

Ethics

Shopping mindfully

RecyCOOL Lessons

Disclaimer

These lessons have been created for and tested with young people in Slovakia, the Czech republic, Germany, Hungary and Croatia. They are open-source and available for adaptation for different groups globally.

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Shopping mindfully

Description of the lesson

The lesson starts with explaining the terms “ethics”, “morality”, and “ethical dilemma”. After that, learners will be informed that more transportation means more pollution and learn the differences in the amount of transportation between online and in-store shopping. Learners will be presented with the ethical dilemma as an exercise that they will have to “solve” based on their preferences and possibilities.

Objective:

The objective of this lesson is for learners to become aware of how their lifestyle and shopping behaviour fit into a broader, carbon intensive fashion system.

After this lesson you will be able to:

- evaluate your own shopping behaviour and habits and consider how these behaviours contribute to a broader fashion system
- define the personal values or ‘non-negotiable’ element of your shopping behaviour, when it’s time to replace fashion items (e.g., second-hand shopping, buying locally, reusing, up-cycling, etc., if possible), which if we collectively commit to, will reduce fashion’s impact

Tools and materials:

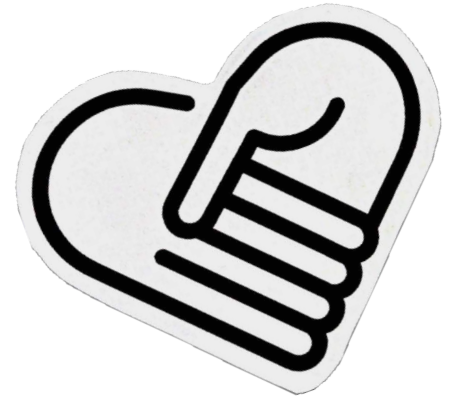
pen and paper

ETHICS:

A philosophical discipline concerned with what is morally right and wrong.

ETHICAL DILEMMA:

Situations where it is difficult to know the best choice because both choices are not entirely moral.



Since the Rana Plaza tragedy in 2013 until today, a lot has changed in the minds of people who buy clothes. The public are increasingly aware that the fashion industry contributes to global carbon emissions. The information available to people about the pollution of the planet also covers the fashion industry as one of the culprits.

And yet, green claims made by fashion brands can be confusing. The evidence of climate change that we are witnessing leaves fashion customers quite confused. Every day we read about sustainable, ethical shopping, and we get tips on how to shop ethically. Is online shopping greener?

Is in-store shopping more sustainable? Is transport used more for offline shopping, or does fast delivery of online orders pollute the planet? Can customers solve the complex problem of the fashion industry just by changing their shopping habits?

The way we shop has changed significantly in the last decade. Clothes historically have been purchased seasonally and in-store by trying them on first. However, how we shop has transformed in the last decade due to the alternative of online shopping.

Why has online shopping become so popular? What advantages does this method of shopping offer to people and the planet? And what are the downsides of shopping in this way? Online shopping allows people to find, choose and buy their favourite piece of clothing without spending time or money on shopping trips.

But is online shopping actually better for the environment than in-store shopping? **This is an ethical dilemma because there's no right or wrong answer and the answer depends on the individual's lifestyle, preferences and possibilities.**

Amount of transportation compared between in-store and online shopping

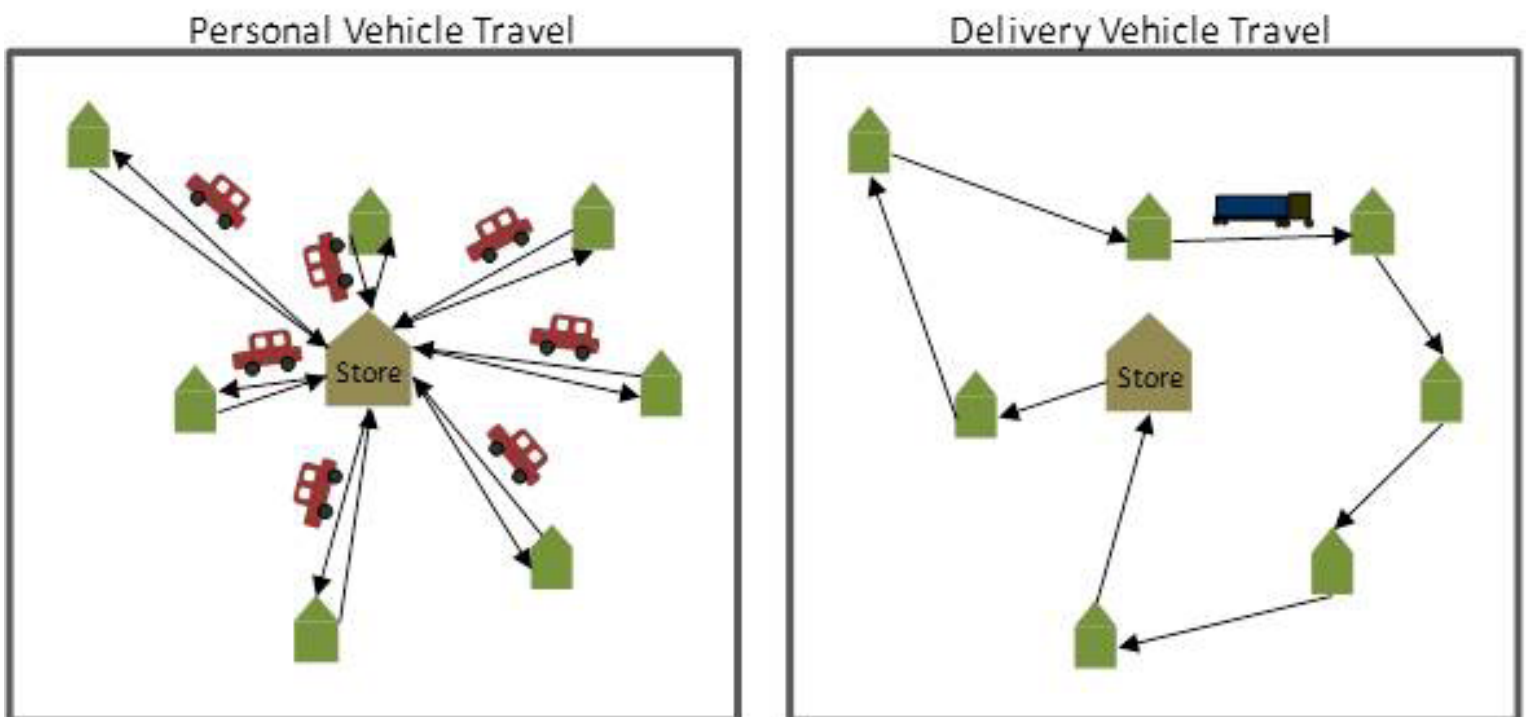


Photo credit: [Digital Initiative](#)

Due to the lack of transparency in the fashion industry about what the carbon footprints are of online/in store shopping and which is lower, and a range of other factors, it is not possible to determine which is the greener option. Ultimately, consumption is still driving an impact on people and the planet so it's important to interrogate our shopping habits and also put pressure on brands to adopt more sustainable practices.

In general, online shopping has a lower carbon footprint than in-store shopping if no rushed delivery is accounted for. Rushed delivery online shopping, on the other hand, has a much more significant impact than conventional in-store shopping because delivery includes transportation by planes.

Carbon footprint of in-store shopping vs. online shopping

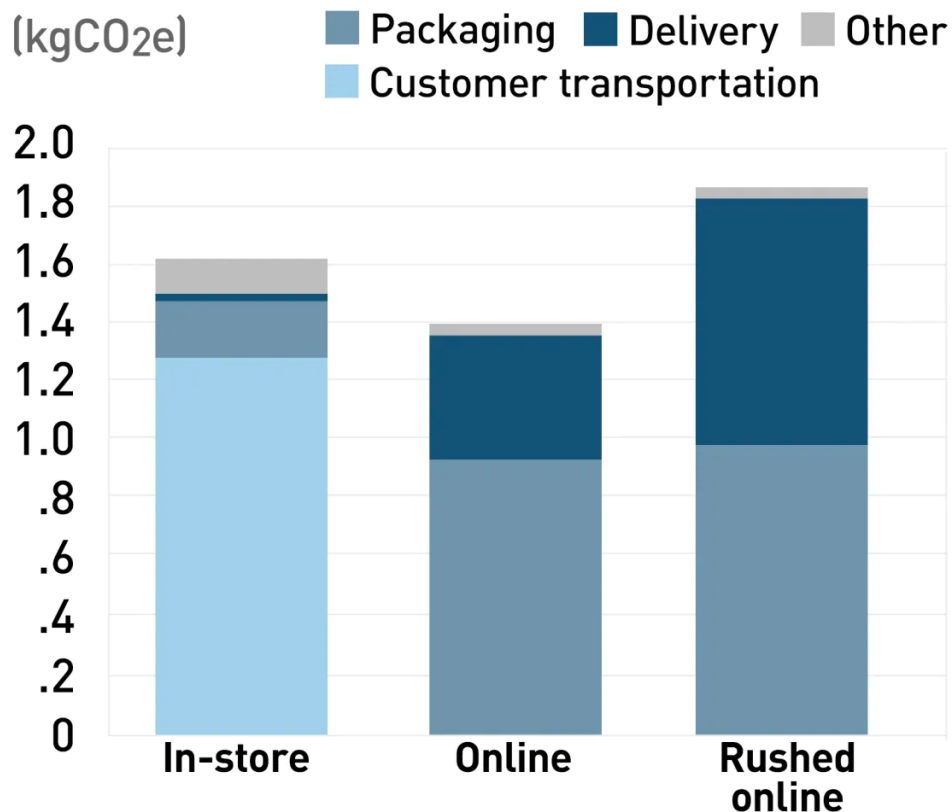


Photo credit: MIT

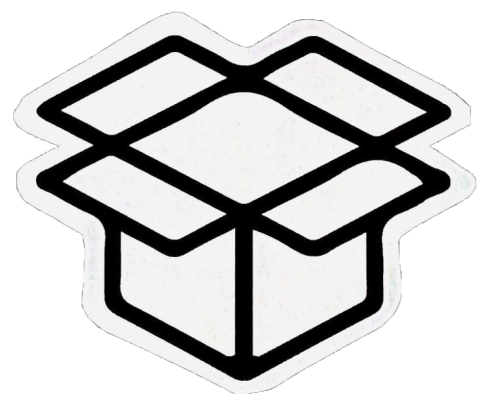
But does your personal lifestyle have an impact? Can the customer have an impact on lowering the amount of transportation as well as carbon footprint?

The answer to both of these questions is yes, it all depends on a customer's behaviour. **Online shopping often results in merchandise returns, which can significantly increase the carbon footprint of your shopping.**

That especially relates to people who buy multiples of the same product online in different sizes and then return all but one size. Brands offering long windows for returns or returns policies for multiple sizes encourage or influence this kind of shopping / consumer behaviour.

Also, buying online frequently, such as every other day, isn't green at all, as this results in more trips for delivery trucks. In addition, every single item of clothing has an impact on the environment, so reducing the overall amount of clothes we buy is a critical step to reduce fashion's overall impact.

Personal choices define the carbon footprint of in-store shopping as well. When we consider the carbon impact of transportation for in-store shopping, the most significant contributor to emissions of greenhouse gases with in-store shopping is your method of transport to the store. Is it by car? Maybe public transportation, or by bicycle or walking?



This strongly influences your shopping trip's carbon footprint. Your planning is also essential. If you are purchasing all you need in one go, it is greener than going to the shop every other day. However, it is important to remember that transportation is a small component for fashion's overall footprint – considering that the most carbon intensive aspect of the clothing occurs during the processing and production stages.

We need greater transparency of fashion's carbon footprint to make more informed choices. There is no definite answer to the question of what is greener, online or in-store shopping. It all depends on your personal choices as well as your possibilities. We should also remember that every item of clothing has an environmental footprint and reducing the number of clothes we buy is a critical step in reducing the footprint of the fashion industry.

Ultimately, we are citizens before we are consumers and as citizens we should feel empowered to be curious, find out and do something. It is important that we ask major brands and retailers questions like, #WhoMadeMyClothes?, #WhatsInMyClothes and #WhoMadeMyFabric? Citizens must also call for greater regulation of the fashion industry by demanding change from policymakers, who need to put in action laws that hold brands accountable for their impact on people and planet.

Ultimately, brands should not be producing garments that are unsustainable – more sustainable production must be incentivised like through tax credits for using more sustainable fabrics and reducing the price premiums of these preferred fabrics. The burden of sustainability is not on citizens' shoulders – whilst society's choices are important, major brands and retailers have the most power, resources and responsibility to change.

Task

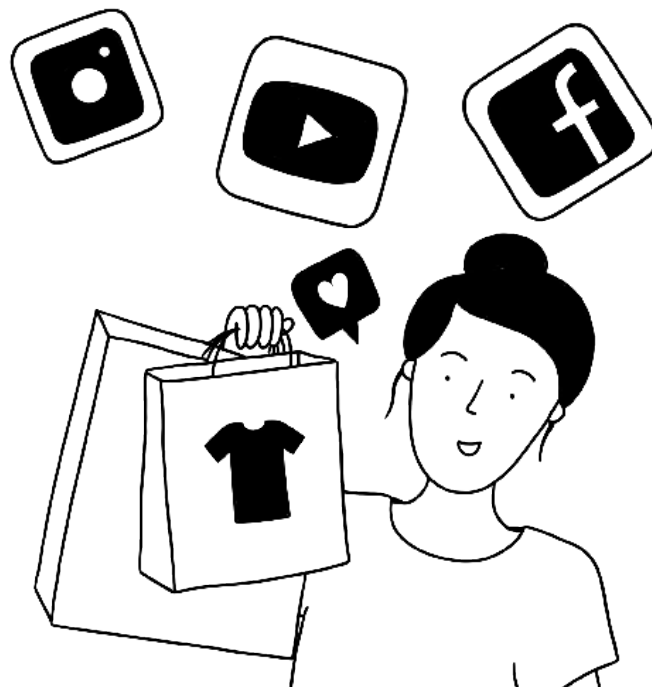
Your task in this lesson is to think about your lifestyle, see how you could minimise transportation in your shopping, and decide between in-store vs. online shopping.

What do you think, does your place of living (in the city or the suburban or rural areas) influence the outcome of this question?

Can you organise your shopping to buy only in one place (for example, in a shopping mall/retail park) and buy everything you need in one go?

Will you definitely be satisfied with the received merchandise from an online store or physical store, to avoid returns?

Please write down your explanation of what would better suit you in order to manage lowering the carbon footprint of your shopping behaviour – in-store vs. online shopping.



Reflection

In this lesson, you have learned what ethics, morality, and ethical dilemmas are. Also, you were given a new transportation-based perspective on the difference between online and in-store shopping. You have encountered an ethical dilemma in the task and tried to find the best solution according to your personal possibilities and preferences.

Now, through the lens of your knowledge, think about the following dilemmas: is buying second-hand better than buying a new garment? What about recycling or making clothes yourself? **Be curious, find out and do something.**

Some resources to get you started on your journey if you are interested in recycling and making clothes yourself, please check out [Fashion Revolution's Loved Clothes Last Fanzine](#).

And in the end, the great fashion designer's quote and advice:
"What you wear is how you present yourself to the world, especially today, when human contact is so quick. Fashion is instant language."
– Miuccia Prada



BE CURIOUS



FIND OUT



DO SOMETHING

Resources:

Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. (n.d.). Problems of Divine Origin.

Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved November 11, 2022, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ethics-philosophy/Problems-of-divine-origin>

Ethical dilemma. Corporate Finance Institute. (2022, November 25). Retrieved November 11, 2022, from <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/esg/ethical-dilemma/>

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Yoon, Brittany., (2016). Online Shopping, Sustainable Shipping. Retrieved November 11, 2022, from <https://d3.harvard.edu/platform-rctom/submission/online-shopping-sustainable-shipping/>

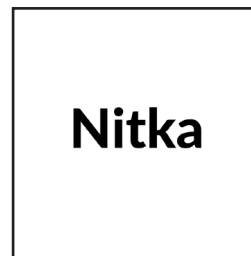
CBC/Radio Canada. (2018, November 28). Online shopping can be worse for the environment than going to the mall | CBC news. CBCnews. Retrieved November 11, 2022, from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/science/online-shopping-carbon-footprint-1.4914942>



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