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Conflicting Perspectives on Speed: Dynamics and Consequences of the Fast Fashion System

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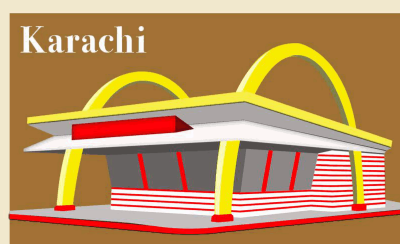
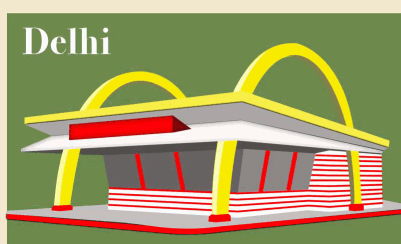
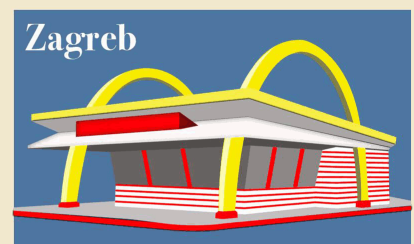
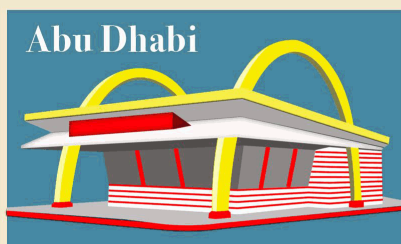
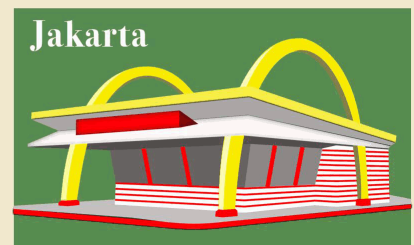
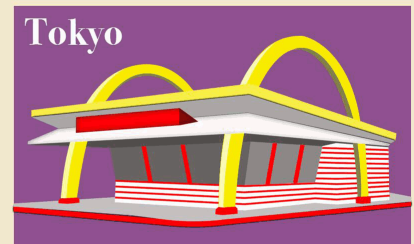
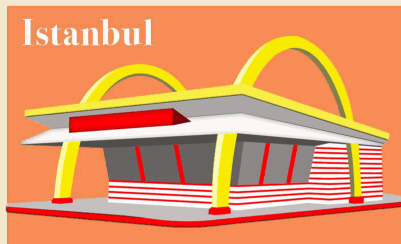
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Markets, Globalization & Development Review



Conflicting Perspectives on Speed: Dynamics and Consequences of the Fast Fashion System

Zeynep Ozdamar-Ertekin

Abstract

The fashion industry today is trapped in a competitive cycle of shorter and faster sales and production periods, requiring continual changing of styles, frequent renewal of products, and speed of availability. This high speed of the current fashion system has both positive and negative outcomes on the environment, the workers and the society. The purpose of this study is to provide a more comprehensive and macro perspective on speed, by acknowledging the conflicting perspectives of different stakeholders, focusing mainly on institutional actors. Ethnography, with emphasis on participant observation and interviews, was used as a research method, supported by secondary data on fast fashion and sustainable fashion practices. Findings contribute to existing literature by shedding light on these dynamics and consequences of speed of the current fashion system, hoping to raise awareness among marketers, managers, and public policymakers.

Keywords

Fashion industry, Fast Fashion, Zara, H&M, Competitive cycle, Speed, Sustainability

Zeynep Ozdamar-Ertekin has a PhD in Business Administration. She worked in fashion apparel industry for 17 years and has been working as a part-time lecturer at Izmir University of Economics. Her research interests concentrate on consumption theories, fashion, sustainability, retailing, and consumption patterns of children. She has published in *Journal of Macromarketing*, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, and *METU Studies in Development*.

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Conflicting Perspectives on Speed: Dynamics and Consequences of the Fast Fashion System

Introduction

Fashion is a central element of current consumer culture and it represents elements of contemporary society (Atik and Firat 2013). Today, there is fast consumption in all areas, not only in fashion. The impact of speed in fashion industry, however, is especially severe. Since 2000, it has undergone profound transformation. One of the changes is the speeding up of the fashion system (Cline 2012; LeBlanc 2012; Tokatlı 2008; Tokatlı and Kızılgun 2009). The three-month production cycle, which often includes the time it takes to design, manufacture, and distribute clothing to stores, has decreased to three to eight weeks. A design from a runway show can be adapted very quickly and make it to the stores within a month (Cline 2012; Godelnik 2014; LeBlanc 2012; Moon 2014; Tokatlı 2008). Consequently, the fashion industry today is trapped in a competitive cycle of shorter and faster sales and production periods.

Speed of the current fashion system has both positive and negative outcomes at global level. The purpose of this study is to provide a theoretical explanation of the different dynamics and consequences of speed. Studies that include different actors of the fashion system are limited. Most of the prior studies in marketing literature on fashion are carried out with consumers (i.e. Dolbec and Fischer 2015; Joy et al. 2012; Niinimäki 2010; Pears 2006; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). This study aims to provide a more comprehensive and macro perspective on speed, by acknowledging the conflicting perspectives of different stakeholders, focusing mainly on institutional actors. Ethnography, with emphasis on participant observation and interviews, was used as a research method to examine the dynamics and consequences of speed. Secondary data on fast fashion and sustainable fashion practices was also helpful to support the findings. Within this perspective, the article starts by providing an overview of the fast fashion system and its characteristics. Then, it shows the dynamics and consequences related to speed.

Overview of the Fast Fashion System

The phrase fast fashion "refers to low-cost clothing collections that imitate the current luxury fashion trends" (Joy et al. 2012, p. 273). It is commonly used to describe how designs are adapted rapidly from catwalk to stores and into the mass-retailing market (Cline 2012). As Wilson ([1985] 2003) states, "fashion is dress in which the key feature is rapid and continual

changing of styles" (p. 3). This demand for high speed in fashion is the main characteristic of today's textile and clothing industry. The current fashion system requires rapid and continual changing of styles; frequent renewal of products; speed of availability; greater variety; and affordable prices.

Originating in the late 1990s, fast fashion model is based on speed. Pioneered by Inditex Group and H&M, it has become popular among retailers that adopt the vertically integrated business model following "just-in-time" manufacturing philosophy and "quick response" strategies (Birtwistle et al. 2003). It was made possible by advanced technology, quick manufacturing, supply chain control, rapid prototyping, small batches, large variety, efficient transportation and delivery, and "floor ready" merchandise (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006). Targets are consumers who are passionate about fashion and trends. This new type of shopper wants catwalk looks at high street prices and they want them at once. Most of the high street retailers have sensed this opportunity and started producing more fashion items, offering them to the consumers immediately at diminishing prices (Styles 2015).

The increasing supply and demand for fast fashion has created a vicious cycle necessitating designers, retailers, and manufacturers to react faster. Trends change frequently and there is a continuous supply of new themes and new designs. There are no slow periods. Chief fashion critic of the *New York Times*, Journalist Vanessa Friedman drew attention to the fact that the system is based on planned obsolescence and designers are expected to create at least six to eight collections a year (Rickey 2014). Previously apparel designers presented only two to four collections a year (spring/summer and autumn/winter). Standard turnaround time from catwalk to consumer was around six months. Lately, the rate of fashion production cycle is reduced to three to eight weeks. In order to keep customers coming back, fast fashion retailers like Topshop, Zara, H&M, and Forever 21, replenish stock and purchase on a weekly basis to be able to introduce new trends and new items (Cline 2012; LeBlanc 2012; Noble 2014; Tokatlı 2008; Tokatlı and Kızılgun 2009).

Lucy Siegle, in her article at *Ecouterre*, describes Zara's way of working, which is one of the most successful fast fashion business models. Rather than taking nine to 12 months and using forecasters and analysts to decide on styles, colors, and fabrics, Zara set up a large production team at Inditex's headquarters at A Coruña. The team gets constant feedback from trend-spotters on the ground about consumers' view of what's hot and what's not. Based on this feedback the stores receive new fashion items twice a week. Zara's system enables the goods

to be distributed to all the stores within one week after being shipped. Instead of holding onto lots of stock and assessing for quality, retailers started to follow Zara's way of getting what is new and swapping two wardrobe seasons a year to up to 20 seasons (Siegle 2011).

Speed of availability of updated looks makes the industry attractive to many consumers. Offering the latest fashion trends at reasonable prices makes fashion accessible for almost all social classes. Therefore, along with speed and style, disposability becomes an important characteristic as well. Fast fashion companies give ten washes as a reference after which an item is not expected to retain its original value (Joy et al. 2012). Consequently, the current fashion system requires products to be renewed frequently, so that the market constantly grows (Atik and Firat 2013). As a result, the realized growth of the fast fashion market has been astonishing. Conventional apparel retailers and the traditional apparel model of selling seasonal lines of clothing, manufactured and marketed months in advance, has been replaced by affordable brands that rapidly respond to the latest fashion trends enabled by just-in-time production (Gonzales 2015). Consumers both got used to and have loved this fast system, which has global consequences.

The fashion industry has been criticized due to appalling working conditions in clothing production, particularly for low wages and child labor, especially in third world nations (McRobbie 1997; Wilson 1985). While big companies generate high profits, workers only earn minimum wages (Cline 2012). In addition to low wages, due to short lead times, suppliers struggle to plan orders and predict the number of workers needed in longer term. This creates the need for either temporary or subcontracted workers or excessive overtime to meet unpredictable orders with unreasonable deadlines, which puts a strain on the workers (Cataldi et al. 2010; Fletcher 2007). Furthermore, mass-market fashion retailers create trends and generate waste ever more quickly. Increasingly rapid releases encourage constant shopping and trend chasing (Cline 2012). Producers offering latest fashion trends at reasonable prices encourage disposability, which leads to rapid product turnover and high waste outputs (Fletcher 2008). As a result of the rapid and continual changing of styles, clothes quickly lose their appeal, become out-of-fashion and are disposed of. Consequently, this throw-away fashion, based on excessive consumption and quick disposal of clothes, has become a big waste handling issue (Morgan and Birtwistle 2009).

Producing massive amounts of low-quality clothing with artificial fibers also puts strain on natural resources (Cline 2012), leading to deterioration of natural resources and the environment (McRobbie 1997;

Wilson 1985). Most of the consumers are not aware that the clothes they make, buy, wear and discard are resource intensive: they do not see the carbon or water footprints (Goodwin 2012). If fashion consumption keeps increasing at the current rate as a result of accelerated product obsolescence, the impacts on social and ecological environment will pose a threat to quality of life of future generations. Therefore, with this study, I aim to lay out some of the consequences of the fast fashion system, contributing to existing academic literature and hoping to increase awareness among marketers, managers, and public policymakers.

Methodology

To explore fast fashion from multiple angles, ethnography was used with emphasis on participant observation and interaction, supported by interviews and secondary data. The research was mostly carried out in Turkey, as clothing industry is one of the leading industries of the Turkish economy in terms of production, employment, and export earnings. Turkey is not a low-cost manufacturer. As a result of fast fashion gaining importance, however, in addition to cost considerations, quick response concerns started to influence sourcing decisions. Geographic proximity of Turkey to main markets, such as Europe; flexibility in production and relative ease of procuring fabric due to country's high-quality cotton cultivation enable Turkish textile and clothing manufacturers to compete against lower cost competitors, such as China (ITKIB 2011; Tokatlı and Kızılgun 2009).

The research was carried out from fall 2012 until fall 2015, while I was working in an apparel manufacturer in Izmir, the 3rd city in Turkey in apparel exports, with 7.6 percent share, in 2011 (Ministry of Labor and Social Security 2011). The company employs around 1100 people, 900 of which are blue collar workers. The main customers are worldwide fashion retailers such as H&M, Inditex Group, C&A, George, We, Mango, Mayorel, and Sainsbury. Considering my 16 years of professional experience in fashion industry, participant observation was a relevant technique to use. Naturally occurring everyday events, settings, interactions, actions, participants' explanations, and passages of conversations were recorded as fieldnotes. I attended 116 meetings with retailers, brands, and designers, both in Turkey and Europe. I also took notes during internal meetings (about 50 meetings), along with numerous unstructured short conversations.

Having fulltime ethnographic immersion in the field enabled me to gain access to various formal and informal settings and allowed me to interact with different actors as an insider. Along with my own subjective

experience, my ethnographic involvement helped to connect with the participants; understand their experiences, relations and conflicts; gain deep insights on the dynamics of the industry; and examine the consequences of speed. Furthermore, my prolonged prior engagement and extended participation in the context helped to obtain valuable longitudinal perspectives and insights that would have been difficult to achieve through less sustained involvement. On the other hand, increased ethnographic involvement can lead to the problem of over involvement (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). To safeguard against over involvement, I employed critical self-examination and kept a record of my cognitive and emotional experiences, my biases, feelings, and thoughts in order to maintain scholarly distance from the phenomena and to enhance the integrity of the findings.

Observational data – if used alone – does not reveal the perceptions, values, beliefs, and internal states of informants (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). Therefore, I combined data obtained from participant observation with data elicited in ethnographic and in-depth interviews, to explain the phenomenon of interest more thoroughly. The informants were selected in the course of an emergent design. Judgmental sampling was used to seek out people who have specialist knowledge in the area and who have different roles, experiences, and characteristics such as age, gender, work experience, and job title. The diversity of the informants enhanced the validity of the findings through triangulation of data across informants.

Fifteen in-depth interviews were carried out with different actors on the institutional side of the fashion industry, including designers (4) working in retailers and suppliers, both in Turkey and Europe, sales manager (1) of a Turkish supplier, product developers (2) working for retailers in Turkey and Europe, merchandisers (2) of a Turkish supplier, academic director (1) of a fashion institute, owner (1) of a Turkish supplier, consultants (3) of a Sustainability and Communications Consultancy in Istanbul, and business and research manager (1) of a Sustainable Fashion Center in London. During the interviews, most of the informants made comments as a fashion consumer as well. Secondary data such as news, blogs, and various online sources on fast fashion and sustainable fashion were also used to support the findings.

Based on the processes described by McCracken (1988) and Arnould and Wallendorf (1994), data was collected, coded, compared, and broken down to form themes and categories. Collection and interpretive analysis of the data and triangulation of the findings were iterative throughout the ethnographic process, and findings were continually refined

as part of an emergent design. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation helped to increase trustworthiness and credibility of the findings. Furthermore, triangulation across sources and methods were used to strengthen the credibility, integrity, and trustworthiness of the research. To construct a credible interpretation and to strengthen the validity of the findings, deliberate attention was paid to negative cases and events. Consequently, having an emergent design and the various data collection, sampling, and research techniques used, enhanced trustworthiness of the findings and the themes that emerged, which are discussed in the findings section.

Findings

Review of literature and analysis of the interviews, fieldnotes, and secondary data reveal that speed is one of the main characteristics of the current fashion system and it has become an important part of the contemporary consumer culture and society. As addressed by a business and research manager, the key requirements of the current fashion system – speedy circulation of products, constant newness and change – are closely linked to each other. Prior literature also supports that – to ensure continuous consumption – speed becomes critical as fast fashion retailers seek to fulfill consumers' desire for new by constantly providing new offerings and by rapid change (Joy et al. 2012). Fashion clothing is not the only thing that people consume quickly. There is fast consumption in most areas, from electronics to toy industries. Academic director of a fashion institute underlined that compared to expensive items, such as mobile phones, consuming a t-shirt quickly becomes insignificant. People no longer wear something for a long period or until it gets really old. They got used to buying and throwing away quickly without considering the consequences.

We need the fast fashion system as we earn our living from it. However, it is a trap for people to consume more. I do not think that fashion which is consumed this quickly is fashion in real sense. It only serves to increase consumption. However, everything is fast now and consumed quickly. Fashion is a part of this culture (Sales manager, female, 41).

Some of the informants raised their concern with the speed of the industry as they believe that the current fast fashion system only serves to increase consumption. One of the designers addressed that people need to consider the carbon footprint of the products that they consume and throw away so quickly. Therefore, fashion clothing should not be short lived and manufactured for so cheap. People need to make use of a

product for longer periods. Another informant noted, however, that this is against today's consumption culture.

Similarly, in a panel that she attended at Istanbul International Arts & Culture Festival, Livia Firth, the founder of Eco-age, tried to attract attention to the consequences of having two collections in a week as opposed to in a year. She underlined that people's habits and psychology of buying clothes have changed: 20-30 years ago, people thought a lot before buying something. They saved money to buy clothes with good quality that they can use for longer. They mended and used their families' and relatives' clothes. Today, people buy something just for the sake of buying, without thinking, without consideration, and use it only for a short time before throwing it away. As the speed of production and consumption continues, it is difficult to change this consumption sprint (Bursalıgil 2015). Consequently, speed has become an inevitable part of the contemporary consumer culture and its component fashion culture. In an era when everything is consumed so fast, it seems unlikely for fashion to slow down.

The speed of the industry has some positive consequences such as delivering economic growth, fulfilling desire for new, and boosting excitement. On the other hand, the immense speed of the fashion system has negative outcomes on the environment, natural resources, society, and workers. These lead to stress and uncertainty, increasing waste, disposability, overstocks, and decreasing value and uniqueness. These dynamics and consequences related to speed are discussed in detail in the following sections.

Speed as Enabler of Economic Growth

As stated previously, speed has both positive and negative consequences. One of the most important positive outcomes of speed is delivering economic growth. Fashion system has evolved to meet the demand that fast fashion has created in the consumer, and this current commercial model is very successful. Fast fashion has become a multibillion dollar industry and it keeps growing (Gonzalez 2015). Speed and quick lead times have become an asset and a marketing tool to gain competitive advantage both for fashion suppliers and retailers. This is in line with some of the earlier findings which argue that high speed in fashion – speed of availability, rapid changing of styles and frequent renewal of products – is a tool to generate more business, increase sales and enable the market to grow (Atik and Fırat 2013; Fletcher 2010; Joy et al. 2012; Wilson 1985).

Many informants addressed the importance of speed as an enabler of growth and success. On the retail side, aim of the retailers is often to grow and to have more sales. Owner of a Turkish supplier stated that retailers like H&M and Zara open 500 to 600 new stores every year and

they grow in 25 to 30 countries, which give them the power to become trendsetters and to dominate the industry. Similarly, a supplier workshop held in Istanbul in 2015 noted that market shares of major fast fashion ladieswear retailers in Europe increased between 2009 and 2014. For instance, market share of Inditex group increased from 3.5 to 4.6 percent, H&M increased its share from 3.1 to 4.2 percent, Primark increased it from 0.9 to 1.9 percent, and C&A almost remained the same at 2.5-2.6 percent.

Some of the informants observed that retailers have become desperate for new products all the time; and they have constant turnover of stock. The ones that are slow in changing their window displays, offering fashionable items, and following trends, lose sales. Whereas the system is rewarding for companies that are fast. The firms that have different goods in stores frequently manage to sell and earn more. Even the luxury fashion retailers have more collections than before. Furthermore, some meetings I attended indicated that supplying orders with long lead times can lead to commercial losses as – by the time the goods are in store – the trends may change, so the retailers cannot sell these products. It is less risky to buy fashion items from suppliers that offer short lead times and flexibility.

We can ship in three to six weeks. Everything is speeding up. Crazy times! One of the biggest fashion retailers for instance, has a fast fashion model, which they have started recently. The speed is unbelievable. Their buyers and designers go shopping; make a design pack; choose fabrics, shapes, and graphics. They invite their top five or six suppliers; present the range to all the suppliers at the same time; and ask everyone to send the samples and the prices in two or three days. Suppliers which offer the best samples quickest with best prices get the orders and they need to ship in four to five weeks. Everything in trend is in store in five weeks. The suppliers do their best as the retailer places orders for million pieces... (Owner, male, 57).

One of the most successful fast fashion retailers is Zara, whose success is based on short lead times, multiple seasons, reduced delivery times, and not keeping lots of stock. Inditex's chairman José Maria Castellano, who is known for coming up with Zara's "*blink-and-you-miss-it-fashion*," states that "this business is all about reducing response time. In fashion, stock is like food. It goes bad quick." Normally fashion retailers discount 35 to 40 percent of their merchandise, whereas Zara has set up such a system that it discounts around 18 percent of its products

(Siegle 2011). One fashion buyer expressed great concern to a supplier whose processes were relatively slow:

Everything is very slow at your company. Orders, print approvals, lab dips, samples, everything... We are the fastest fashion retailer. We do not have time. You are much too slow. We can work on design. I am not worried about that. I am more worried about the production side. Everything is very slow compared to other suppliers. Even at approval stage, I am afraid that it will not be on time. Therefore, I always think twice before placing orders with you. All the suppliers need to understand that we need priority and speed (Buyer, female, 40s).

Speed is also critical for suppliers to sustain their business. Long lead times, both for production and development, are not acceptable especially to fast fashion retailers. Most retailers require developments to be quicker and they do not tolerate delays in shipment as it affects their sales. Notes from meetings attended indicate that even one week can become important. Retailers request four to six weeks lead time for quick buys, for orders of styles that they missed to place at pre-selection stage, and for repeat orders of best sellers. Being slow or late can lead to cancellation of orders and loss in sales. In order not to lose business, suppliers sometimes even have to accept shipment dates and lead times that are difficult to achieve; or risk consequences such as cancellations, discounts or reclamations. Consequently, it is unlikely for fast fashion brands, retailers, and suppliers, who earn a lot of money from this business, to slow down:

If the cycle slows down and system becomes sustainable than a lot of people will lose their jobs. We will sell fewer styles but higher quality garments that will last longer with higher margins. The lead times will be longer so there will be less stress but there will be less production which means less people (General Manager, male, 40s).

Fast fashion system provides job opportunities, economic growth and earnings. Frequent changes in trends and offering many collections create more jobs for more people. Therefore, even if under pressure and stress, most of the informants did not want fashion to slow down because of their need for jobs. There is fear that sustainable development can lead to a slowdown in economic growth, which could result in loss of jobs and a rise in unemployment (Dolan et al. 2006). Similarly, economic concerns were addressed in most of the meetings and interviews. Suppliers are concerned that if they do not have enough orders they will not be able to sustain their business. Moreover, if the cycle slows down they may need

to lay off many workers due to reduced business. Therefore, even though some of the informants do not approve of fast fashion, they prefer the system to continue for economic reasons, to secure their jobs, earnings, and living:

There is a paradox between current economy and sustainable fashion. Fashion is necessary for economy to survive and for people to find jobs... Waste may have increased by 5 percent this year but employment wise we grew 30 percent, providing job opportunities for 300 or 400 more people. At least in our industry, the cut-and-sew section of the business, I believe that the positive effects are more than the negative consequences (Owner, male, 57).

Offering jobs and employment opportunities to many people can override the adverse effects on environment and increase in waste. Similarly, the CEO of fast fashion retailer H&M stated in a post for *The Guardian* that even reducing speed of consumption by 10 to 20 percent would lead to loss of jobs and increase in poverty, creating a social and economic catastrophe (Martinko 2015). Therefore, buying and selling many things can be seen as necessary rather than wasteful, in order to maintain economic growth (Bergman 2000). Consequently, speed – which enables economic growth and success and can serve as means to gain competitive advantage – is also regarded as a requirement to sustain business, economy, and jobs. This makes it difficult to imagine a radical change in lifestyles supporting unsustainable consumption practices (Thøgersen 2005). Speed of change also fulfills consumers' desire for new, which is discussed in the next section.

Speed of Change Fulfilling Desire for New

In the late 20th century, the apparel industry experienced major changes in production logistics, timelines, and scale, which helped to increase output and fed shoppers' increasing desire to buy more (Gonzalez 2015). Zara is one of the main retailers responsible of the changes in fashion system. Instead of focusing on quantity, Zara manufactures only small quantities of each style. Its designers in Spain constantly create new designs of which around 12,000 are produced in a year. They hardly have stock replenishments, which creates a "*terrible hunger*" in the consumer. Consumers fear that they will miss the opportunity to have an affordable version of a catwalk item if they do not buy quickly. Accordingly, consumers have changed their priorities in buying clothing. Instead of assessing for quality or looking at labels, they started to search for what is new. Therefore, they started to visit the stores frequently. For instance,

Zara expects its customers to visit the store on average 17 times a year, whereas for a typical retailer this drops to four times a year (Siegle 2011).

Like Zara, Primark also keeps shoppers coming back to store by constantly adding new styles. Primark's head of buying for womenswear, states that about 10 percent of the lines in store are new each week. Stock turnover is six times a season compared to an average of two times for most U.S. retailers. Basic garments are produced in Asia with a lead time of about 90 days, while fast fashion items are manufactured in Turkey or Eastern Europe with a lead time of eight weeks. This allows Primark to respond to demand for popular items quickly and trade in season rather than forecasting long time in advance (Davey and Morris 2014). These strategies enabled the retailer to become successful in the past years.

Fast fashion is a term that is being used specifically in relation to high street retailers and 16 collections a year model that actually means that the products are on the rail or on the shelves no more than 3 or 4 weeks. We have this system, where newness and availability of something that looks like it is different from the thing that was there few weeks before is absolutely necessary part of retail because it is what customers have come to expect. This also has some implications... High fashion has evolved and changed to be able to meet that demand that fast fashion has created in the consumer. We see that pre-collections in the luxury sector is a response to the fact that retailers are so desperate for new products all the time that they are not really interested any more in just buying one collection a year but at least 4 collections a year so that they got that turnover of stock. It has a huge impact and is connected to so many different things. It is connected to the way we consume everything. It is connected to the way we consume information, the speed with which the information is there, the social media, and the proliferation of internet sites that promote fashion in different ways. This pretty much tells us that we really need to be looking at something new all the time. If people are looking at something new, they feel that they should be wearing something new and that is the problem (Business and Research Manager, Male, 40s).

Informants also noted that due to many factors, consumers now expect to see something new or at least something that looks different every few weeks. Once they start looking at something new all the time, they then feel that they should be wearing something new all the time. Fashion satisfies this desire for new and different by changing fast:

It is to do with supply and demand. Because of this speed we constantly search for new things. Before we used to go shopping at the beginning of the season and bought what we need for that season. After that we only went to stores to have a look if they had anything new. Now we go shopping every week and when we see the same products we think that they are old, as we have seen them already. When people expect to see new things every week, firms need to continue this cycle by offering new products at this speed to be able to survive. They need to meet this fast demand for new products. A chicken and egg situation... (Research and Development executive, female, 30s).

Shopping habits have changed as well. A product developer interviewed stated that people used to go shopping at the beginning of the season; now they go shopping almost every week and expect to see new things. More people have started to follow fashion. Similarly, one of the designers noted that even if retailers decide to slow down the cycle, it is difficult to have four seasons again because it is unlikely for consumers to get used to having three months without buying any new items. Consequently, retailers need to constantly offer new products to be able to meet consumers' expectations for seeing new things every week. They have to continue this fast fashion cycle and fulfill constant demand for new products to be able to survive:

We want to surprise the customers. We want to have something exciting. If it's hanging the same things there all the time, it is not so exciting (Margareta van den Bosch, H&M's style adviser, from an article by Godelnik 2014).

Furthermore, some of the informants find speed of change necessary to ensure excitement. Fashion being fast and changing quickly is important for it to remain exciting. Having fewer collections can be considered boring. Similarly, H&M's style adviser told NPR that surprising the customers and excitement is an essential part of the business (Godelnik 2014). As Topshop's creative director Kate Phelan states, "It's important to celebrate individuality. Trying to look normal takes away the thrill of the new and the excitement of shopping" (Farrell 2014). Consequently, desire for new and change was often associated with excitement.

It is difficult to change people's habits. To shift from slow to fast speed is easy but once people get used to going to stores and seeing new stuff every week it is very difficult to do the reverse.

They get used to buying something new frequently and when someone tries to stop this, it is very difficult (Designer, female, 28).

As a result, fashion is used to fulfill people's desire for new by changing fast and remaining exciting. There is such a speedy circulation of new products that as new styles are offered consumers are tempted to buy new things and it is difficult to encourage people to consume less when the retailers continue to change their collections frequently. Consequently, the level of consumption has been increasing as people expect to see new things in stores every week and feel the need to be shopping for something new all the time. It is difficult to change this habit and slow down the process.

Consequences on Welfare of Workers: Stress

This greed for economic growth and newness also brings with it negative consequences. Fieldnotes, interviews, secondary data, and prior literature reveal that the speed of fast fashion and its rapid growth puts a strain on all the actors. Shorter lead times can mean overlooking unethical practices. Earlier findings highlight that unpredictable orders and unrealistic deadlines make it difficult to make production plans. Therefore, suppliers struggle to predict the number of workers needed in longer term. Consequently, fast fashion practices include buying in irregular orders with quick deadlines to keep up with changing trends. Responding to fluctuating demand aggravates problems like excessive overtime and replacing fulltime staff with temporary or subcontracted workers, to whom employers pay less benefits (Abnett 2015; Cataldi et al. 2010; Fletcher 2007).

One of the most important negative consequences on welfare and health of workers is stress caused by speed. The increasing supply and demand for fast fashion has created a vicious cycle necessitating designers, retailers, and manufacturers to react faster. To be successful firms need to ship in short time and send samples and answer other requests quickly. This constant requirement to act quickly to ensure economic success leads to stress and exhaustion among actors:

Delivery dates are very important. We cannot accept delays... We do not want quantity of development samples. Speed does not allow us to comment on all the samples that we receive. We wish we had the time but we do not. Therefore, samples need to be perfect (Buyer, female, 40s).

Garment workers are expected to produce a huge volume of clothes in impossibly short turnaround times at the cheapest possible price

(Martinko 2015). Lead times have become shorter and retailers have become more demanding. They want everything to be quick and perfect. With these kinds of demands and retailers competing to be the cheapest and quickest, all the pressure is often placed at the starting side of the supply chain (Noble 2014). Therefore, it is stressful and tiring for people who work in the industry. Informants often complained about stress and lack of time. Everything changes quickly and demanded very fast. It is impossible to prioritize requests as everything has become urgent. Most popular and common phrases repeated in fieldnotes and interviews were "*I request urgently, within today, asap...*" Sometimes, it is not even possible to make an action plan as additional urgent requests keep arriving from the customers. In the end, it becomes impossible to prioritize:

Slow meant 6 months lead time in old days. We knew what we will ship and make in advance. Now there is no time even to make a weekly plan (Manager of the sampling room, female, 40s).

Speed of the fast fashion system also brings about uncertainty. Uncertainty on retail side leads retailers to demand short lead times, which creates uncertainty on the production side, as both retailers and producers do not know what they will sell in the next couple of months. It has become more difficult to guess and plan what the customers will like and buy. The uncertainty caused by speed enhances the stress of the actors on the institutional side and it is one of the main reasons behind conflicts, as no one can foresee or plan for the future:

I think that the main reason behind stress is speed. Before, when lead times were three to four months, no one used to fight with each other this much. We placed orders for fabrics of garments to be shipped three months later. If it arrived in three weeks instead of two, it would not be a problem. Week delays were not as important. Today, as we need to do everything so quickly, everyone is arguing with each other... Before we took time to make the samples, so they were correct and if it was not approved there was time to resend. If fabric was wrong there was time to repair the fabric. Now there is no time to make even one tiny mistake or time for anything to go wrong. As it is so fast, everything needs to be perfect and correct but this is not realistic. There are always mistakes or problems in this business (Merchandiser, male, 42).

Short lead times and requirement to do everything urgently also increases tensions and conflicts among actors. In (the not so) 'old' days, there were not this many arguments between people as the lead times were longer. Today, people need to work against time. Moreover, there

are many potential problems that can affect the shipment date and lead time in fashion, and even a tiny problem causes a delay in shipment. Any delay is devastating for every actor along the supply chain (Hertzman 2014). There is often no time to fix the mistakes. Therefore, everything needs to be correct, which is not realistic. Consequently, the need to do everything perfectly and quickly aggravates the arguments amongst actors.

Some fast fashion retailers put a lot of pressure on both the designers and the manufacturers, even during development process. Interviews and meeting notes reveal that the amount of development samples that the retailers demand from the suppliers and the speed that they require them at can be very challenging and stressful. Some can even request around 60 styles to be sent in two weeks. Considering that most of the retailers' demands are urgent, the development stage has also become very stressful for the suppliers. Speed is critical to be able to succeed. The necessity to achieve such speed often causes stress and this stress and pressure often ends up in arguments between designers, merchandisers, and the sampling department.

The textile industry is enormous and global, with a big supply chain with many different actors. Hardly anyone works independently. Manufacturers, fabric suppliers, accessory suppliers, designers, merchandisers, retailers, all need to work in cooperation with each other. One of the merchandisers noted that during this process many problems may be encountered as there are many unpredictable factors and variables in textile production – such as procurement of fabric, materials, and accessories – which make it difficult to keep up with the short lead times. These uncontrollable or unforeseen variables add up to the pressures of the business and result in problems and conflicts among actors:

There are many factors causing stress. Retailers may want to make changes on products after placing an order because they can't be sure. This means stopping production and starting from the beginning and doing everything again, which is very stressful and tiring. Moreover, they do not want the suppliers to delay the shipment. We need to send pre-production samples with bulk fabric before starting production. Fabric arrives in three weeks. Production takes one and a half weeks. This leaves two-three days for approvals. We may need to take the initiative and start production instead of waiting for approvals but this is risky. Shipment date may also be delayed because of problems in purchasing fabric and accessories, such as quality. Print can have formaldehyde so we

have to carry out tests. There are many potential problems and everything can affect the lead time in fast fashion. If we can't ship on time than we have problems with the customer. Therefore, we are constantly under stress... (Merchandiser, male, 35).

Brands not submitting approvals on time or making last minute changes to styles ordered aggravates the problems and makes the process harder (Hertzman 2014). Informants noted that the retailers are often not aware of the importance of sending approvals quickly. Moreover, they make changes, they do not allow the suppliers enough time to get approvals, and they still do not want to delay the shipment. Meeting notes also show that there are often arguments between retailers and suppliers due to shipment delays. Delayed shipments lead to commercial losses for retailers as the merchandise cannot be in store at planned time. Therefore, retailers often ask suppliers to compensate for loss in sales, even when they are responsible for delaying the shipment by approving something late. Some retailers cancel some of the quantity to prevent overstocking. Others ask for reclamation for delays. This can be 5 percent discount for one week delay and up to 25 percent discount for two weeks delay; and when the delay is more than two weeks, orders can be cancelled. Moreover, when one order is delayed it affects the other orders and the whole production schedule is affected. Therefore, it is critical to be fast and well-programmed to be able to foresee the problems and take precautions:

We need to be fast but we got used to this. If we receive fabric and accessories on time, we have enough capacity, and we will not have problems with the lead time. However, problems affect the lead times and in order to ship on time we have to work overtime. Overtime increases the costs and it may become a problem due to code of conduct requirements. Therefore, making people work overtime can be problematic. It needs to be within allowed limits. Retailers do not understand this. When they are late in giving us the approvals we have problems keeping the same lead times. They think that once they give an approval, we can ship it the next day as if we are printing t-shirts in a photocopy machine (Owner, male, 57).

When the approvals are given late, in order to ship on time, the workers often have to work overtime which increases the overhead costs. Manufacturers also need to keep the overtime within acceptable limits of the industry's code-of-conduct requirements. Some of the informants underlined that it is hard to explain these facts to the retailers, as they want everything they need, exactly as they require, on the date they want.

They do not understand the problems that the suppliers have to deal with or the factors that they cannot control, such as fabric lead time. Having strict code of conduct procedures and requirements to conform to these standards can slow down the speed. Therefore, it is difficult for suppliers to meet all these demands within expected lead times:

One of the leading retailers we work with has strict rules for its suppliers. If it is an urgent issue related to a fast order, the suppliers need to reply back to an inquiry within four hours upon receipt of request. If it is a normal issue and a request, suppliers need to reply back in 24 hours. Every supplier has a score chart, based on which they are evaluated every year. If the suppliers do not meet these deadlines, then they lose points on their score chart. It is very stressful to work like this as it is not always possible to reply back to an inquiry within 4 to 24 hours (Owner, male, 57).

There are many other examples of stress, mainly due to working under time pressure. In the end, suppliers often have to bear the costs of high speed: they have no choice but to be quick if they are working for fast fashion retailers. Some of the big fast fashion retailers even evaluate suppliers every year based on their speed in replying back to inquiries and on performance for on-time delivery. According to most of the informants, the business is not likely to get any easier in the future, as the industry is becoming more uncertain and difficult. Suppliers need to be quick, keep prices low, and provide a lot of development samples to be able to get orders. It is not any easier on the retail side. The fierce competition and the difficulty to plan due to uncertainty and speed of change are among the main difficulties.

Even though some of the informants like this speed and find it exciting, they still complain that they have a lot of things to do but not enough time to get them done. They are often stressed due to time pressure. Some have conflicting feelings. Having fewer collections can be considered as boring, and not as exciting as 'fast fashion', but on the other hand, fast fashion has become very stressful and difficult to cope with:

I do not see the possibility of a new system in the world. Of course I would like to go back to the old system. If fashion cycle is slower like in old days, everything will be more predictable and less stressful... (Merchandiser, male, 42).

Considering the stress dimension of the business, it is not a sustainable business model. Most of the informants expressed their desire for the system to be slower so that they can work in more efficient ways. Some even wished to go back to the old system, as it was easier, more

predictable, and much more relaxed. There are even examples of actors who left the industry due to speed. For instance, a well-known Dutch designer (wishing to be anonymous), who attended a workshop in Istanbul in 2012, stopped working as a designer, as she was tired of the production and consumption speed of the fast fashion system. She became a lecturer at an Institute of Fashion and started supporting slow fashion practices. Another informant also stated that she was much stressed and not happy when she was working with fast fashion retailers and suppliers. Now she has her own studio and she does not earn as much but she is much happier. The Academic Coordinator of a design school also indicated that if the system continues with this speed, there will eventually be a saturation point in textiles. Everyone will be exhausted and worn out from this cycle. People may be fed up with this stress and ask for it to slow down.

I am not sure how fast fashion will change or if it is possible to go back to the old pace. However, I would like to go back to the old speed because I do not even know what I will ship or sell next month anymore. Before, I used to have orders to be shipped in the next six months. This uncertainty leads to stress and it is the main source of all the conflicts as no one can see, predict, or plan the future. The retailers do not know if they are buying the right products so they are cautious when placing the orders. They want to work with short lead times and place repeat orders for the best sellers. As a result, everyone is under pressure and stressed out... but will the system change? I do not think so... (Sales manager, female, 41).

As a result, working in these conditions has negative outcomes on welfare of workers and is stressful for most of the actors working on the institutional side. It is a tough way to do business considering that many factories are already working on thin margins and extreme deadlines. According to most of the informants, however, it is unlikely that the system will change or slow down, mainly due to economic reasons. Therefore, the actors often feel the pressure and the necessity to adapt to this speed.

Consequences for the Environment: Waste

The current speed of the fashion system also creates negative consequences for the environment and natural resources, as highlighted in literature, press, and fieldnotes. As eco-textiles consultant Kate Fletcher states, "Fast is not free. Short lead times and cheap clothes are only made possible by exploitation of labor and natural resources." Shorter lead times often mean ignoring unethical practices and increasing the need for air

transport, polluting the environment (Styles 2015). According to Greenpeace, around 80 billion garments are produced worldwide, which equals to over 11 garments a year per person. The immense volume of clothing being made, sold, and disposed of increases the human and environmental costs of our clothes. A campaigner at Greenpeace East Asia states that as fashion gets faster and more globalized, more consumers worldwide become fashion's victims and contribute to industry's pollution (Chua November 21, 2012).

Mass-market fashion retailers today create trends quickly and accelerate waste production. Rapid release of products encourages constant shopping and trend chasing (Cline 2012). As a result of speedy and continual changing of styles, clothes quickly lose their appeal, become out-of-fashion, and are disposed of very fast. Trendy clothing adapted from catwalks to retail floors at rapid speed is tempting for many people who no longer have to wear the same outfit many times. The rising volume of discarded but still wearable items illustrates that people view clothing as disposable (Boboltz 2014).

Similarly, informants also addressed that people have got used to buying new things frequently and throwing them away quickly, without considering the consequences. Consuming and throwing away things so quickly of course have serious implications for the environment and finite resources. Some of the informants criticized the rate of consumption and throwaway mentality in fashion industry. Others considered it a big waste. Despite all the criticisms, however, throwaway fashion has become more common. The negative outcomes of fast consumption and production were also addressed in some of the seminars and workshops I attended. One seminar noted that if fashion consumption and production keeps increasing at the current rate, the impact on social and ecological environment will increase, making it more difficult for the industry to handle and resolve these issues.

Most of the informants noted that the garments are no longer durable. Products are specifically made with bad quality fabrics so that they become old very quickly and are thrown away after three months. People immediately buy new clothes leading to a speedy circulation of products. As a result, more is produced and consumed and more resources are used and exhausted, deteriorating and polluting the environment. A freelance designer interviewed stated that if the fashion system continues at this speed, there will soon be an ecological crisis, as the world's resources are finite. Similarly, a business and research manager underscored that the root cause of the problems is using too many resources and the planet cannot sustain or afford this level of

consumption, as it will eventually lead to resource scarcity. Therefore, sustainability consultants and some of the designers interviewed invite people to become more sustainable and more cautious:

...There is no such luxury as buying and throwing away so quickly. Environment cannot sustain this. This awareness may not happen soon but it will happen eventually. We have no right to use things once and consume things with short lives and throw them away. We need to consider their carbon footprint.... (Freelance Designer, female, 32).

People need to gain awareness and consider the carbon footprint of their purchases. Rose Marcario, Patagonia's new CEO, in an interview with *The Guardian* drew attention to negative consequences of speed and the danger of facing an ecological disaster if we continue with the fast fashion philosophy and throwing away products. She suggested producing and consuming less of durable products that last longer as opposed to throwaway fast fashion items (Goldenik 2014).

Overconsumption and overproduction of textiles also leads to increase in textile waste, which is in line with earlier findings (Morgan and Birtwistle 2009). Fast fashion is a driving force in modern consumer culture, which urges people to buy more clothing. Inevitably, loads of clothes are thrown or given away. For instance, in US more than 10.5 million tons of clothes end up in landfills every year (Bain 2015). According to the Environmental Protection Agency, only about 15 percent of the 13 million tons of clothing and other textiles that are thrown away each year are recycled, turned into products, or broken down to be reused as sustainable fibers. The carbon produced in making that 15 percent, is a drop in the ocean compared to the amount of carbon generated in the production of the other 11 million tons of clothes that are bought, worn, and disposed in the landfill (C. A. Lee 2014).

Fast fashion's effect on the environment is not good. As people continuously buy new clothes manufacturers need to produce more. Producing more and consuming these quickly means throwing away more goods, which creates a waste problem. Therefore, fast fashion has become a big waste (Merchandiser, male, 41).

Some of the informants also addressed the increase in carbon footprint and waste in textiles. The owner of a supplier firm, while admitting that there are adverse effects on the environment, also stated that compared to most industries, textiles, at least on the manufacturing side, is cleaner. The production of waste in fashion industry, however, remains an important issue, raising concerns and discussions by some

academicians and institutions (e.g., "*Sustainable Approach to Textile Waste*," International Art and Design Congress, DEU Faculty of Fine Arts, İzmir, 2014). As a result, fast fashion's consequences on environment and finite resources cannot be ignored.

Consequences for Wellbeing of Society

Speed of the fast fashion system also has societal consequences, such as increase in materialism and promoting unnecessary consumption. Image has become the most important thing. People started to consume to impress others and to buy social status. A sales manager interviewed highlighted that fashion is used as a tool in this respect, as it changes very fast and urges people to buy new things by offering minor changes all the time.

They established a system to promote people to spend more. Before style of a car used to change every six years and manufacturers used to manufacture and sell the same style for six years. Now it changes every year. Same thing is valid for textiles but even faster. Trends used to change once every two years. Now trends change every three months. Everything is changing faster, not only textiles but also cars, furniture, phones...The companies change everything quickly to make people buy new things (Merchandiser, male, 42).

Things we buy and wear lose their appeal and styles become old very quickly. It is not only in textiles but in all areas, from furniture to cars, accessories to food. Media plays an important role in promoting this fast and unnecessary consumption. Consequently, people feel pressured to buy more. Some of the designers believe that this ubiquitous consumption leads – especially the young generation – to become more materialistic. At the same time, it is stressful and tiring for consumers to be under pressure to keep up with the changing fashion trends all the time. There is such a speedy circulation of products that as new things are offered people feel obliged to consume more. Moreover, people are shopping using credit cards, borrowing from their future earnings. Some of the informants raised their concern that if the system continues with this speed, eventually it will create serious societal and psychological problems:

...There is a huge stress pressure on the manufacturers; there is a huge stress pressure on the retailers; and there is a huge stress pressure on the consumers because when we talk to consumers we find out that the level of consumption that people are engaging in isn't making them happy. It is actually generating dissatisfaction.

Research shows that the use of consumption as a way to satisfy dissatisfaction is not working. It creates the opposite. It actually means people feel like they are chasing some sort of an idea or a dream that they can never capture. They are buying things; taking them home; they don't fit, they are not right. Therefore, the level of returns with retailers is just going up, especially with online retailers, because people are buying but they do not actually like what they are buying. They are just buying for the buzz of buying and then taking that stuff back. When we look at the bigger picture, we see that it is not functional. So we know that ultimately, at some point, it will start to self-implode but a lot of people have invested interest in stopping that from happening (Business and Research manager, male, 40s).

The level of consumption that people are engaging in is not making them happy. It is actually generating dissatisfaction. Research also shows that using consumption to feel better is not working anymore. One of the indications is the increase in level of returns because people do not like what they buy. One of the merchandisers also noted that this constant shopping is actually making the society unhappy but no one attempts to change this system as the big capital owners continue to dominate the industry. The director of Centre for Sustainable Fashion also criticizes the current model based on fast consumption and throwaway fashion; and considers this fast model as the real problem (M. Lee 2011). The level of consumption in emerging markets is increasing as well, along with speedy growth of population and wealth. The planet, however, cannot sustain this level and pace of consumption. The business and research manager of a Sustainable Fashion Center underlined that we can come up with new ways of consuming more but we cannot afford the level of constant consumption that we are currently engaging in. There needs to be a cutoff point.

Many individuals, especially in Western industrial countries, want to slow down and have more time to enjoy life (Lasn 1999). There are consumers who want less choice in their consumption decisions. They want to consume less, as in the case of slow movement, for environmental reasons or because of economic circumstances. Many consumers – who were forced to consume less because of economic factors – actually became happier as they have a less pressured lifestyle and spend more time with their families and friends. Hence, many started to realize that choice and increased consumption do not necessarily increase happiness and/or improve quality of life (Prothero et al. 2010).

Lack of Uniqueness, Originality, and Value

Elizabeth Cline, in her book *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion*, states that fashion feels arbitrary and pointless now due to the madness in speed of fast fashion. My findings partly support this argument. For some of the informants, fashion that is consumed so quickly cannot be considered as "real fashion":

When it was not this fast, fashion was something that people saw on the catwalks or something that people bought from a good brand and cared for at least six months. Now it loses its appeal in two weeks because it gets old, as people get tired of seeing it everywhere. Last month it was in Zara, three weeks ago in another store and so on. Nothing gives pleasure anymore. This is not good and it is boring as well. People see the same things in every store they go to. Everyone copies each other. Eventually, all the stores look alike (Sales manager, female, 41).

Fashion serves as a tool of consumption because even if fashion and trends repeat themselves, firms still come up with new things or offer minor changes to avoid people from getting bored and to urge them to buy new things. Trends used to remain in fashion for a longer period in earlier times. Items purchased were more precious and remained valuable for a longer time. Now, fashion trends lose their appeal within weeks as they are copied and recopied. Therefore, fashion has lost its zest and appeal. It has lost its excitement and has become boring because same or similar items are in every high street store. Consequently, stores look alike and people look alike, as everyone copies each other.

Furthermore, everything is changing so quickly that fashion has started to repeat itself. Designers can get stuck and may not be able to come up with new and original designs due to speed of change. Despite the constant change of products in stores, especially after the 1990s, there are no longer distinctive and long lasting trends or fashion statements. Every year the same or similar trends are offered with little changes. Trends have started to influence each other. In 1920s, 1960s or 1980s, styles, fabrics, shapes differed from each other. These were iconic eras for fashion. They represented a certain shape, a look, or a style. After the 1990s it has become difficult to categorize or distinguish fashion:

...There are no longer long-lasting, single trends like before. Trends and themes repeat frequently with minor changes, for instance by changing color. There is no longer one indicative or determinant trend. After 1940s silhouettes and shapes of clothes became very determinative. With Dior's 1950s new look, everyone started to

follow that silhouette and that silhouette became the milestone of that period. Now there is no such distinction. These distinctive trends dominated in 50s, 60s, and 70s. People used to own precious garments that they valued. We no longer have that understanding of quality... (Academic director, female, 41).

In the future, when we talk about 2010s, there will not be one big trend. Earlier, the time scale was long. The trends that we considered for the entire decade of 1980s now we use it all in one season. The next season it will be the 1940s fashion. Versions of these iconic trends are used in shorter periods. Everything changes so fast that people see everything every season. Similarly, a product developer interviewed stated that the dominating trends may differ but they all exist at the same time and as there are changes every season, no one can remember the particular trends of the previous season. Furthermore, due to speed of change, people no longer own precious garments that they value. Therefore, the characteristic of this period can be complexity, rather than uniqueness, originality, or value. People today have little connection to the things they use, how it was made, where it came from: it has become too easy to buy, consume and throw away.

Increase in Overstocks

Typically, the fashion industry has been "buy now, buy quickly, buy in season," and toward the middle of the season it is all about sales and discounts. Then we see the next season is stocked in store about four months ahead of the weather changing. It is a very fast cycle (Owner of a boutique, from an article by Donatelli 2014).

The meetings I attended show that the current system based on speed is not working for all the retailers. Recently, the fast cycle of the fashion system started to give warning signals. Retailers have to change stock so frequently that there is not enough time for the goods to be sold before new goods arrive. Therefore, they started to have sales and discounts towards the middle of the season to get rid of the accumulated stock. The goods for next season arrive in store couple of months ahead of the weather changing, which does not help with the sales as well (Donatelli 2014). Even Zara, which is one of the most successful fast fashion retailers, started to have longer sales periods and more leftover stock offered during the sale. Previously, they only had a small section allocated for sales. They did not have much merchandise left and sales only lasted for few weeks. In recent seasons they had a lot of merchandise left and sales lasted over a month. Other retailers try to solve this problem

of overstock by having promotion corners. When they have new arrivals they sell the leftover merchandise from previous collections in these corners. For the first time in autumn winter 2014/2015, Zara started to have small promotion corners to get rid of the stock as well.

We started fast fashion two years ago. We have a new collection in store every four weeks. We have seen that within the retail system this is too much as there is too much left over products and there is no room in stores. The system is not working for us... (Buyer, female, 40s).

The problem of overstock, mainly due to the increasing speed of the fashion cycle, was also addressed in meetings with other retailers. Having a new collection even every eight weeks is too frequent for some. They end up with overstock. Therefore, some are thinking of changing their buying strategy to have less options and more volume, to be able to negotiate a cheaper price. More volume and cheaper prices, however, have negative consequences as well. Others try to improve product planning, purchasing, and shipment plans to avoid and resolve the problem of overstock, which mainly arises due to the immense speed of the industry.

Conclusions and Discussion: Conflicting Perspectives on Speed

There are conflicting views on speed, which is one of the main characteristics of the current fashion system and an inevitable part of the contemporary consumer culture. In meetings and interviews, fast fashion system based on speed was related to economic growth and success, and fulfillment of desire for new. Speed of availability and quick lead times have become an asset and a marketing tool for fashion suppliers and retailers, which enable them to generate more business. Speed of consumption and production also provides job opportunities, enhances earnings, enables new industries to develop, and economies to grow. Furthermore, speedy circulation of new products and rapid response to fashion trends help to fulfill consumers' desire for new. These outcomes of speed are likely to become barriers in emergence and mobilization of a sustainable fashion market (Ozdamar-Ertekin and Atik 2015).

On the other hand, the immense speed of the fashion system and the overconsumption and overproduction has considerable negative consequences for the environment, natural resources, workers, and society in general. Stress, uncertainty, and exhaustion are the most striking consequences; followed by conflicts among actors; rising waste

and disposability problems; lack of value and uniqueness; and overstock. These outcomes of speed are likely to become driving factors in the emergence of a sustainable fashion market.

The development rationale often justifies unethical behaviors of corporations: after all, the end result is rapid macroeconomic development; and compelling economic rationalization overrides ethical beliefs (Eckhardt et al. 2010). Even though sustainability has gained wide public acceptance in recent years, it often conflicts with quest for continuous growth (Kumar and Dholakia 2016). In the fashion field also, greed for economic growth and desire for new often takes precedence over sustainability goals. Speedy growth of fast fashion retailers, however, makes staggering demands on resources. For instance, H&M manufactures at least 600 million items each year, operates more than 3,200 stores in 55 countries, and expands its locations by 10 to 15 percent every year. Even if retailers like H&M try to lessen their environmental footprint, the business continues to grow and the consequences are far from sustainable (Bain 2015). Furthermore, speed of fast fashion and its rapid growth puts a strain on all the actors, causing stress, exhaustion and conflicts. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the negative implications of the speedy growth of fast fashion along with its positive outcomes.

Not surprisingly, there are conflicting perspectives on the future prospects related to speed of the fashion system. According to some, it is necessary and possible for the system to slow down to become more sustainable. Chief fashion critic of the *New York Times*, Journalist Vanessa Friedman, is among the ones who believe that the current speed of the system based on planned obsolescence is unsustainable. Longevity is an aspect of sustainability and garments that must be discarded after a short time are hardly sustainable. She compares the current fashion system to a runaway train that will eventually crash (Rickey 2014). Some of the informants also share Friedman's standpoint that the current speed of the system is unsustainable. Moreover, if the speed keeps increasing at the current rate, it will be very difficult for the industry to resolve the impacts on social and ecological environment (Sengul 2014). Therefore, the competition in the future will not only be based on being trendy and quick but also on being conscious of the environment, society, and workers.

Furthermore, on the production side, quick lead times enable fashion suppliers and retailers to generate more business but the need to do everything urgently increases tensions and conflicts. Consequently, coping with the fast fashion cycle has become stressful and exhausting,

which can eventually motivate the actors on the institutional side to slow down. On the consumer side, especially in higher-income countries, people are consuming beyond their economic means and beyond the limits of the natural environment. Meanwhile, many continue to suffer from poverty and hunger in less developed parts of the world. Continuing speed of economic growth leads to depletion of natural resources, accelerates climate change, and widens inequalities, posing a threat for future generations. Moreover, speed of consumption requires overproduction and overwork, leaving little time to live sustainably and to enjoy life (Coote et al. 2010).

My meeting notes and interviews also indicate that it is not likely for the fashion cycle to slow down any time soon. The technological advancements can enable the system to become even quicker. Despite the fact that business is very stressful and difficult due to speed of the system, it is not likely to become any slower. It is not easy for the retailers to slow down the cycle and offer fewer collections. Even the luxury brands have started to offer product lines and ranges that cater to middle class and can be consumed like fast fashion. Only if all the retailers agree to slow down and offer new products less frequently, then the consumers can eventually get used to not buying something new all the time. This is not likely to happen, however, as the common perception is that – because of competitive profit motives – there will always be someone who will work fast and offer new products frequently. Therefore, the system promotes being fast and it is not likely to slow down.

The big paradox between fast fashion and sustainability is that there is no time in the current fashion system to understand the ways in which sustainability can be achieved. Therefore, the real challenge is to find the time within the system that operates with such speed. Big fast fashion brands and retailers have huge power and they can rethink the model but the speed of the system does not allow time for thought. As a result, speed becomes both inevitable and at the same time damaging for the current fashion industry. I hope this study contributes to existing literature by laying out the dynamics and consequences associated with the speed of the current fashion system and raises awareness among marketers, managers, and public policymakers. Future research can look into ways to overcome these challenges by involving different stakeholders and actors of the fashion system.

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