

The True Cost of Fast Fashion

It is now very easy to buy clothes. Every year, about 80 billion pieces of clothing are made. But we are making too many clothes. A lot of these clothes end up in landfills, which are places where trash is buried.

"Fast fashion" means clothes that are cheap and new in style. This lets people buy more clothes. But people wear these clothes less often and throw them away faster than before.

So, where do old clothes go? A company called "Savannah Rags" in England recycles clothes. They sort through clothes that people have thrown away from recycling bins all over the country.

Mohammed Patel has run this recycling center for 12 years. He says, "Most of it will go to Africa and Dubai."

Around the world, places like this only recycle about 25% of the clothes that are thrown away. In Britain, over 300,000 tons of clothes go into landfills every year. This is the fastest-growing type of trash in the country.

This is a problem everywhere. As more people in other countries get richer, they want to buy more clothes. They want cheaper clothes. Experts think that by the year 2050, the amount of clothing sold could become more than three times bigger.

Mohammed says, "We've seen that the quality of the materials used has gotten worse. We have to sort through many more clothes to find the same quality of items we can sell."

But how can the clothing business keep growing and also help the planet? We need people to buy fewer clothes.

Ijeoma Kola is a fashion blogger from New York. She cares more about the newest styles than old clothes. She says, "Because I post often on Instagram, there's some pressure to have a new outfit."

Ijeoma is a fashion blogger. Her stylish posts and tips about clothes get many people to follow her online. She used to buy many clothes from stores like H&M, Zara, and ASOS. "They have trendy items, and they are quite cheap," she says.

Today, she is looking for a new outfit for a special event. But this store does not sell clothes. It rents them out.

Ijeoma has been telling people about "Rent the Runway." It is a new way to get nice clothes. Rent the Runway lets you rent clothes for four or eight days at a time.

Ijeoma explains, "You are using clothes quickly, but you are sharing them with other people. So other people get to wear the same things you are wearing."

Usually, clothes are only worn about 20% of the time. Rent the Runway's goal is to change how people think about the clothes they wear. "Instead of buying something and only wearing it maybe three or four times before you give it away or throw it away," Ijeoma says, "an item is worn much more when it is shared by different people."

Rent the Runway has only a few physical stores, but they are very popular online. They are changing the fashion world. The company has 10 million members, which means

they have a lot of laundry to do! The company says they have the biggest dry-cleaning service in the world.

Rent the Runway helps clothes be used more. It also helps fight the problem of throwing away too much. But clothing brands usually do not want people to buy less.

One exception might be Patagonia. They are an outdoor clothing company. They surprised the fashion world with an advertisement in The New York Times on Black Friday in 2011. The ad said, "DON'T BUY THIS JACKET."

In Amsterdam, Ryan Gellert leads Patagonia's work in Europe and the Middle East. He explains, "The clothing industry has become one of the most polluting in the world. We make products that people do not need by making them want them. We create a feeling that if you do not buy it now, it will not be available later."

He says there is a "race to the bottom on price and quality" that cannot continue.

Patagonia's ideas are very different from fast fashion. Their main idea is: buy once, buy good quality, and fix clothes so they last longer.

Ryan says, "So maybe doing that in Amsterdam and then finding out how to share it elsewhere."

With one repair shop in North America and repair services that can travel around Europe and America, Patagonia's message against fast fashion is reaching people. They want people to believe in their ideas.

"Helping our customers keep their product in use longer was also one of Patagonia's first big ideas," Ryan says.