

Geography

Other countries, other customs

RecyCOOL Lessons

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Other countries, other customs

Description of the lesson

First we introduce the key concepts of fashion consumption: fast fashion, ultra fast fashion and slow fashion, then we explain the meaning of GDP and how this differs in countries all over the world. We look at examples of fashion and fast fashion purchasing habits; both globally and in Europe according to Statista (a German company specialising in market and consumer data). At the end we reflect on fashion purchasing tendencies in the world.

Objective:

Objective of this lesson is to distinguish between fast and slow fashion and to discover what geographical areas are the biggest consumers of fast fashion.

After this lesson you will be able to

- understand the difference between slow fashion, fast fashion and ultra fast fashion
- understand why fashion became quickly produced en masse, and in 'trends'
- understand where fast fashion is popular and where it is less popular

Tools and materials:

pen and paper, map of the world (can be digital)

CONSUMPTION:

The act of using up a resource or substance in its entirety

“Global fashion consumption continues to gain volume and speed at unsustainable levels and relies on a culture of disposability. Around the world, we produce too many clothes, from unsustainable materials, the majority of which end up as waste. Instead of designing for landfill, we must design for longevity, and encourage a generational and cultural shift that relies on keeping our clothes”

Orsola de Castro



Do you recognize the difference between fast fashion and slow fashion?

Why do you think there's a difference in consumption habits in other countries?

Write down what you think.

Developments in the fashion industry

Fashion production used to be much slower. Let's look back to the 19th century, when people made clothes by hand.

During the Industrial Revolution, things became easier and quicker to produce. Textile factories were set up and clothes started to be produced ready to wear and in larger quantities. [Since the sewing machine was patented in 1846 the price of clothes has been declining steadily.](#)

[Many factors contribute to the decreasing price of clothing, including trade policies which attracted foreign investment in the Global South where fashion brands shifted production to save on labour costs \(where the majority of garment workers are people of colour\), which agitated the legacy of colonialism in these regions.](#) This, along with the creation of synthetic materials like polyester, rayon and nylon, lowered the material costs of producing clothes.

During the second half of the 20th century, as the world recovered from the horrors and shortages of the world wars, the major fashion houses began creating trends for the seasons of the year – spring, summer, autumn and winter – which are still generally held by these brands today.

[Nowadays, some brands have as many as 52 “micro-seasons”, which means that they practically create new trends every week, which is why there is not as much emphasis on quality and sustainability in the production of clothing.](#) Fashion Revolution's [Fashion Transparency Index 2022](#) reviewed 250 of the world's largest brands and retailers, ranking them according to their transparency across different human rights and environmental indicators.

The findings showed that 85% of brands do not disclose the number of items they produce annually, despite the increasing visibility of clothing waste in places like Ghana and Chile.

This lack of transparency means there is not a clear picture on the scale of overconsumption and overproduction globally, making it hard to measure if the actions being taken to tackle the problem are effective enough.

Fast fashion

- A business model
- Constantly changing clothing styles and weekly changes
- Thousands of pieces and styles available
- Extremely short time for clothes to appear in stores
- Made in countries where labour is very cheap
- Cheap, low quality materials that deteriorate after a few wears

Ultra fast fashion

This is the evolution from fast fashion to ultrafast fashion. Fashion brands regularly renew clothes at least once a week. This way, they keep their customers always on the lookout for new products.

The creation of products and marketing takes just a week or two. This is because they create their products in a two to four-week period. It can also be sold online, meaning it can be marketed, bought and received in a short timeframe.

- Short lead-times
- Mass production – often, 1000s of new items a week
- Low costs per unit
- Using influencers/micro influencers to market their clothing
- Quality standards established by a country where clothes are made
- Typically low labour costs
- Typically poor safety standards

Slow fashion

Is not just about the business model or how local and sustainable fashion brands are produced and sold. Slow fashion is more about the consumer and purchasing attitude. Even a piece of clothing from a fast fashion brand can become a slow fashion piece.

- Premium quality materials that last longer
- Timeless products, avoiding trends
- Locally sourced, produced, and sold garments
- Often made-to-order to reduce unnecessary production
- Fewer, specific styles per collection, which are released two to three times per year, or a permanent seasonless collection
- Made to last, not considered disposable

The biggest consumers of fast fashion brands are the countries with high standards of living which are connected to GDP. People can buy fast fashion very cheaply, even though they might be able to afford to buy more expensive and higher quality clothes.

In some countries the need for sustainability grows and influences purchasing decisions of consumers.

GDP

Gross domestic product, or GDP, represents the total dollar value of all goods and services produced in a country in a given period. **GDP is often used to track the growth of a country's economy.**

Officials associate the number with prosperity when it is high. GDP helps to identify a society's standard of living and income; it is an accepted measure of productivity in a society. **In the most general sense, GDP is an indication of the size of a country's economy.**

Nominal GDP Rankings by Country

What are the largest economies in the world? According to the International Monetary Fund, these are the highest ranking countries in the world in nominal GDP:

- 1 United States (GDP: 20.49 USD trillion)
- 2 China (GDP: 13.4 USD trillion)
- 3 Japan (GDP: 4.97 USD trillion)
- 4 Germany (GDP: 4.00 USD trillion)
- 5 United Kingdom (GDP: 2.83 USDtrillion)
- 6 France (GDP: 2.78 USD trillion)
- 7 India (GDP: 2.72 USD trillion)
- 8 Italy (GDP: 2.07 USD trillion)
- 9 Brazil (GDP: 1.87 USD trillion)
- 31 Norway (GDP: 458.4 USD billion)
- 34 Egypt (GDP 363.3 USD billion)
- 41 Vietnam (GDP: 350 USD billion)
- 43 Bangladesh (GDP:324,2 USD billion)

Economic growth and prosperity are impacted by a wide array of factors, namely investment in workforce education, production output (as determined by investment in physical capital), natural resources, and entrepreneurship.

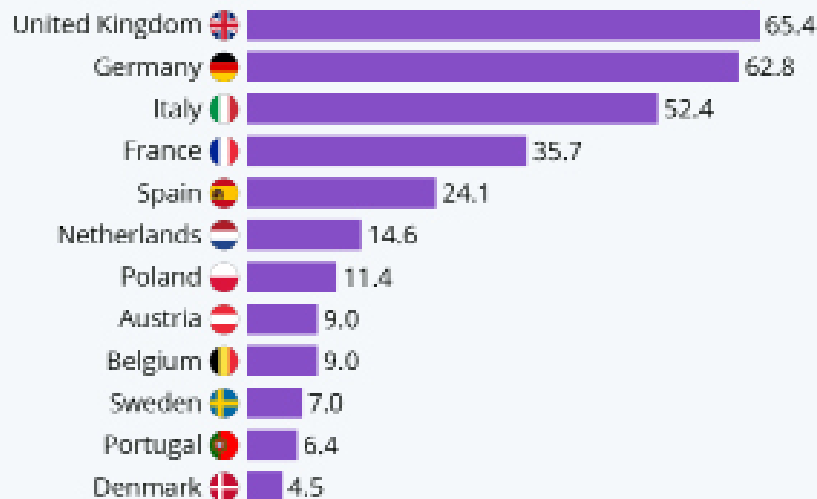
The economies of the U.S.A., China and Japan all have a unique combination of these factors that have led to economic growth over time.



Show your students these two charts and then come to the activities: Fast Fashion Flourishes in the U.S. and Russia

The European's New Clothes

Consumer spending on clothing in Europe in 2018 (in billion euro)



Data is reported in current prices.
Source: Eurostat, March 2020

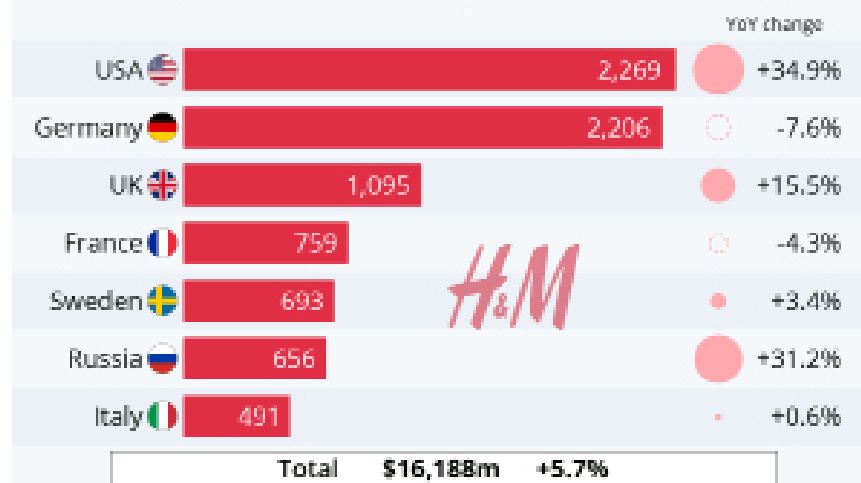


statista

Photo credit: Statista

Fast Fashion Flourishes in U.S. & Russia

H&M Group top markets by sales in first three quarters of 2021 (in million U.S. dollars)



Source: H&M Group



statista

Photo credit: Statista

Task 1

Choose the right definitions of slow fashion and fast fashion:

- Locally sourced, produced, and sold garments
- Timeless products, avoiding trends
- Constantly changing clothing styles and weekly changes
- A business model
- Constantly changing clothing styles and weekly changes
- Made to last, not considered disposable
- Often made-to-order
- Made in countries where labour is very cheap
- Thousands of pieces and styles available

Task 2

Choose the right fast fashion purchasing habits in USA, China, Japan, UK, India, Brazil, Norway, Vietnam and Egypt by items purchased by person and mark it on the map:

- 52 items purchased by person
- 32 items purchased by person
- 28 items purchased by person
- 24 items purchased by person
- 12 items purchased by person
- 8 items purchased by person
- 4 items purchased by person
- 2 items purchased by person
- 2 items purchased by person

Then verify your answers by the chart called Fast fashion purchasing habits around the world.

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FAST FASHION PURCHASING HABITS AROUND THE WORLD



SOURCE: EUROMONITOR INTERNATIONAL
GRAPHIC BY: ADRIAN WONG



ITEMS PURCHASED PER PERSON
1 SHIRT = 4 ITEMS



AVERAGE PRICE PER ITEM (US\$)

EARTH.ORG

Photo credit: [Earth Org](https://www.earth.org/)

Reflection

Do you understand the difference in fast fashion purchasing tendencies in the world or is that surprising?

Why do you think Scandinavian people purchase less on fast fashion brands than some other EU countries with lower standard of living?

Not every rich country purchases the same way. It is connected to the cultural and political environment. Norway is the most sustainable country in the world. But it's not the only Scandinavian country that tops the list. Sweden, Finland and Denmark are hot on its heels.

These countries have held these positions for years thanks to their leadership in governance, innovation, human capital and environmental indicators, according to RobecoSAM.

States and their policies are one of the key players in achieving a more sustainable planet. Their decisions and policies directly affect the environment and the development of their communities. And it seems that this is a lesson that the Nordic countries have well and truly learnt.

To make your country more sustainable you can change your consumption habits but also become an activist and pursue your politics towards bigger sustainability.



Resources

National Geographic. Gross Domestic Product. 2022. Available from <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/gross-domestic-product/>

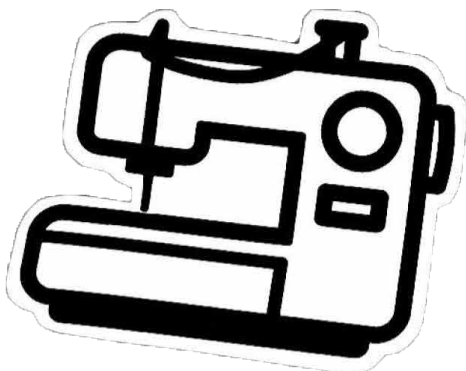
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