
× FASHION CONSUMPTION ×

INTRO TO FASHION CONSUMPTION



- Fashion consumption refers to the processes through which individuals and groups purchase, use, and dispose of fashion products such as clothing, footwear, and accessories.
- Tied to identity, social belonging, cultural values, and economic status (McNeill & Moore, 2015).
- In contemporary society, fashion consumption functions as a form of self-expression and communication.
- Individuals use clothing to articulate who they are, what they value, and the social groups with which they align.
- This process extends beyond mere material ownership, embodying social meanings and emotional connections.
- These meanings and connections shape how consumers interact with fashion brands and products.

HISTORY AND CULTURE

- The culture of fashion consumption has evolved significantly over the past century due to economic, social, and technological changes.
- In the early 20th century, couture houses in Europe catered to elites, with slow fashion cycles and exclusive, long-lasting clothing (Crane, 2000).
- After World War II, mass production and consumer culture expanded access to fashion across classes, driven by rising incomes, urbanisation, and youth culture.
- Media influences like fashion magazines and television shaped consumer aspirations during this period (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).
- From the 1970s to 1990s, fast fashion and globalisation enabled rapid production, making fashion affordable while creating a culture of disposability (Joy et al., 2012).
- Celebrity culture influenced consumer desires, leading to seasonal wardrobes and microtrends.
- Technological developments, including the internet and e-commerce, transformed how consumers discover and purchase fashion, while social media changed engagement with brands (McKinsey & Company, 2022).
- Societal factors such as women's workforce participation, rising disposable incomes, and global fashion capitals have shaped purchasing decisions (Taplin, 2014).
- These shifts show how fashion consumption has been linked to economic prosperity, social mobility aspirations, and evolving cultural values, with fashion used to express individuality within societal structures.



- Ethics has become a critical influence on fashion consumption over the past decade due to rising consumer awareness of labour rights, animal welfare, and environmental impacts.
- Ethical considerations in fashion include worker treatment in supply chains, environmental impacts of material extraction and textile production, and animal welfare in clothing and accessory production.
- The fashion industry accounts for ~10% of global carbon emissions and nearly 20% of wastewater, showing its significant environmental footprint (United Nations, 2019).
- A McKinsey survey found 67% of consumers value the use of sustainable materials, and 63% are influenced by brands promoting sustainability in their marketing (McKinsey & Company, 2020).
- The second-hand apparel market is projected to grow by 127% by 2026, reflecting consumer interest in circular models and reducing waste (ThredUp, 2022).
- Ethics is now a major driver of change, with consumers scrutinising brands' environmental practices, supply chain transparency, and ethical production processes.
- Consumers are aligning purchasing behaviours with values, supporting brands committed to ethical and sustainable practices and rejecting those that fail to meet these expectations.

KEY INFLUENCE OVER THE LAST DECADE: ETHICS IN FASHION CONSUMPTION

CHANGES IN FASHION CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN CONTEMPORARY FASHION



- Significant changes in fashion consumption and consumer behaviour reflect shifts in values, technology, and social and environmental awareness.
- Younger consumers (Gen Z and Millennials) now value experiences over ownership, prioritising sustainability, ethical production, and environmental impact over simply owning new items (Intel, 2023).
- Online shopping and social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok have transformed how consumers discover and interact with fashion, allowing trends to spread rapidly and enabling direct engagement with brands.
- There is a growing backlash against fast fashion due to awareness of its environmental and social costs, including textile waste, overproduction, and labour exploitation.
- Conscious consumerism is rising, with demand for brands that follow ethical and sustainable practices.
- Diversity and inclusivity have become priorities, with consumers expecting brands to represent different body types, cultures, and identities in marketing and product offerings (McKinsey & Company, 2022).
- Technological advancements such as virtual try-ons, AI-driven recommendations, and blockchain supply chain transparency allow consumers to trace clothing origins and engage more deeply with fashion.
- Consumers today are more informed, value-driven, and technologically engaged, transforming how fashion is consumed and perceived in society.

STELLA MCCARTNEY'S ETHICAL AND SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION MODEL

- Stella McCartney is a pioneering fashion brand aligning operations with ethical and sustainable consumption models.
- Founded in 2001, the brand rejects the use of leather, feathers, fur, and animal skins in all product lines.
- Material innovation is central, using sustainable viscose from FSC-certified forests, Mylo™ (mycelium-based leather), organic cotton, and recycled materials.
- The brand uses the Environmental Profit and Loss (EP&L) tool to publicly report environmental impacts like carbon emissions, water usage, and waste, demonstrating supply chain transparency.
- It collaborates with NGOs to monitor and improve labour conditions in its supply chain.
- Embraces circular economy models by designing high-quality, long-lasting products and promoting upcycling.
- Partners with The RealReal for luxury consignment to encourage circular fashion consumption and reduce textile waste.



- Committed to reducing its carbon footprint through net-zero carbon targets and renewable energy initiatives across operations.
- Has raised consumer expectations for transparency, accountability, and sustainability within luxury fashion.
- Normalises the rejection of animal-based materials while maintaining high design and quality standards.
- Encourages consumers to invest in ethically produced, long-lasting garments instead of fast fashion.
- Demonstrates that ethical and sustainable practices are viable in luxury fashion, setting industry standards.
- Consumers align their identities with environmental stewardship, animal welfare, and social responsibility by purchasing Stella McCartney products.
- Shows how ethical influences are reshaping contemporary fashion consumption patterns.



CONCLUSION

Fashion consumption is a complex and evolving phenomenon, deeply intertwined with cultural, social, and economic contexts. Over the past century, fashion consumption has transformed from the exclusive practices of elite couture to the widespread availability of fast fashion and now towards an era defined by ethical and sustainable practices. Ethics has emerged as a key influence over the last decade, reshaping the landscape of fashion consumption as consumers increasingly demand accountability, transparency, and environmental consciousness from the brands they support.

Brands like Stella McCartney exemplify how the fashion industry can respond to these changing consumer expectations by aligning luxury with sustainability and ethical practices, demonstrating that responsible fashion consumption is not only necessary but also achievable. As the fashion industry continues to evolve, the dynamic relationship between consumer behaviour and industry practices will remain central to shaping a future that prioritises social responsibility, environmental stewardship, and the conscious consumption of fashion.

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