

Our shopping habits are killing the planet

By Maria Carton, Style Advisor

The fashion industry is the second-largest polluter in the world after fossil fuel energy production and the second-largest polluter of fresh water in the world, yet we hear so little about it.

It is hard to believe that the manufacture, retail, consumption, and disposal of clothes is not serving us, the planet or the little fingers and hearts that make our clothes.

This is an industry I have worked in happily my whole life and continue to do so, but change needs to happen and we all have a part to play.

It is a mammoth industry estimated to be worth \$1.5 trillion (€1.2tn) globally with one in six people on the planet working in the industry.

The natural resources used in the production of fabrics are mind-boggling. The production of viscose requires the felling of 150m trees each year and the production of polyester requires 342m barrels of oil annually.

But the biggest drain is on freshwater. The production of cotton, which forms the basis of most of our clothes especially our jeans, requires 10,000 to 15,000 litres of fresh

water to produce just one pair of jeans from beginning to end, which involves growing the cotton (a very thirsty and toxic plant due to the use of pesticides), to cleaning and bleaching the cotton, to dyeing and chemical treatments, which are repeated many times depending on the finish.

This is not sustainable on any level.

The hugely successful 'business model' of Amancio Ortega (owner of Zara and the world's sixth-richest man worth \$78bn) has been copied the world over. Simply put, it's a vertically integrated company whereby design, manufacture, retail and marketing is all done in house.

The clothes are produced in huge volumes, sold in huge volumes and, with clever marketing, social media and low prices, has everyone buying more and more.

What has evolved with this business model being copied the world over is fast fashion — too fast for anyone to keep up with. Too many clothes are produced, with quality and design sacrificed for price.

When something is cheap, we don't value it and it becomes easily disposable.

When something is cheap, we also buy more of it and there-



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in lies the problem. We are shopping more, accumulating more with little thought for what we really need or want because of PRICE.

How packed are your wardrobes? How many items still have the tags on? Do you still struggle to get dressed, despite having four times more in your wardrobe than 20 years ago? How often do you clear out your wardrobe only to start the cycle again.

We absolve ourselves by giving to the charity shops, which are packed full of clothes already, or we give and receive clothes to family and friends — which we never wear.

Recycling is a great option, but currently only about 1% of clothes are recycled. Considering it would take 12 years to recycle what H&M sells in 48 hours worldwide, it is a mammoth task.

There are no easy solutions, the challenge is in changing the mindset in how we produce, consume and dispose of our clothes because planet earth can no longer continue to absorb our waste.

We all love to shop, but we need to make it count.

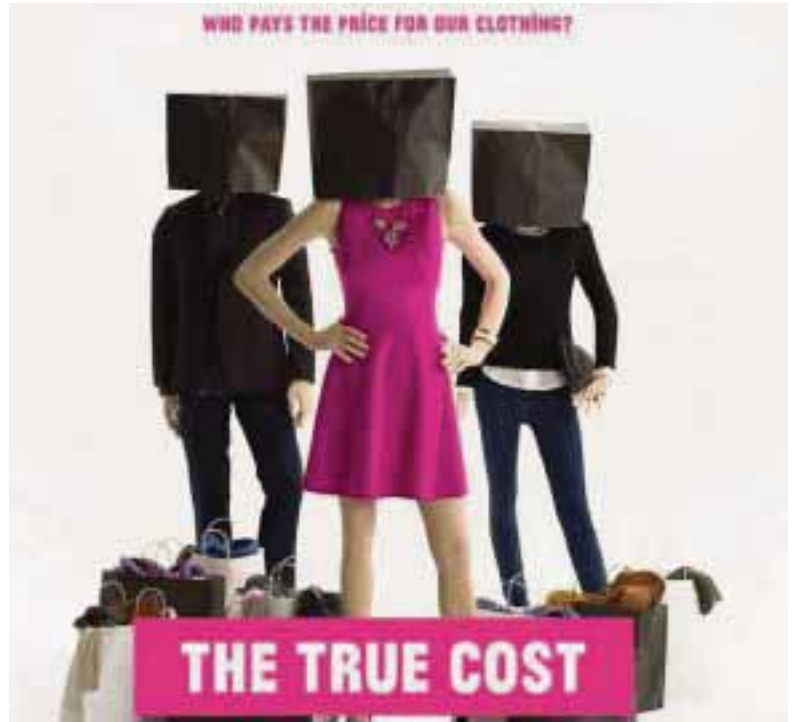
We need longevity, quality and good design in our clothes — clothes that we want to hold on to and enjoy wearing; something we have forgotten and the younger generations have never experienced.

We need to be prepared to pay more for this and we can achieve this by buying less.

Reducing, reusing and recycling is a short-term answer to a long-term problem while the fashion industry recalibrates and begins to pay for design, develop transparent/ethical manufacturing in regulated circumstances, using sustainable materials and delivering quality well-made desirable clothes for us, the consumer.

Remember climate change is about saving humanity — planet earth will survive and evolve, but we will not.

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There is a human cost to our desire for cheap clothes and we need to change our mindset around shopping.



Style advisor Maria Carton, who says change needs to happen.