

Is social media the main contributor to the rise of fast fashion?

The rapid speed of trends promoted by social media has caused consumers to buy clothing more frequently. The ease of sharing ideas on social media fuels the fast change in fashion trends. A report from *ULOOP Inc*, about super-fast fashion shares the viewpoint that: 'a constant overturn of trends... encourages overconsumption and impulse buying. This shows that social media trends promote buying large quantities of clothing. Because these trends drive consumers into buying so much, consumers turn towards cheap fast fashion. On fast fashion giant, Shein's website, trending items are heavily advertised. Upon looking through Shein's main page, many items are listed as 'trending' or 'hot' and are highlighted in orange to emphasise them to shoppers, as well as many of them having been promotionally 'marked down' to attract shoppers. This is evidence on how fast fashion brands have recognised the effect trends have on their Sales. They have capitalized on this by using it as a main selling point for clothing items, further indulging consumers to over-consume and buy their cheap fashion.

Influencers on social media shape consumer habits, leading to fast fashion brands to partner with them for promotion, making influencers a major part of the fashion economy. Social media influencers are people with large followings on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. A 2021 article titled "The Price of Fast Fashion" gives the viewpoint that; the influencers of social media cause consumers (specifically teens) to hunt for the looks that influencers are constantly promoting. Their daily 'get ready with me' vlogs and fashion hauls make everyday consumers try to mimic this maximal living. Fast fashion brands take this to their advantage by forming partnerships with influencers.



An example of this is TikTok and Instagram influencer Darcy McQueeny, her content consists of promoting products, hauls, going to promotional events, and a series dedicated to her opening packages sent from brands. This photo shows darcy McQueeny in one of her PR unboxing videos on TikTok. In this photo, Darcy is getting mounds of products from many fast fashion brands, like urban outfitters and white fox. Her captions include links/codes for the brands she works with, and the comments are flooded with statements such as "I have never been so jealous" and "wow this is literally a dream life" these comments show us how influencers pushing the idea that quantity equals happiness works to lure their followers towards the fast cheap fashion brands that they endorse, which is why fast fashion brands form these partnerships; because social media influencers are heavily increasing their sales.

While social media significantly drives fast fashion, several non-social media factors contribute to its dominance. A major contributor to fast fashion apart from social media is the low clothing prices. Writer, Nicole Lipman in an article shared her experience shopping at fast fashion brand, H&M, "I could take a \$20 bill and come back from the mall beaming with a new outfit. I never thought about why the clothes were so cheap. I just loved that they could be mine." Here we see the consumer

perspective, noting the happiness coming from buying fast fashion: spending little money, yet still getting high quantities of clothing, without considering other factors. Clothing is so cheap because of the low-quality materials, and low labour wages brands pay by producing their garments in other countries. The low prices that benefit consumers are at the cost of workers who work in fast fashion textiles for little money, and poor working conditions, show the lack of equity present in this industry.

Sustainable influencers on social media combat the fast fashion endorsed influencers promote. the article titled, Super Cute Please Like: the unstoppable rise of Shein states "It was uncanny to bounce between videos: here was a girl showing off her new halter, here was another girl giving a litany of reasons why it was unconscionable to buy clothes for so little money." this view highlights social media users who promote sustainable shopping, which can help reduce fast fashion consumption and challenge fast fashion brands. These sustainable influencers educate followers about the negative impacts of fast fashion and promote upcycling and thrifting, this includes online thrift stores. One of these online stores includes Depop, the social second-hand shopping site, now has "27 million users in 147 countries—and 90 percent of them are part of Gen Z" the company says. Sustainable influencers that use social media platforms to spread awareness about the impacts of fast fashion and encourage more equitable alternatives to help slow its constant rise.

Ultimately, we must ask the final question that this research aims to answer, 'how social media can be seen as the biggest contributor to fast fashion?' Weighing other factors is important to accurately answer the question, firstly the low prices of fast fashion clothing. The low cost of garments plays a big role in consumers decisions. to purchase from fast fashion; as money/being cost-effective is important for majority of people. However, a reason consumers want low price clothing is to accommodate to the rapid trend cycles on social media; the promotion of high clothing quantities on social platforms is what encourages consumers into seeking cheaper alternatives. Social media is also the marketing tool brands use to advertise the cheapness of their products. Another aspect to consider is the sustainable influencers that utilize social media to discourage fast fashion shopping. These influencers promote sustainable shopping alternatives and speak out against unethical fast fashion practices. while thrifting that's encouraged by these influencers are beneficial for reusing garments, many sustainable influencers still promote over-consumption by showcasing thrift hauls, which still generate waste. Additionally, anti- fast fashion social media accounts are far fewer compared to the numerous influencers promoting fast fashion hauls and packages. Meaning whilst they do help to fight the issue, not enough is done to combat the ways social media is used to endorse fast fashion. With these factors in mind, I believe that social media is seen as the biggest contributor to fast fashion because it crucial to the brands marketing and has popularised it with medias trends and influencers. These aspects are more prominent than low prices which still tie into social media and sustainable influencers that are more underlying on social media platforms.