Slow Fashion is the Future: Fast Fashion and Collaborative Consumption

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What is Fast Fashion?

"Fast fashion," as the name implies, is fashion that is produced quickly and cheaply in order to respond to the rapid-fire changes of modern fashion trends. It is intended to be thrown out at a moment's notice in order to make way for new trends, and has low practical life.

Fashion trends are largely dictated by the industry, and not consumers; what they say, goes, and consumers are expected and encouraged to update their wardrobes in a matter of weeks at a moment's notice, encouraging clothing waste.

Why is Fast Fashion So Affordable?

Affordability and availability make fast fashion the only source of clothing for many people− there is no ethical consumption under late stage capitalism.

Like fast food or plastic, it's cheaper and more profitable to make clothes that won't last long− be it due to low durability or transient trends− than it is to make clothing that has a long service life. This is to ensure that customers keep coming back frequently, in order to purchase new items to replace old garments that either wore out or went out of style.

Traditional Pricing Sheet, US Mass-Market and Mid-Market Garment Retail

Production Link	Retail Price (%)
Fabric	13
CM (labor, overhead, profit)	6
Trim	2
FOB	21
Duty	4
Clearance and inland freight	1.4
Import office costs	6
Total production and transportation costs	53
Retail markup	100−53 = **47**
Retail markdown	**30**
Net retail sale	**70**
Net profit	**18**

Source: Based on Birnbaum, D., *Crisis in the 21st Century Garment Industry and Breakthrough Unified Strategy.* The Fashion Index Inc., New York, 2008.

Note: CM, cut and make; FOB, freight on board. The bold numbers indicate the percent in the pricing of the garment that is the profit margin for the retailer.

(Anguelov, 2015).

Textile Pollution

According to estimates from World Bank, roughly 20% of all global water pollution is the result of runoff from dyeing and rinsing natural fibers such as cotton for textiles.

Excluded from this estimate is pollution from natural fiber treatment, in which the fibers are bleached, after being dipped in a hydrogen peroxide bath to increase pliability. Bleaching is performed on cotton, linen, and other natural fiber yarns to diminish their natural tint in preparation for dyeing and fiber blending.

Mass amounts of clothing in landfills also cause off-gassing, which is when chemicals leech out of the materials during decomposition.

Collaborative Consumption

Collaborative consumption, in the case of our topic, refers to redistribution markets, i.e. thrift stores, clothing donation, and sharing clothes in place of owning them. Its scale ' and availability has been greatly increased by way of the Internet through sites like eBay and Poshmark, as well as sites offering swap and rental models of collaborative consumption.

By exchanging and repurposing pre-owned clothing, consumers are able to reduce the environmental impact of fashion by extending the practical longevity of garments, instead of simply throwing clothes away.

The following charts detail various models of collaborative consumption, such as rental "Fashion Netflix" models, swapping, and the popular E-Commerce methods.

	Swapping Model	The Fashion *Airbnb* Model
Examples	*Resecond, Swapdom, Swapstyle, Grand Circle,* and *The Clothing Exchange*	*Rentez-vous*
Value Proposition	• Clothes, bags, household goods, children's and maternity clothing • Pre-owned items	• Clothing and accessories • Events
Customer Segments	Men and women	Women
Channels	Website, physical shop, and app	Events and website
Cost/Revenue Structure	• Revenue: Membership and transaction fees • Costs: Rent; salary	• Revenue: Transaction (purchasing fee and rental fee); designers; booking fees; events • Costs: Website and app management; salary

In the swapping method, individuals contribute their own fashion items to the collective closet before they are allowed to swap for the same amount of items in return. Individuals can upload pictures of the garments they would like to swap on the app or website, and once the items are listed, others simply request them.
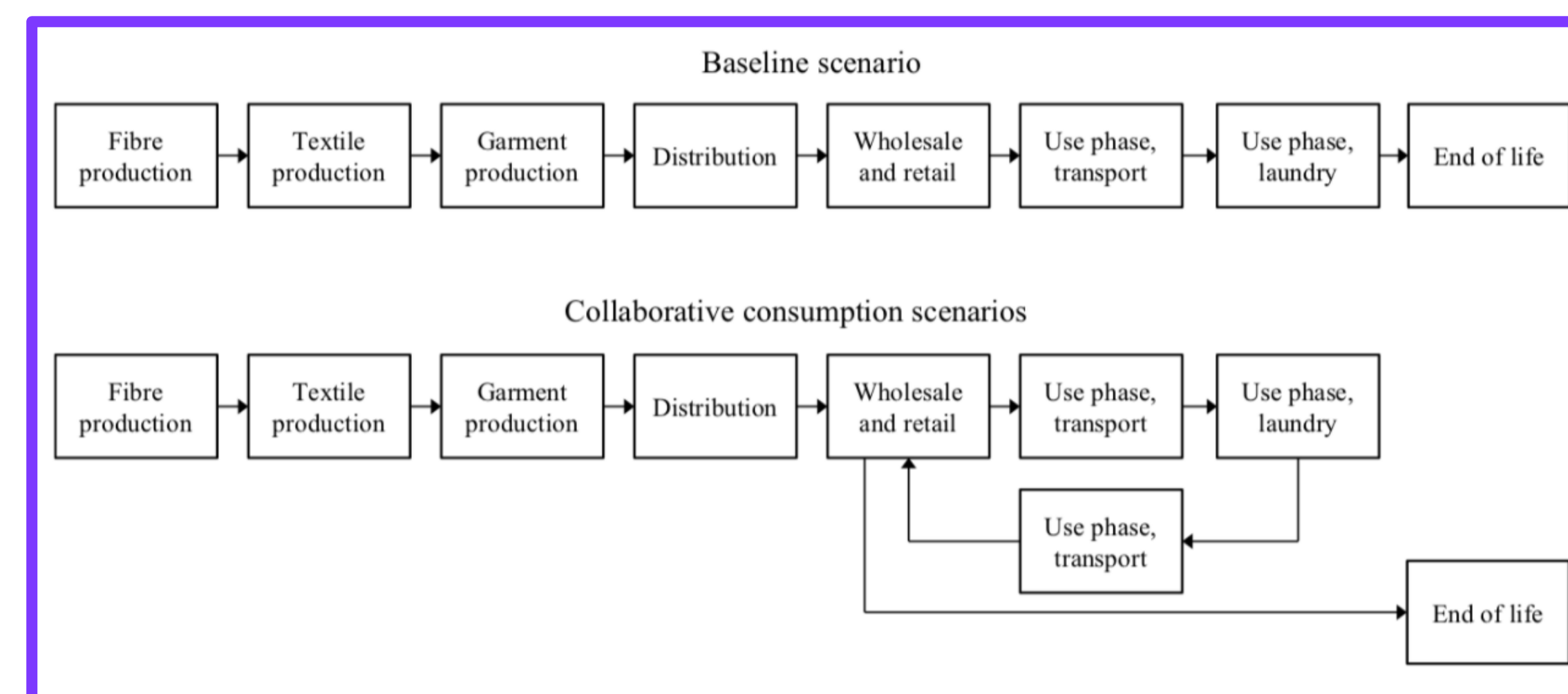
Collaborative Consumption Scenarios

Chart from Bahareh Zamani, Gustav Sandin, Greg M. Peters, 2017.

Swedish Case Study

Chart and description from Bahareh Zamani, Gustav Sandin, Greg M. Peters, 2017.

The average number of uses per garment in the baseline scenarios is estimated based on the number of garments an average Swede purchases per year according to Swedish statistics on net annual imports of garments in 2008. We are specifically looking at the impact of t-shirts, jeans, and dresses. For construction of the clothing library scenarios different parameters were varied including:
(i)   the extension of the garment's service life (two or four times the garment's service life assumed in the baseline scenarios; to make this feasible one either extends the technical service life of current garments, or only uses particularly durable garments.)
(ii) the type of customer transportation (the same means of transportation as in the baseline scenarios for medium impact, or low or high impact means of transportation, respectively.)
(iii) whether the setup is an offline (physical store) or online (internet, with a pick-up point for deliverables) solution (this influences mode of transportation to and from the store/pick-up point and distances.)
To get an overall perspective regarding the environmental impact associated with each collaborative consumption scenario, the results for climate change, freshwater eutrophication, freshwater consumption and freshwater ecotoxicity are shown for the medium transport impact scenarios.

	The Fashion *Netflix* Model	Fashion Library
Examples	*Rent the Runway, Chic by Choice, LeTote, Tie Society,* and *The Black Tux.*	*Lånegarderoben, Albright Fashion Library, Klädoteket, LENA,* and *De Kledingbibliotheek*
Value proposition	• Luxury, haute couture, accessories, jewellery or maternity clothing • Additional services as point-of-difference	• Clothes, shoes, jewellery, handbags, and accessories • Mix of second-hand, vintage, sustainable, and new items from design collaborators • Luxury clothing
Customer segments	Women	• Young women interested in fashion and caring about sustainability • High-income women interested in luxury designer wear
Channels	Apps, physical stores, and website	Physical stores, showrooms, pop-ups, and other events
Cost / revenue Structure	• Revenue: Membership fees and subscription packages; additional fees: late fee insurance fee, cancellation fee; additional try-on service • Costs: Purchasing of fashion items from designers; dry cleaning services and shipping services; website and app management; salary	• Revenue: Membership fees and subscription packages; sponsorships and donations; penalty fees for lost, stolen, damaged, and delayed items; events • Costs: Purchasing of garments from designers and private people; rent; service fees for dry cleaning, repairing, and remaking; salary

The fashion-rental model offers a rental service of fashion items to customers. This is targeted to individuals who do not feel the need to own clothes anymore, but want to try out different styles on a continuous basis

	The E-Commerce Model
Examples	*Threadflip, Tradesy, Poshmark, Thredup, Vestiaire Collective, BuyMyWardrobe, Kidizen*
Value Proposition	• Luxury clothes, shoes, jewellery, accessories, handbags, and watches • Wedding dresses and wardrobe basics • Maternity and plus-size clothes • Children's products: clothing, toys, shoes, and other accessories
Customer Segment	Women, men, and children
Channels	Website, app, blog, and fashion events
Cost/Revenue Structure	Revenue: • (Flat, variable, or seller-based) commission rate for each item sold • Concierge services • Ticket income from events Costs: • Management of online platform (website, apps, blogs etc.) • Salary • Shipping and return handling

The e-commerce method is arguably the most well-known. Individuals contribute their pre-owned items of clothing to be purchased by other consumers, instead of temporarily swapping or renting. As the items are purchased instead of rented, ownership is formally transferred to the buyer.

Garment	T-shirt	Jeans	Dress
Mass	110 g	477 g	478 g
Textile material	100% cotton	98% cotton	100% polyester
Baseline scenarios			
Medium impact transportation	50% car 50% bus	50% car 50% bus	50% car 50% bus
Low impact transportation	100% bus	100% bus	100% bus
High impact transportation	100% car	100% car	100% car
Customer transport distance	17 km distance back and forth	17 km distance back and forth	17 km distance back and forth
Number of uses	22	200	10
Number of uses per laundry cycle	2	10	3
Number of customers per service life	1	1	1
Collaborative consumption scenarios – twice ("life x2") and four times ("life x4") the garment service life			
Number of uses before disposal (life x2)	44	400	20
Number of uses before disposal (life x4)	88	800	40
Number of customers before disposal (life x2)	11	10	15
Number of customers before disposal (life x4)	22	20	30

Poor Working Conditions

While buying large amounts of clothes for cheap can help consumers feel they are living the high life, the cost is much greater for workers in the supply chain. Unsafe, unhealthy conditions and child labor run rampant in the fashion industry; air both in and out of factories is polluted by particles from fashion production, and local water sources become tainted by runoff. As demand for and overconsumption of fast fashion increases, abuse of workers is further proliferated.

(Claudio, 2007)

Pollution from Transportation

Production and disposal of items is not the only contributor to pollution; higher demand for fast fashion requires more frequent transportation. With shipping over water considered too slow for the fast-fashion world, transportation of garments usually results in considerable pollution from air travel.

Consumer Awareness

Unless widespread, major changes can be made to the fashion production industry, the most consumers are able to do is be aware of how they can reduce waste. Participating in collaborative consumption models can extend the service life of garments, and recycling fabrics can give new purpose to worn-down clothing. Reducing the amount of inorganic fabrics in one's wardrobe can reduce the introduction of plastic particles into wastewater, and Washing clothes at lower temperatures can increase their practical life as well.

Furthermore, consumers can do research on which brands heavily contribute To fast fashion, and, when possible, limit their consumption of said brands in protest of these unsustainable practices.

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