solutions encompasses new ways of thinking and performing actions that distance themselves from the practices of the current model of consumer society”. Seeking a more sustainable society, slow fashion emerges an alternative to the fashion industry the “concept [of which] derives from slow design and is linked to the deceleration of fashion, with pieces that are perennial and aesthetically absorbed in more than one season” (REFOSCO; OENNING; NEVES, 2011, p. 13). The slow fashion movement, unlike fast fashion, seeks a more sustainable development, minimizing the environmental impacts caused by the accelerated and massive production of fast fashion.

In addition, slow fashion promotes greater transparency about the origin of materials and labor used, showing to the consumer that one can consume observing environmental, economic and social practices. Nevertheless, some authors also criticize this system, because there are brands that use this status to obtain profit, without a deep concern about environmental impacts. According to Santos (2016), this system does not cover the entire population due to the higher prices, preventing a change in fashion consumption.

The fast fashion and slow fashion models “work paradoxically, because they follow different paths to achieve their goals” (COUTINHO; KAULING, 2020, p. 89 free translation). Society is renewed every generation and influenced by the context experienced and the renewal cycle of the fashion industry. Therefore, the process will not be immediate or linear to achieve the ideal of sustainability in this industry. Change should be a conceptual revolution based on changes of all processes in the production chain, aiming not only at quantity or trend, but also at the essence and concept of the product.

Conclusion

The general objective of this study is to review how the fast fashion production model in Brazil encourages the excessive consumption of products and services related to the fashion industry, directly affecting the right to sustainability. To do so, it was necessary to study the reflexes of the consumer society allied to the fast fashion production model and its consequences for sustainability. These phenomena, added to the economic interests of large companies, are responsible for the use of natural resources and the disposal of waste in nature, giving rise to great environmental impacts.

It was identified that the fashion industry, its production chain and the way it operates in the market have a wide impact on different areas and aspects; among them, the numerous social and environmental impacts were visible. The fast fashion production system, in this sense, mirrors the consumer society and the emergence of the new. This production model accelerated the brands' creation processes, generating new products in a short period of time, and increasingly promoting the consumption of goods and services.

Because of that, sustainable fashion movements have gained prominence over the years, raising a concern about these aspects on the part of brands. The great challenge of the fashion industry is to adapt its production chain to achieve a more sustainable ideal, generating awareness and a change in the consumer's own behavior. The presence of new movements that seek sustainability has grown, as is the case of the fashion revolution movement, responsible for providing greater visibility to this issue and the new production model, 'slow fashion', which seeks transparency about the origin of materials and labor used in the industry.

However, these issues will not be solved quickly and/or linearly, since it ends up being restricted to the social context experienced and the renewal cycles generated by the fashion industry. As the fashion industry is constantly fostered by the capitalist economy, it has become visible the need for a conceptual revolution that encompasses from the modification of the production chain to the circulation of the product or service. Finally, it is essential that fashion is not seen only as a trend/model, but as a production chain formed by essences and concepts, which must be endowed with economic, social and environmental responsibility.

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