

# Fast Fashion and Sustainability Challenges: A Critical Review with Insights from Cyprus

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## Abstract

The main aim of this article is to review the impact of the fast fashion industry on the environment, using Cyprus as a case study. Fast fashion exacerbates the environmental crisis through excessive carbon emissions, water pollution, and textile waste, driven by a culture of rapid and excessive consumption. In this article, the significant environmental impact fast fashion has on the environment will be discussed, along with related research from Europe, focusing mainly on Cyprus, an island where consumer habits increasingly align with global trends. In Cyprus, many people seem to be aware of the negative effect fast fashion has, yet not many changes have been implemented to minimize the unconscious and unsustainable shopping habits, contributing to the aggravation of climate change. Further research is needed to better determine the consumer habits in Cyprus, yet by fostering a culture of sustainability and responsible consumption, Cyprus has the potential to reduce its environmental footprint and lead by example in the fight against environmental degradation.

**Keywords:** Fast fashion, textile waste, environment, Cyprus

## 1. Introduction

Fast fashion is among the most damaging industries for the environment, negatively affecting water resources, contributing to the greenhouse effect, and accelerating climate change. Research from the EU indicates that only 1% of the textiles are recycled, with the rest disposed of in landfills (European Commission, n.d). Furthermore, these textiles emit 121 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions, as the materials used to currently produce clothes include polyester and other cheap fabrics made from microplastics that, end up contaminating the water or even affecting the human body. It is estimated that by 2030, 148 million more tons of waste will be generated (Papamichael et al., 2023, p. 252), yet consumption habits continue to evolve, underscoring the critical need for immediate action towards sustainability.

## 2. Case Study: Cyprus

The scourge of fast fashion does not leave the island of Cyprus intact, as consumer habits increasingly align with global trends. There is a notable lack of data regarding the impact of fast fashion in Cyprus, however, several important studies provide a foundation for **developing an initial**

understanding of Cypriot consumer behavior related to fashion choices. The literature reviewed was selected based on targeted keyword searches such as "Fast fashion", "Cyprus", conducted on databases like Science Direct and Google Scholar.

In a study, Papadopoulou et al. (2021) are examining whether 50 Cypriot consumers belonging to generation X and Y, are aware of sustainable fashion and how their purchase decisions change upon that. Although many participants recognized the need for environmentally friendly practices, few were aware of sustainable initiatives by major brands like Zara and H&M, therefore they do not engage with them. However, most of the Generation Y participants tend to shop sustainably or refuse to purchase from non-ethical brands. Moreover, both age groups seem to be aware of the need for an environmentally friendly implementation. This highlights the need for more effective information dissemination, as there is a disconnection between corporate communication and consumer awareness. Papamichael et al. (2023) emphasize the urgency of transitioning towards a circular economy, highlighting the role of consumer habits shaped by accessibility, affordability, and availability (Papamichael et al., 2023, p. 259). Based on data from Eurostat (2018), Cyprus, in 2014, ranked first in Europe in textile waste production, generating 29.3 kg pp, while in 2018 Cyprus produced 2000 tones that correspond to 22% of the island's population, significantly exceeding Greece, where textile waste corresponded to only 9% of the population (Papamichael et al., 2023, p. 255). While certain measures have been implemented, such as the installation of textile waste bins, the study argues that they have been ineffective. This shows significant differences in the cultural aspect of sustainability and circularity among the two countries, highlighting the insufficiency of the management policies in Cyprus, therefore deeper systemic issues must be addressed. In another study, Papasolomou et al (2023) are combining data to assess public awareness in Cyprus regarding the impact their consuming behaviors have on the environment. Results show that although 75% of Cypriots claim awareness, their knowledge remains superficial. Notably, men spend less than 10% of their budget on buying new clothes, while 35% of women spend more than the 30% of theirs for the same cause (Papasolomou et al., 2022 p.198). In general, their findings reflect persistent challenges in fostering responsible consumption behaviors.

### 3. Policy and Initiatives

The EU is constantly implementing ways to reduce textile waste all over Europe. There are comprehensive laws and policies, encouraging producers to be more responsible with their waste and prove their environmental claims. The EU is also offering guidance and fundings to ensure a smooth transition into these new methods (European Commission, n.d). In Cyprus, there is no specific law regarding textile waste management, but there are certain laws that can include it, such as Waste Law of 2011 (L.185(I)/2011) and the Municipal Waste Management Plans (2015–2021), (*DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT - Waste Management Strategy*, n.d.). The Fashion Revolution movement also actively contributes to raising public awareness and reducing the impact of fast fashion, by hosting annual events, including clothing bazaars and sewing workshops, aimed at promoting sustainable practices. Notably, it introduced an innovative initiative to the Cypriot context, by developing a "Sustainable Routes Map," which allows people to easily locate slow fashion and ethically responsible brands across the island.

### 4. Conclusion

The fast fashion industry leads people into unsustainable practices that have negative impact on the environment. Recent studies show how big the impact is on the environment and humans in the long run, with Cyprus contributing notably to the issue, as textile waste volumes continue to rise. Although a substantial proportion of Cypriots is aware about the impact their habits have, yet effective measures to reduce waste and unconscious purchases remain lacking. Promoting sustainable fashion brands, encouraging circular economy practices, and enhancing consumer education on ethical fashion choices, with the aid of the anti-fast fashion movement, can suggest a shift towards responsible consumer behavior. Further empirical research is essential, as limited data is available regarding fast fashion and consumer habits in Cyprus.

#### Author comments

This article is a case concerning a spread of awareness to this severely underrated and rarely discussed topic which most people have little to no knowledge of, especially in an island like Cyprus.

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