

LOVE IN A HOT CLIMATE

Fashion Media and Sustainability

Fashion is one of the three biggest polluters in the world, coming immediately after the natural resources industry (gas, oil) and agriculture. It damages our planet from the very start of production (when cotton or polyester for a new dress is being sourced – consuming seas-worth of fresh water and polluting rivers with chemical dye) to the end of its life – say, when a dress ends up in landfill.

For example: a pair of jeans requires 15,000 litres of water to produce, this is equivalent to the drinking water needs of one person for 20 years; nearly 3/5 of all clothing ends up in landfills within a year of production; burning waste clothes heats the planet which triggers health issues, loss of wildlife and natural disasters.

Recent research has analysed the most popular media publications and the Instagram posts of celebrities from the world of fashion. Over 1,500 media items in total from press and online from many issues of *Vogue* and *Cosmo* to *Refinery29*; blogs like Aimee's Song and Instagram accounts of the likes of Holly Willoughby and Bella Hadid have been examined. Results show that the media promotes overconsumption and changing style on a weekly basis – which means old clothes ending up in landfill. Many of the bloggers analysed use affiliated links (brand promotion) in 99% of their posts. They don't own them but act as an advertisement for these clothes.

Fashion is many things, and we love it for it. It is self-expression and artisan work; it can help us improve self-esteem or establish a social status; we use shopping to escape from a bad day or to celebrate a wonderful one. So how can journalists and Instagrammers continue promoting fashion whilst remaining ecologically sound and sustainable?



KEY IDEAS

Fashion and women's magazines (*Vogue*, *ELLE*, *Grazia*, *Cosmopolitan*), gossip magazines (*OK! Hello*, *Heat*) and Instagram influencers (from Kendall Jenner to Alexa Chung) love talking about new clothes. But these magazines promote clothes and brands that they don't own – leaving us with the impression that celebrity's wardrobes is updated all the time – so instilling in us a desire to follow suit.

Suggestions for positive change coming out of recent research include:

- Changing our viewing perspective – to see fashion as art, not as product; it can be admired but does not have to be bought all the time
- Promotion of re-styling as opposed to buying new things
- Shifting journalistic focus towards practical fashion – writing about clothes that can stay for a while.

We can keep celebrating amazing designs and ideas, but we don't have to 'consume' them. We can show our skill and creativity in finding fantastic frocks in charity shops or second-hand boutiques – they are a great part of British culture. We can exchange clothes with friends, we can rent clothes, and we can also reconsider what fashion means to us.

KEY READINGS

Denisova, A. (2019) Fashion Media and Sustainability. CAMRI Policy Brief (upcoming).

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Koca, E., & Koc, F. (2016). A study of clothing purchasing behavior by gender with respect to fashion and brand awareness. *European Scientific Journal*, 12 (7). 234 - 238 Available from: [tiny.cc/4rfoiz](https://www.tiny.cc/4rfoiz)

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ACTIVITIES

1. If you were a fashion influencer on Instagram who cares about climate crisis, how would you show your style? List ideas for the hashtags, captions, or stories for your posts.
2. Imagine you are an editor of *Vogue* with responsibility to talk about new things and new trends all the time. How would you keep the magazine going, but reduce the promotion of buying? Write some notes on your strategy.
3. There are champions of sustainable fashion journalism in the industry – *The Guardian*, *The Stylist* and *Refinery29*'s writer Georgia Murray are good examples ; they suggest slowing down and buying less, but better. What would be your style as a sustainable fashion journalist?
4. Draw a cover of a fashion magazine that celebrates fashion but reminds of its impact on the planet. You can be creative with the name of your magazine, the cover star and main headlines. Make it catchy and fun!