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Fast Fashion: A Thorough Examination on Human Rights Violations in Bangladesh and Global Environmental Degradation

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FAST FASHION: A THOROUGH EXAMINATION ON
HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN BANGLADESH AND
GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

A Thesis by

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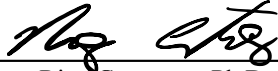
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ABSTRACT

FAST FASHION: A THOROUGH EXAMINATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN BANGLADESH AND GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

by Maggie Quiroz

Fast fashion is one of the most popular industries in the world as it provides consumers with clothing at an affordable price, however, despite its heightened popularity, it is one of the leading industries in human rights violations and environmental degradation. The thesis explores the different implications of fast fashion in a form that focuses on the human right violations workers are enduring and the global effect of such high demand for fast fashion. It uses a mixed methodology composed of both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data is used to analyze the historical impact fast fashion has on human rights in outsourced nations, Bangladesh, and the global environment. While quantitative data is used to measure poverty, the number of ready-made garment workers that have endured human rights violations, media coverage, and to determine the overall dimension of the issue. This research also examines the role of fashion retail companies in human rights violations and environmental degradation. It dissects the involvement of fast fashion in human right violations and environmental impact and examines the symmetrical relationship.

Keywords: Fast fashion, human rights violations, environmental degradation, outsourcing, unlivable wages, unsafe work conditions, textile waste, pollution, water consumption, greenhouse gasses, Bangladesh, United States

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1. Introduction

Originally, because fashion was composed of durable materials, it was seen as a luxury that only the upper class and upper middle class could purchase. As labor costs reduced and technology advanced, fashionable clothing was now offered to the middle class because of its new lower price. As a result of growing consumer demand and fashion merchants' weekly production and release of new items to stay up to date with trends, fast fashion emerged. Due to its prolific output of new goods, the fashion industry has been ranked third among global polluters in 2021 (Whalen, V., & Fellow, S. M., 2022). Fast fashion has become a phenomenon that is taking over Western society and is projected to continuously grow immensely. The term fast fashion was derived from the desire to keep up constant rotating trends. The term "fast fashion" was first used in a 1990 New York Times article to refer to the rapid production of apparel items that can be sold in retailers in roughly two weeks (Birch, 2023). Fashion retailers were finding it difficult to meet the massive demand for new apparel produced by the middle class's introduction of fashionable clothing. Mass retailers started assessing ways to create things that customers would want to buy in the shortest amount of time to meet the huge demand for changing fashion trends.

In the late 1940's, fashion retailers, H&M and Uniqlo discovered that outsourcing ready-made garment workers in developing countries could reduce production costs and increase profits (Idacavage, 2018; Industries 440, 2021). They discovered that less restrictive labor laws and standards in developing nations like Bangladesh could result in lower compensation for ready-made garment workers (Industries 440, 2021). Furthermore, the pay for ready-made garment workers can be quite low when compared to developed nations like the United States because labor rules and regulations are less restrictive in developing nations (Le, 2020). With

Bangladesh's low labor costs, advanced textile technology, and duty-free market access to the European Union, more than 180 fast-fashion retailers have chosen Bangladesh as one of their preferred locations of choice (AQF, 2021). Still, given that ninety-seven percent of the things that Americans buy are made overseas, these workers are among the lowest paid in the world and are often exploited as cheap labor (Elrod, 2017). Bangladeshi ready-made garment workers are thus exposed to hazardous working conditions, long work hours, and low pay.

In addition to fashion retailers outsourcing ready-made garment workers from emerging nations with less strict laws and regulations to enhance their own profit margins and continue producing clothing quickly, they began to search for new textile materials that could reduce material cost. To produce pieces of clothing in a short amount of time at a low cost, retailers have become dependent on low quality materials to produce clothing (Ganz, 2020). My environmental data examination will mostly concentrate on the low-quality textile materials such as the use of plastic, water consumption, and greenhouse gas emissions. In addition to the detrimental effects of the low-quality materials that are used to make apparel, the volume of clothing that is thrown out annually has made the fashion industry one of the most polluting sectors of the economy (Whalen, V., & Fellow, S. M., 2022; Beall, 2020). Approximately 92 million tons of textile waste are produced annually worldwide (Beall, 2020); where the average American alone produces about seventy-one pounds of textile waste annually (Beall, 2020). According to experts, the world's clothing consumption will reach approximately 134 million tons by 2030, continuing its sixty-three percent growth trend (Beall, 2020; Maratos, 2023). It's clear that fast fashion has caused significant environmental harm in the United States during the last ten years due to fast fashion's intent to provide clothing that is on trend at a rapid pace at an affordable price.

This project examines the motivations and outcomes behind mass retailers outsourcing their workforce into developing countries. It raises environmental and human rights issues discussing the comparison of legal working conditions domestically and internationally and the impact low quality clothes being produced at a rapid pace has on the environment. Using content and data analysis methods, diverse literature will be evaluated to further explore motivations behind fast fashion and its key role in human rights and environmental policy. Moreover, I hope to expand on the direct correlation of fast fashion increasing human rights violation and environmental degradation.

I argue that “trendy” fast fashion retailers should take into heavy consideration what human rights violations are occurring to their employees and the environmental impact their production has on the environment. To enhance this relationship, I will be relying on case studies such as the Tazreen Fashions building fire in Bangladesh, Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City, Rana Plaza building collapse in Bangladesh, and the Los Angeles Garment Factory Center. Additionally, I will be examining various working conditions and hazards garment workers are facing consistently. I will also be creating my own data set of released media, specifically newspapers, on the Tazreen Fashions and Rana Plaza case studies to demonstrate the impact media had on these cases. While additionally taking into consideration responses on such issues from mass retailers, governments, and organizations. Although fast fashion is predicted to increase, many retailers are promising to reduce mass consumption and focus on sustainable methods to produce clothing items and shoes. I will be reviewing promised statements of mass retailers and examine if there's any correlation to the treatment of their garment workers and their environmental impact.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Timeline of Fast Fashion

The evolution and significance of the fashion phenomenon, which has several long-term political, social, economic, and cultural ramifications, can be better understood by looking at history (Scarpellini, 2023). Most individuals now consider fashion to be central to their lives, which fuels their ongoing need to follow the newest trends. This was still deemed relevant to the early ages of fashion. The fashion industry was originally designed to produce pieces of clothing that would be enduring and everlasting. However, over the course of the years, we can see how dramatically the quality of clothing has decreased and desire for clothing has increased.

Some claim that the history of fashion may be traced back to the 1400s, between the medieval and modern times. However, fashion began to change drastically in the nineteenth century as the French Revolution brought new fashion trends to the United States (FHT, 2024). During this time, the fashion industry's primary source of desired textile material was wool through farm raised sheep (Idacavage, 2018). Both residential and commercial settings prompted the development of a practical sewing machine (Loscalzo, 2005). Every piece of clothing was created by hand and more refined causing an increase in price of clothing making fashion limited to the lower and middle class (Kupferschmidt, 2004; FHT, 2024). During the late nineteenth century, new aniline dyes and textile machinery was introduced including the first patent sewing machine (Perkin, 2002; FHT, 2024). Traditionally, women were responsible for producing linens and clothes for the family, a talent that was passed down from moms to daughters (Loscalzo, 2005). With the introduction of the sewing machine, clothing was able to be produced more efficiently and rapidly which also allowed for the prices of clothing to be reduced (Idacavage,

2018). Due to such reduced prices, the demand for manufactured clothing began to increase tremendously as more people were able to afford fashion items (Idacavage, 2018, FHT, 2024). As World War II was going on and the demand for clothing increased, in the United States most clothed items were made in homes or small factories in which were made by women and children workers who were not assisting in the war (Idacavage, 2018). However, once demand was surpassing retailers' expectations, fashion companies began to shift their methods. Fashion brands began adopting lower quality textile materials and outsourcing production in developing countries which resulted in the birth of what is known as fast fashion (Idacavage, 2018, FHT, 2024).

As a result of media exposure to fast fashion, people of all ages and economic backgrounds started to place a higher priority on fashion. Fashion trends started to form globally because of this media exposure, and the urge to stay current with trends increased (Bläse, R., Filser, M., Kraus, S., Puumalainen, K., & Moog, P., 2024). Fashion retailers started looking for alternate ways to make apparel to satisfy the growing demand from customers. The 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence on both sides of the Atlantic of important publications dedicated exclusively to the history and modernism of textiles and clothing (Welters & Lillethun, 2018). This led to a shift in the 1960s where fashion retailers heavily relied on labor outsourcing in underdeveloped nations to save millions of dollars on labor costs (Niinimäki, K., Peters, G., Dahlbo, H., Perry, P., Rissanen, T., & Gwilt, A., 2020; Idacavage, 2018). Alongside labor cost reductions, fashion retailers also started to look for ways to save expenses by producing garments from lower-quality textiles (Idacavage, 2018,). In the fashion industry, the “first” brands to pioneer this method of outsourcing in developing countries and use of low-quality textile materials were H&M and Uniqlo (Idacavage, 2018, Industries 440, 2021). In addition to

making more money from newly adopted techniques, fashion retailers H&M and Uniqlo were able to prioritize the middle class by guaranteeing to deliver high-quality apparel at a price that was attainable (Industries 440, 2021). Along with low prices, to satisfy all of their customers' needs, H&M and Uniqlo also assured them that new products will be shipped daily (Industries 440, 2021). With low prices and inventory to fit every consumer's needs, consumers began to drive fashion retailers' sales tremendously (Cook, S. C., & Yurchisin, J., 2017). As a result of this achievement, several fashion retailers started using the same strategies and techniques to increase their revenue and level of success.

During this time, the term 'fast fashion' was first coined through the publication of an article released by the New York Times in 1990 (Birch, 2023). The rise in popularity of fast fashion only increased after this article as it pushed numerous fashion retailers to make apparel more quickly, at lower quality, and at reasonable costs. With that, it brings us to what we know as fast fashion today. In the most recent years, fast fashion brands have begun to outsource their ready-made garment workers and factories in the developing countries of Bangladesh, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia (illumine, 2023). In addition to outsourcing ready-made garment workers in developing countries, fast fashion brands are also utilizing harmful materials to produce clothing at a low cost (Hageman, E., Kumar, V., Duong, L., Kumari, A., & McAuliffe, E., 2024). Some of those harmful materials that are often used by many fashion retailers to minimize cost production include microplastics, polyester, azo dyes, and phthalates (Alptekinoglu, A., Stadler Blank, A., Meloy, M. G., & Guide, V. D. R. Jr., 2023; Herlinger, 2016). Additionally, fast fashion retailers disregard the environmental damage caused by all of

these materials as well as the human rights violations resulting from the way ready-made garment workers are treated in fashion factories (Herlinger, 2016).

2.2. Fast Fashion Retailer Dominance

Since the internet's creation, online shopping has significantly dominated the fashion industry to unimaginable lengths (Pan, X., Li, J., Luo, J., & Zhan, W., 2024). Nowadays, consumers can order apparel online and have it quickly delivered to their home—all from the comfort of their own bed (Nash, 2019). With so much knowledge at consumers' fingertips, they are now able to find clothing that looks very similar to high end clothing at a low cost. During consumers' purchases, the quality of the clothing is displayed under the details before clothing is purchased. Despite the low quality of textile materials being listed, consumers are still willing to purchase pieces of clothing because of how affordable it is compared to clothing that is made of higher quality materials.

Young adults in the middle class have long been targeted by fast fashion, and social media is an excellent platform to follow its global ascent (El-Shazy, 2023). Social media has started to take over as technology develops because it is now easily disposable and accessible at one's fingertips. Due to social media's global dominance, its power and impact have greatly increased on people's lives including their fashion choices (El-Shazy, 2023). There are about 2.3 billion users across the two biggest social media sites, Instagram and Tiktok, with over 1.3 million Instagram users and 1 billion Tiktok users in the United States (Campbell, 2022; Ceci, 2022). Because so many people utilize social media, there is a constant rotation of fashion trends, which generates demand for reasonably priced clothes that satisfies customer needs.

With over one billion active users per month globally and over 94 million active users in the US, TikTok's user base is expected to continue rising as its popularity soars (Doyle,

2022). It is anticipated that as the number of active users grows, so will the popularity of video views. With more than 56.6 million posts and over 210.3 billion views on TikTok, the theme of fashion has emerged as one of the most popular categories (TikTok. 2024). Two of the most popular recurring themes in TikTok videos with the hashtag #fashion have been hauls of inexpensive fast fashion items or high-end clothing duplicates (dupes). Typically, when users post videos of their fashion finds or dupes the hashtag #clothinghaul is used which has over 386.7 thousand posts and over 2.2 billion views (TikTok. 2024). Brands like Fashion Nova, Shein, H&M, Zara, Fashion Nova, and Forever 21 have been often included in these fashion hauls (Ergin, E., Gümüş, M., & Yang, N., 2022; TikTok, 2024).

The demand for people to purchase from such affordable priced fashion retailers has increased as clothing hauls have gained popularity (El-Shazy, 2023). Being able to provide consumers with duplicates of their favorite high-end fashion brands has allowed fast fashion brands to create a mass following (Shi, Z., Liu, X., Lee, D., & Srinivasan, K., 2023). However, with duplicates being created, many fast fashion brands and retailers began to create products that are almost identical to designs made by small or independent fashion businesses which has become highly controversial (Hamilton, 2022; Shi, Z., Liu, X., Lee, D., & Srinivasan, K., 2023). One of the biggest fast fashion retailers, Shein, has become notorious for stealing designs from small and independent fashion businesses (Hamilton, 2022). Small business owner, Bailey Prado, has been a victim of stolen designs from Shein as she has contacted the company for over forty-five of her own product designs (Hamilton, 2022; Shi, Z., Liu, X., Lee, D., & Srinivasan, K., 2023). All of her products are handmade, but Shein still managed to not only steal her designs, but also the style, aesthetics, and feel of her product (Hamilton, 2022). Shein has still

not responded or compensated Prado for her stolen designs and their profit from them (Hamilton, 2022).

To increase their popularity, many fast fashion clothing companies have taken over social media and established a strong following due to their frequent releases and affordable celebrity partnerships. Fast fashion brands have benefited from celebrity relationships by increasing the number of views on their videos and persuading fans that celebrities also shop at fast fashion retailers (Sarin, N., & Sharma, P.; 2023). Mass merchants started to take advantage of outsourced textile labor and materials to continue producing garments at low costs after they realized the high demand for dupes and affordable clothing.

2.3. Workforce Demographics

The \$2.4 trillion apparel and footwear sector in the United States supports millions of jobs globally (HRW, 2024). Fast fashion companies frequently use members of two distinct groups due to their access to inexpensive labor in other developing nations. According to many studies, women and children make up most ready-made garment workers overall, followed by refugees (Khurana, 2011; Manik, Yardley, 2012). Since these workers are the ones who are most directly affected by the working conditions that fast fashion businesses enforce, it is critical to understand the demographics of the population in the countries where labor is outsourced.

It has been standard practice in outsourced garment factories to hire mostly women and children. Bangladesh's economy and culture are formed by patriarchal ideas, which limits the career prospects available to women in the country. In a survey conducted for the year of 1989, it discovered that approximately 90% of the 300,000 workers employed by 772 certified and registered garment factories were women (Rupantur, 1995; Ahmed, 2004). Employers like to hire women because they are obedient and inexpensive workers (Kabeer, 1994; Ahmed, 2004).

The "docility and dispensability" of these women is what draws employers in (Kabeer, 1994; Ahmed, 2004). At this time, the pay for female garment workers in Bangladesh was around 2.5 dollars, or 96.8%, less than the salary of garment workers in the United States, which was at \$7.53 (Beatty, 1995; Ahmed, 2004).

In a more recent survey, it found that women make up over 80% of the workforce in the apparel business as they depend heavily on their income to maintain their families (Bain, 2018; Rupantur, 1995). Data show that sixteen to twenty-year-old's make up 60% of the female labor force (Rupantur, 1995; Ahmed, 2004). The percentage of single girls is between 70% and 75% and women that are widowed or abandoned make up about 2% to 3% (Rupantur, 1995; Ahmed, 2004).

Similarly, refugees frequently look for work for the same reason and land jobs with ready-made garment companies (CCC, 2022). Seeking jobs that will hire immediately, refugees look for employers who will let them work even if they are not legal immigrants. Due to debts from relatives, recruiters, or traffickers—or from other sources—that may have caused them to flee to other countries, refugees may also look for work swiftly (CCC, 2022). Since many refugees live in constant fear of deportation and are not granted legal status by countries at face rate, they believe that staying in the factory for as long as possible is the safest course of action (CCC, 2022). There is little to no legislation protecting refugees in the workforce in most of the outsourced nations where fast fashion retailers locate their factories (Bain, 2022). Fast fashion retailers are aware that garment workers depend on these occupations to provide for their families, yet retailers continue to exploit and capitalize garment workers for their low-cost labor.

2.4. Human Rights Implications

To better understand the human rights implications and violations within the industry, it is important to evaluate the effects of fashion retailers outsourcing their workforce in developing countries with less restrictive human rights laws and regulations. Fast fashion is fueled by outsourced ready-made garment workers with a wide range of abilities, from fulfillment to embroiderers. Textile factories in Bangladesh, India, and China continue to treat their workers unethically despite being the backbone of the ready-made garment industry. The persistent pressure ready-made garment companies endure to manufacture hundreds to thousands of items of apparel at a low cost may be the cause of the unethical methods and treatment. Nonetheless, the desire to reduce production costs for retail profit shouldn't come at the expense of diminishing or eliminating the rights of ready-made garment workers.

Because Bangladesh offers inexpensive labor, cutting-edge textile technology, and duty-free market access to the European Union, it has emerged as the preferred destination for more than 180 fast fashion shops (AQF, 2021). However, these workers are among the lowest paid in the world and are frequently taken advantage of for cheap labor, despite that ninety-seven percent of goods purchased in the United States are created abroad (Elrod, 2017). Textile workers in Bangladesh are more susceptible to low wages, extensive work hours, and hazardous working conditions as it has become one of the largest garment exporters to the United States (Ahmed, 2004).

On average, a textile worker in Bangladesh earns about sixty-seven dollars a month where the average textile worker in the United States earns anywhere between \$2,583 to \$3,383 a month (Le, 2020; Long, X., & Nasiry 2022). The average cost of living in Bangladesh is approximately \$294 dollars per person, not including housing or utilities, therefore ready-made

garment workers who make sixty-seven dollars a month are left in dire need and impoverished (Cost, 2022). But since most ready-made garment workers also have families to support, their average cost of living for a family of four is roughly \$812, not including rent or utilities leaving them desperate (Bain, 2018; Cost, 2022). Workers are forced to forgo meals since they are not paid enough to cover basic expenses like food and water while working twelve-hour or longer shifts (Bain, 2018). It has become a consistent trend to provide ready-made garment workers in outsourced countries with unlivable wages due to less restrictive labor laws and regulations.

In addition to paying unlivable wages, many fast fashion factories are in terrible condition, with leaks, poor lighting, wall fissures, and inadequate ventilation (Le, 2020). In Bangladesh, many textile factory workers have reported multiple times of issues with the infrastructure of the building, unsanitary conditions, and hazardous workstations, but most often reports are ignored by supervisors (Le, 2020). Factories that fail to consider the possible risks associated with overlooked or unfixed reported issues could result in numerous catastrophic incidents which has been in the case of Tazreen Fashions factory, Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, Rana Plaza, and the Garment Center in Los Angeles (Manik, Yardley, 2012; Case Study: Tazreen Fashions (Bangladesh), 2024). Even though there have been fatalities in fast fashion factories due to unfavorable working circumstances and wages, ready-made garment companies continue to take advantage of their employees by profiting from their need for sustenance and less restrictive labor standards and laws.

2.5. Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City

During the early 1900s, New York City's garment industry gave workers' low pay, long work hours, and factories were frequently overcrowded during (Wagner, n.d.). On March 25, 1911, a fire swept across the small Triangle Waist Company garment factory located in lower Manhattan

on the eighth, ninth, and tenth stories of the Asch Building (OSHA, 2011). It was almost time to check out of work and head home when the fire started on the eighth floor of the sweatshop building (Margolis, T., Keller, K., & Rones, J., 2011). As the fire spread rapidly, it was nearly impossible for all garment workers to evacuate the building in a safe manner. There was only one fire escape in the entire structure, and that had fallen during an unsuccessful rescue attempt (OSHA, 2011). As the flames got stronger, machines and tables started to trap and crush garment workers (OSHA, 2011). Managers' locked doors, which prevented employees from stealing, or doors that opened the incorrect manner crushed the terrified workers (OSHA, 2011). Because there was little to no water available to put out the fire, firefighters' ladders were too short to reach the upper stories, and the safety netting was inadequate, leaving the workers with very little escape route. (Margolis, T., Keller, K., & Rones, J., 2011). Despite their best efforts, garment workers were unable to escape the intense flames, and several garment workers started to leap out of the windows. (Margolis, T., Keller, K., & Rones, J., 2011).

Firefighters were able to extinguish the fire in thirty minutes despite the building's ongoing flames. Regrettably, the fire in the clothing factory claimed the lives of 146 individuals due to its extreme intensity making it New York's deadliest workplace tragedy in history for the next ninety years (Margolis, T., Keller, K., & Rones, J., 2011; OSHA, 2011). Most of the lives that were lost were those of young ladies who had just moved to Europe and had no time or opportunity to flee (Margolis, T., Keller, K., & Rones, J., 2011). Due to the real-time media coverage of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire and the claimed lives of young immigrant women, the labor movement and other organizations fighting to advance the rights of immigrants and women in the workplace were inundated with urgency (OSHA, 2011).

2.6. Los Angeles Garment Work Center in 2015

Following the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, the garment working industry had made significant improvements for garment workers. This has been evident in the last several years, yet despite these initiatives and notable advancements, garment workers continue to face difficult obstacles. Approximately 45,000 (11%) of the 500,000 manufacturing jobs in the United States are provided by garment manufacturers in the city of Los Angeles (Garcia, N., Shaddock-Hernández, J., and Valles, D., 2015). The fast fashion production end of a global supply chain is housed in a wide variety of sweatshops and garment factories in the Downtown Fashion District of the Los Angeles area (Garcia, N., Shaddock-Hernández, J., and Valles, D., 2015). Workers are recent arrivals from Asia and Latin America who are assembling enormous amounts of textiles from overseas as garment workers (Garcia, N., Shaddock-Hernández, J., and Valles, D., 2015).

Even though the United States' largest manufacturing hub is located in Los Angeles' Downtown Fashion District, garment workers nevertheless confront numerous challenges. In the Downtown Fashion District, garment workers deal with long hours, dangerous working conditions, low pay, and wage theft (Garcia, N., Shaddock-Hernández, J., and Valles, D., 2015).

In a recent survey of 307 garment workers in Los Angeles, many reported direct working conditions that they face in the factories (Shaddock-Hernández, J., Nuncio, M., Martinez, M., & Pech, Z., 2016). A total of 221 workers (72%) stated that their workplace is covered in dust and 184 workers (60%) claimed that their workplace has excessive heat because of poor ventilation (Garcia, N., Shaddock-Hernández, J., and Valles, D., 2015; Shaddock-Hernández, J., Nuncio, M., Martinez, M., & Pech, Z., 2016). In addition, 128 employees (42%) reported seeing rats and mice in the sewing states (Garcia, N., Shaddock-Hernández, J., and

Valles, D., 2015; Shaddock-Hernández, J., Nuncio, M., Martinez, M., & Pech, Z., 2016). As well as 144 workers (47%) reported that they regularly deal with dirty and poorly maintained restrooms at work (Garcia, N., Shaddock-Hernández, J., and Valles, D., 2015; Shaddock-Hernández, J., Nuncio, M., Martinez, M., & Pech, Z., 2016). Furthermore, exits and doors in factory buildings have been reported to be blocked or locked regularly by 128 employees (42%) (Garcia, N., Shaddock-Hernández, J., and Valles, D., 2015; Shaddock-Hernández, J., Nuncio, M., Martinez, M., & Pech, Z., 2016).

The Downtown Fashion District continues to be the largest manufacturing site for the garment industry in the United States which brings in over 6.4 billion dollars annually and is projected to increase each year (LA Fashion District Business, 2022). The Downtown Fashion District garment sector continues to deny its workers fair wages, safe working conditions, and benefits despite the amount of money it brought in. To close the gaps in worker safeguards, new municipal standards are demanded, along with the holding of retailers accountable for unsafe and unhealthy work environments in addition to wage theft and pay hour infractions (Garcia, N., Shaddock-Hernández, J., and Valles, D., 2015; Shaddock-Hernández, J., Nuncio, M., Martinez, M., & Pech, Z., 2016).

2.7. Environmental Harm

With fast fashion taking over the fashion industry by outstanding numbers, it is important to evaluate the environmental impact it has on the world globally. The disturbing environmental harm that fast fashion causes to the planet is often overlooked, as many people appear to only believe the notion that it boosts our economy. However, fast fashion has had an adverse effect on

the environment in several ways, including increased plastic use, greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption, hazardous chemicals and dyes, and landfill debris.

Given that mass merchants are creating apparel that is intended to be discarded after a few wears, the fashion industry is now recognized as one of the world's leading sources of pollution (Segran, 2021). Experts estimate that by 2030, the world's clothing consumption will continue to increase by sixty three percent (Maratos, 2023). According to a 2019 study, 14 million tons of clothing waste are contributed by Americans to landfills, accounting for around 57% of all discarded clothes (Le, 2020). Along with the consistent buying habits of the consumer, retailers also contribute to waste by disposing of their excess inventory in landfills (Whalen, V., & Fellow, S. M., 2022).

As a result of overflowing landfills, it is required to incinerate piles more frequently which results in an increase in greenhouse gas emissions (Le 2020). A billion tons of greenhouse gasses were released into the atmosphere in 2021 because of fast fashion exports made internationally (Bastard, 2022). According to the World Economic Forum, the fashion business contributes ten percent of greenhouse emissions annually worldwide, and during the next ten years, that percentage is expected to rise to fifty percent (Whalen, V., & Fellow, S. M., 2022). In addition to its increased gas emissions, approximately 1.2 billion tons of carbon dioxide are produced annually by the ready-made garment industry (RMG) (Le, 2020). As used clothes break down in landfills, the fashion industry is also releasing strong methane into the atmosphere, which is 28 times more powerful than carbon dioxide (Whalen, V., & Fellow, S. M.,

2022). Even with technological attempts to filter harmful pollutants, these compounds continue to be present and deadly, leading to air pollution.

As previously mentioned, fast fashion clothing is created from low-quality materials that are utilized more frequently as an effort to reduce production cost. Fast fashion clothing has been found to be extremely detrimental to the environment because it is constructed of materials that mostly contain plastic and synthetic fibers (Ganz, 2020). About sixty-nine percent of clothing is made of synthetic fibers including acrylic, polyester, and nylon (Maratos, 2023). It is discovered that, overall, microplastics are present in around thirty-five percent of synthetic materials (Le, 2020). Due to its inexpensive cost of production, polyester is one textile material that fast fashion stores regularly use. Compared to cotton, polyester is composed of fibers and polymers, which releases more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere (Le, 2020). It should be highlighted that most customers discard polyester since it is low-quality after only a couple of uses. Filtering and removing plastic microfibers from the ocean have become nearly impossible when they enter the water (Ganz, 2020). Due to their focus solely on making money, retailers overlook the fact that polyester takes hundreds of years to decompose fully and the impact it has on the oceans (Ganz, 2020).

A major issue arising from the fashion business is the quantity of water used to meet the demand for apparel at an accelerated pace. Water usage might come from the water required for factory operations such as cleaning supplies, fabric materials, and textile growth. About ten percent of the global water consumption is attributed to the fashion industry (Whalen, V., & Fellow, S. M., 2022; Le, 2020). With cotton making up almost seventy-five percent of all clothing, it accounts for the largest portion of water consumption (Whalen, V., & Fellow, S. M., 2022; Le, 2020). For comparison, almost 3,000 liters of water are needed to create one cotton t-

shirt, which is equal to one human being's three years' worth of drinking water (Le, 2020; Ganz, 2020). The necessity to grow cotton requires the production of over 250 billion tons annually worldwide (Whalen, V., & Fellow, S. M., 2022). Due to the high cost and usage of water, large retailers have moved their manufacturing to nations with less restrictive laws and regulations.

Mass merchants are to be held accountable for water loss in the oceans that those nations depend on when laws and regulations are less restrictive. According to studies, one of Asia's primary water supplies, the Aral Sea, is being affected by twenty percent from the European Union's excessive demand for cotton (Whalen, V., & Fellow, S. M., 2022). Studies indicate that by 2030, the balance between water supply and demand will be disrupted by a 40% increase in water consumption (Elrod, 2017). Furthermore, it is now a norm for fashion retailers to return wastewater into major sources of water that nations rely on due to less restrictive water laws and regulations. For instance, a 2011 study indicated that hazardous chemicals from the fashion industry are present in China's two main water sources, the Yangtze River Delta and the Pearl River Delta (Ganz, 2020). Due to the dangerous chemicals and other materials, it contains, wastewater is very toxic and endangers biodiversity and marine life (Ganz, 2020). It is nearly impossible to ever make the water safe again in most wastewater incidents because the water is so hazardous (Le, 2020).

3. Theory

3.1. Ecocriticism

Within the discipline of literary scholarship, ecocriticism examines the connection between literature and the natural world. In literary studies, ecocriticism is a relatively recent paradigm that has gained traction since the 1990s (Issit, 2022). The term ecocriticism was first coined as an, “experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for a human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we all live in” (Rueckert, 1978). In William Rueckert’s 1978 essay, *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*, he questions:

“How can we apply the energy, the creativity, the knowledge, the vision we know to be in literature to the human-made problems ecology tells us are destroying the biosphere which is our home?” (Rueckert, 86, 1978).

He contends that educators and environmental literature critics should focus on "the discovery, training, and development of creative biospheric perceptions, attitudes, and actions" under the heading of ecocriticism (Rueckert, 1978). The primary and most significant objective of ecocriticism is to alter how humans interact with the natural world (Newman, 2002).

When ecocriticism first started to emerge in the 1990s, its main concerns were environmental issues, advocating for ecologically sustainable practices and development, human relationships with the natural world, and environmental activism (Issit, 2022). Modern ecocriticism, however, is more of an interdisciplinary study that draws on ideas from practical activism, social and physical sciences, and literary scholarship (Issit, 2022; Newman, 2002). Evaluation of the human condition in connection to nature and the physical world,

environmentalism, nature philosophy, and nature writing are among the key tenets of ecocriticism (Issit, 2022). Ecocritics assess the fashion business as fast fashion keeps expanding and affects the environment through human interactions.

Ecocritics argue that the central strength of this theoretical framework is relevance and applying their work to their training, attitudes, and actions (Newman, 2002). They argue that emphasizing the relationship between humans and the environment is crucial. Ecocritics assess the historical perspective in the field of fast fashion to identify the primary drivers of the structure and its relationships to the environment (Newman, 2002).

In fast fashion, it is evident that pollution involves issues with ecology when it comes to toxicological studies, ecological effect assessments, and technological advancement (Garrard, 2007). According to expert estimates, the global clothing consumption is expected to increase by sixty-three percent by 2030, resulting in an extra twenty-three million tons of textile waste (Maratos, 2023). Carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses have continued to rise sharply to nearly four times the current levels due to rising textile production waste (Le, 2020). In addition, with fast fashion clothing being produced with low-quality materials to keep cost of production low, many retailers utilize synthetic fabrics and plastic, which has been determined to be extremely harmful to the oceans and rivers that developing countries and marine bio life depend on (Ganz, 2020). Ecocritics begin to evaluate textile waste, pollution, such as carbon dioxide and greenhouse gasses, and water consumption and harm, to determine where values can be shifted and prioritize methods to minimize textile waste, emissions of toxic substances produced by fast fashion retailers (Garrard, 2007).

To make an improvement and contribution to the environment, ecocriticism argues the mitigation of the environmental catastrophe hinges on developing more effective conceptual

frameworks for nature and humankind's relationship with it (Newman, 2002). They want to raise awareness of the effects fast fashion businesses have on the environment through appropriate education (Newman, 2002). Through proper and adequate education on the topic, information can reveal the true seriousness of the issue that is most often disregarded or overlooked (Phillips, 1999). Activism is heavily encouraged by ecocriticism as people grow more conscious of the detrimental effects fast fashion has on human rights and the environment.

3.2. Marxism

The human condition in relation to nature and the physical world, environmentalism, nature philosophy, and nature writing are all highlighted in ecocriticism. However, Marxism contends that ecocriticism ignores the fact that the efficiency of capitalists in exploitation of workers determines the fundamental rights and freedoms (Engle, 2008). Marxism is an ideology that embodies the ideas and concepts of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, that highlights historical and dialectical materialism as a fundamental component. Marxism maintains that the best way to understand international relations is to start with how humans have used the land to shape political institutions, such as the state and international organizations, and produced things on land that have become dependent resources (Garrett, 2024). Marxists aim to understand how the capitalist mode of production and the system of sovereign states came to be by mapping and retracing those social relations and conditions.

In the present era, human rights are viewed as an unalienable, irreversible, and indivisible phenomena, which the Preamble of the Universal Rights of Declaration states as:

“Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” (REFUGEE, ASYLUM, and INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS

DIRECTORATE (RAIO) RAIO DIRECTORATE -OFFICER TRAINING RAIO
Combined Training Program INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW TRAINING
MODULE, 2019)

However, Marxism argues that capitalism systems disregard the fundamental rights and interests of the oppressed in an effort of personal gain. Marxist foundation lies in the idea that an unbiased understanding of how society is changing over time must emphasize the tangible aspects that are derived from the economy (Akani, nd). As fast fashion continues to grow immensely, the human rights of ready-made garment workers in outsourced nations continue to be violated by fashion retailers. Under Marxism, fast fashion retailers demonstrate the capitalists desire for personal profit and disregard of fundamental human rights of ready-made garment workers.

Textile workers in outsourcing countries continue to be subjected to human rights violations at work because fashion retailers ignore their basic rights and interests. Under Marxism, it is believed that there is a great priority in interpreting the world rather than methods to change the world (for the better) (Esther, 2018; Pal, 2018). When examining the relationship between fast fashion and human rights abuses, it's critical to examine the historical materialism of human rights and expose the injustices committed by the fashion industry (Pal, 2018). Gaining a better understanding of the historical materialism and background of the outsourced nations and fashion industry will allow a framework to challenge the fashion industry's capitalist approach.

The economy in outsourced countries have deprived textile garment workers of basic human rights and adequate working conditions. Textile garment workers are left with hazardous working conditions, long work hours, insufficient breaks, and unlivable earnings while the fast fashion sector continues to flourish. Marxism contends that under these

circumstances, human rights might be viewed as false or mythical as they were established through social constructs and are currently sufficiently implemented globally by all countries (Akani, nd; Esther, 2018). Therefore, if change is not made, the environment and human rights will suffer as capitalism grows. It is one's responsibility to support and deepen the efforts of textile and apparel workers, which calls for knowledge of class interests, historical materialism of economic forces, women's and children's rights, and the environment to combat capitalism (Akani, nd).

4. Methodology

As I previously indicated, a gap in the literature on this subject was found during my preliminary research. A large portion of the available literature concentrated on the causes of businesses outsourcing to developing nations. Although there is less available literature examining the impact of fast fashion on the environment and human rights, they still lack the development of the effects of media coverage and retailer accountability. By analyzing the various literature, I argue that fast fashion influenced environmental and labor policies in developing countries in the last decade and change can occur through high levels of media coverage which leads to retail company accountability. Therefore, fast fashion companies should consider human rights implications in outsourcing decisions and whether there are any models these companies can use to address human rights violations within their supply chain. This research will contribute to the conversation on fast fashion and climate change, and human rights in developing countries such as Bangladesh.

I demonstrate how fast fashion companies should take human rights implications into account when deciding to outsource into developing countries and how heavily fast fashion affects the environment. Based on literature regarding fast fashion, human rights violations, and environmental degradation, I use case studies, articles, reports, and data analysis to demonstrate current human rights violations and environmental areas of concern. I will analyze working conditions, wages, gender pay, regulations, legal status, and protections in Bangladesh. With that, I plan to compare the amount of media coverage and the outcomes following the Tazreen Fashions and Rana Plaza incidents.

I will use three different types of methods to conduct my research. To create a framework, I plan to use a non-structured qualitative analysis method. Human rights case studies will be reviewed and analyzed from garment factories in Bangladesh. While using this method, I will go in depth on already existing literature regarding fast fashion and climate change to better understand the human rights and environmental impact that follows. I will also be conducting my own data research to analyze data regarding media coverage of Tazreen Fashions and Rana Plaza. I will limit my data research from media coverage to newspapers as it is the main source of information for developing countries. With many newspaper articles being released, I will focus on the years of when the incident occurred up until a full year after. Given that the United States and the United Kingdom are some of the main contributors to outsourcing in developing countries, it was expected that there would be coverage in American, United Kingdom, and Bangladeshi newspapers. Considering this, newspapers for this study were selected by the following criteria. Initially, the newspapers needed to be well-established and have substantial readership (Peiser, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2018). Newspapers in the United States, United Kingdom, and Bangladesh were also chosen by reading popularity.

The *New York Times* was included in this study to determine whether there were any regional differences in coverage. The *New York Times* is the United States newspaper of record and its dedication to *helping people understand the world through on-the-ground, expert and deeply reported independent journalism* helped to determine whether intermedia agenda setting was an important factor in the framing of garment workers abuses in the fast fashion industry (New York Times, 2018). In similarity, *The New York Times– International Edition* was also included due to its focus on issues that are occurring globally. In the case of United Kingdom newspapers, *The Independent* and *The Times* were also chosen out of reader popularity. In the case of

Bangladesh newspapers, *The Financial Express (Bangladesh)* and *The New Nation (Bangladesh)* were also included in this study out of reader popularity.

Second, newspapers were also determined by area of proximity. This means that the newspapers were from the geographical location of the incidents and surrounding border state, the United Kingdom. The newspapers of the United States include *The New York Times* and *The New York Times– International Edition*, while the United Kingdom newspapers include *The Independent* and *The Times*. The United Kingdom news media was expected to have more information and content about the human rights violations Bangladeshi garment workers face; however distance would not be the only factor for heavy media coverage. Bangladesh newspapers include *The Financial Express (Bangladesh)* and *The New Nation*.

Third, access to past information for some United States, United Kingdom, and Bangladesh newspapers are very limited. All newspapers would be required to provide an extensive database of their past issues to be included in this study. These six newspapers met the criteria of high circulation, proximity, and access to past content.

4.1. Tazreen Fashions

In 2012, Bangladesh was home to more than 4,500 garment factories, employing over four million people, most of them being women (Manik, Yardley, 2012). Garment industries have become an essential component of Bangladesh due to their heavy reliance on them for their economy and employment opportunities. As a result, it is anticipated that the clothing business factories in Bangladesh will continue to expand throughout time. However, over the past few decades, Bangladesh has emerged as one of the most sought-after places for fast-fashion

factories; consequently, it has been a frequent site of factory fires (Manik, Yardley, 2012; Case Study: Tazreen Fashions (Bangladesh), 2024).

Tazreen Fashions' garment factory in Bangladesh's capital city of Dhaka was well-known for creating apparel for global mass retailers like Walmart and Sears (Neuman, 2014). The eight-story Tazreen Fashions garment factory had numerous complaints about incorrect fire exits, a deficiency of fire extinguishers, electrical issues, and improper emergency protocols (Manik, Yardley, 2012). Approximately 1,100 garment workers were ordered to work overtime one night to satisfy orders for international fashion brands (Manik, Yardley, 2012). During this time, a fire broke out in the factory building, but managers reassured all garment workers that it was a routine drill and to remain in their assigned locations to continue production (Manik, Yardley, 2012; Neuman, 2014).

As workers remained in their stations and continued production, managers went throughout the factory building to lock the gates from the outside as the fire progressed (Neuman, 2014). As the manufacturing building started to fill with smoke and flames, workers had no choice but to utilize the inside stairway to escape due to the absence of fire exits, fire extinguishers, fire alarms, and sprinkler systems. (Manik, Yardley, 2012). Many of the workers on the higher levels had little time to flee after receiving orders to stay at their stations. Workers tried furiously to smash windows in a desperate bid to flee but were unable to do so because iron grilles were obstructing their view of the windows. (Manik, Yardley, 2012). In their final attempts, managers and employees hurried to the roof and started jumping to a nearby building, while others, in a desperate attempt, leaped off the building (Manik, Yardley, 2012; Neuman, 2014). The incident, which was one of the largest garment factory fires, claimed the lives of

nearly 110 garment workers and injured over 200 garment workers due to many safety violations (Manik, Yardley, 2012; Case Study: Tazreen Fashions (Bangladesh), 2024).

The Tazreen Fashions garment factory emerged as one of the most fatal garment fires, prompting media attention and generating numerous inquiries and apprehensions on the safety of working conditions for garment workers. Due to extensive media coverage, Bangladeshi officials faced both internal and international pressure to conduct a more thorough investigation of the fire and hold accountable those who are considered responsible (Manik, Yardley, 2012). A significant number of the families affected by the fire believed that it was necessary to pursue legal recourse against the owner of the building, Delowar Hossain, as he was aware of all the safety violations yet pursued no further action to provide safety for the workers in the building (Neuman, 2014; Manik, Yardley, 2012).

On one hand, families desired to bring legal action against the managers who obstructed the workers' ability to escape and resume production. (Neuman, 2014; Manik, Yardley, 2012). On the other hand, others argued that the corporations and global brands whose clothing products were manufactured in the Tazreen Fashions garment factory building should also be held responsible. They were aware of the fire and building safety issues but did not make any steps to improve the situation (Manik, Yardley, 2012). The ineffectiveness of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in safeguarding workers globally is evident as many more garment workers continue to get injured and lose their lives at the cost of mass clothing retailers revenue (Case Study: Tazreen Fashions (Bangladesh), 2024). As more incidents involving inadequate safety conditions occur, the need for garment workers' safety enforced through contracts and laws is becoming more and more pressing.

4.2. Tazreen Fashions Media Analytics

For this research data, I selected the terms *garment workers* and *violations* in newspapers from the United States (17 articles), The United Kingdom (7 articles), and Bangladesh (14 articles). The terms *garment workers* and *violations* were chosen to highlight the human rights violations garment workers faced during their time with Tazreen Fashions. Newspaper articles were chosen within the timeframe of the incident date, November 24th, 2012, to December 31st, 2013.

Newspaper articles were found through the news, business, and legal sources database, Nexis Uni, by searching for articles that mentioned *garment workers* and *violations* in the headline or paragraphs. Thus, making the sample found relevant. Only articles that contained the keywords of *garment workers* and *violations* were considered which narrowed down the sample tremendously. These terms were utilized as limiting factors for articles that addressed the Tazreen Fashions incident by local and international news media.

The total universe of articles before refining with the keywords of *garment workers* and *violations* in November 2012 to December 2013 was found to be a total 409 articles in the United States, United Kingdom, and Bangladesh together. After refining the search to include *garment workers* and *violations*, it brought it down to only 38 articles. All 38 articles contained the terms *garment workers* and *violations* in the headline or lead paragraph. The United States had a total of seventeen articles with key terms, *garment workers and violations*, released under *The New York Times* and *The New York Times– International Edition* between November 2012 and December 2013. Similarly, Bangladeshi newspaper outlets, *The Financial Express (Bangladesh)* and *The New Nation*, released fourteen articles regarding the Tazreen Fashions factory fire with key terms *garment workers and violations*. Under the same time frame

and key terms, the United Kingdom, newspaper outlets, *The Independent* and *The Times*, only had a total of seven articles released.

4.3. Rana Plaza

Women in Bangladesh are limited in employment opportunities because Bangladesh's economy and cultural settings are shaped by patriarchal ideals. Consequently, most of the workforce in Rana Plaza consisted of women and children. Approximately eighty percent of workers are women who work in the garment industry because they are in dire need of income to support their families (Bain, 2018). As factory textile workers, women continue to get low wages despite their desperate need for income and the scarcity of available jobs. On average, the female factory textile worker received about sixty-seven US dollars a month before the newly passed fixed minimum wage in late 2023 (Le, 2022, *Bangladesh garment workers 'frustrated' by gov't wage hike after protests*, 2023). Without rent, an independent person in Bangladesh pays roughly \$294 per month on average for their standard of life (Cost, 2022). In a desperate attempt to increase their pay, female textile workers are forced to put in endless long hours under appalling working conditions.

Located in Savar, Bangladesh, the Rana Plaza garment factory stood at eight stories high and was utilized by many Italian and British retailers (Bossavie, Cho, Heath, 2013). For months, the Rana Plaza garment workers had been expressing various concerns and complaints to higher management about their safety in the workplace (Le, 2022). The concerns and complaints expressed included several cracks in the walls, improper ventilation, leaks, low lighting, and many more (Le, 2022). Despite their various concerns and complaints, management guaranteed that all workers in the factory building were safe (BHRRC, 2022). Workers

continued to be forced to work in unsafe working conditions until the collapse of the building in April of 2013 (BHRRC, 2022).

The collapse of the Rana Plaza has become to be known as one of the worst garment factory accidents to have occurred. The collapse of the building had cost the lives of primarily women and children workers as over 1,100 workers lost their lives and over 2,500 workers were left injured (ILO, 2022). In comparison to their male colleagues, female survivors were significantly impacted by the collapse due to the strong patriarchal norms that pervaded Bangladesh (Kabir, H.; Maple, M.; Islam, M.S.; Usher, K., 2021). Female survivors under Bangladesh laws, are prohibited from working in other jobs that are available to them, such as driving vans or pulling rickshaws (Kabir, H.; Maple, M.;Islam, M.S.; Usher, K., 2021). However, all survivors were left with physical injuries, psychological stress, declination in mental health, and increased suicide rates (Kabir, H.; Maple, M.;Islam, M.S.; Usher, K., 2021). Given how severe and extensive this tragedy at the Rana Plaza garment factory was the effectiveness of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs in Bangladesh's ready-to-garment (RMG) industry has been questioned.

4.4. Rana Plaza Media Analytics

For this research data, I also selected the terms *garment workers* and *violations* in newspapers from the United States (14 articles), The United Kingdom (22 articles), and Bangladesh (5 articles). The terms *garment workers* and *violations* were chosen to highlight the human rights violations garment workers faced during their employment in the Rana Plaza building.

Newspaper articles were chosen within the timeframe of the incident date, April 24th, 2013, to a year later, December 31st, 2014.

Newspaper articles were found through the news, business, and legal sources database, Nexis Uni, by searching for articles that mentioned *garment workers* and *violations* in the headline or paragraphs. Thus, making the sample found relevant. Only articles that contained the keywords of *garment workers* and *violations* were considered which narrowed down the sample tremendously. These terms were utilized as limiting factors for articles that addressed the Tazreen Fashions incident by local and international news media.

The total universe of articles before refining with the keywords of *garment workers* and *violations* in April 2013 to December 2013 was found to be a total 922 articles in the United States, United Kingdom, and Bangladesh together. After refining the search to include *garment workers* and *violations*, it brought it down to only 41 articles. All 41 articles contained the terms *garment workers* and *violations* in the headline or lead paragraph. The United States had a total of fourteen articles with key terms, *garment workers and violations*, released under *The New York Times* and *The New York Times– International Edition* between April 2013 and December 2014. Similarly, Bangladeshi newspaper outlets, *The Financial Express (Bangladesh)* and *The New Nation*, released twenty-two articles regarding the Tazreen Fashions factory fire with key terms *garment workers and violations*. Under the same time frame and key terms, the United Kingdom newspaper outlets, *The Independent* and *Financial Times*, only had a total of five articles released,

5. Findings/Results

5.1. Media Analytics Results

While collecting data to compare the number of media (newspapers) released within the one-year time frame of each garment factory incident, I was able to come to some conclusions. Before evaluating the number of newspapers released, I expected to find that the Tazreen Fashions incident would have a substantial amount of newspaper articles released. I expected an abundance of articles due to the number of trials the owners of Tazreen Fashion faced and the persistence of the family members of those injured had on holding those in charge accountable. It was shocking to see the results drop from 409 articles to 38 when terms *garment workers* and *violations* were used to refine the search. With my data specifications and terms highlighted, my numbers showed that only 38 newspaper articles were released within the United States, the United Kingdom, and Bangladesh. Out of all three nations, the ones with the most newspaper articles were the United States with 17 published articles. Bangladesh newspaper articles released were not much behind the United States newspaper articles at 14 articles. I found this shocking because I expected more local coverage newspaper outlets in Bangladesh to have published an outstanding number of articles on the Tazreen Fashions tragedy.

Similarly, when collecting data samples for the Rana Plaza tragedy to compare the number of media (newspapers) released within the one-year time frame of each garment factory incident, I was able to come to some conclusions. I expected to find less newspaper articles to be released about Rana Plaza than the amount found in the Tazreen Fashions tragedy. However, after the same specifications and terms *garment workers* and *violations* were used to refine the search, I found that there were more newspaper articles released about Rana Plaza's incident.

The Rana Plaza incident had a total of 922 newspaper articles released and 41 newspaper articles released after terms were used for refinement. This was also shocking to discover because family members of those involved in the Tazreen Fashions fire were persistent in holding the proper people accountable. Whereas for the victims of Rana Plaza, there seem to be no trials against the building owners or brands that ignored the reported safety issues which lead to fatalities. I was also a little surprised to see that Bangladeshi newspaper outlets had released slightly more newspaper articles on the Rana Plaza incident after discovering the results for Tazreen Fashions. In this case, the United States followed Bangladesh in leading articles at 14 newspaper articles released. With both data sets of Tazreen Fashions and Rana Plaza after terms *garment workers* and *violations* and specifications for refinement, results demonstrated that there was a lack of newspaper articles written within the time frame of the incidents indicating a need for discussion by local and global actors.

5.2. Corporate Social Responsibility

“To be socially responsible means not only fully satisfying the legal obligations but going further and investing more in human capital, in the environment, and in relations with the other interested parties” (Green Book of the European Commission, July 2001).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is an endeavor taken voluntarily by businesses to incorporate environmental and social issues into their daily business operations (Gazzola and Pellicelli, 2009). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) encompasses a range of social efforts, including community development, environmental protection, and socially responsible company practices, driven by both economic viability and societal value addition (Blowfield, M., Frynas, J.G., 2010; Du, S.; Bhattacharya, C.B., Sen, S., 2005). Traditionally with CSR theories addressing social aspects, political demand, ethical values, and revenue, it fails to

take environmental impact into theoretical consideration (Saha, P.K., Akhter, S., Hassan, A., 2021). However, CSR can still be used to assess the persistent violations of workers' rights, the unsustainability of RMG industries, their inadequate infrastructure, their labor unrest, and gender discrimination in the workplace.

Businesses, especially those in the industrial sector, have been under increasing pressure over the past twenty years from many stakeholders to take the environment into account when conducting their operations (Abbas, J., and Sagsan, M., 2019). The ready-made clothing industry has been under criticism from ecocritics and other groups to evaluate the impact of human interactions on the environment and the sector's growth (Issit, 2022). Change is possible because to the main strengths of ecocriticism, which include relevance, applying their work to training, attitudes, and actions, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which emphasizes addressing social aspects, political demand, ethical ideals, and revenue (Newman, 2002; Saha, P.K., Akhter, S., Hassan, A., 2021). The interaction between people and the environment is emphasized in both CSR and ecocriticism to evaluate the unethical and unsustainable activities that the RMG industry produces. However, with Bangladeshi ready-made garment sectors rapid expansion, there is an increase of environmental pressures being placed by CSR through organizations and the media (Sarkar, A., Qian, L. & Peau, A.K., 2020).

To connect stakeholders and organizations symmetrically, corporate social responsibility (CSR) involves three areas of interaction: social, environmental, and economic (Gazzola and Pellicelli, 2009). The environment area aims to efficiently manage the material and energy resources to lower the amount of the environmental impact of the businesses' activities, while the social area concentrates on enhancing public enterprise and maintaining influence in the community and region (Gazzola and Pellicelli, 2009). The economic area seeks to create and

distribute value under corporate governance in tandem with the environmental and social domains (Gazzola and Pellicelli, 2009). Sectors could lose business and be compelled to withdraw from the market if RMG merchants continue to focus profit maximization without adhering to necessary social compliance issues, even when they are aware of CSR implementation (Saha, P.K., Akhter, S., Hassan, A., 2021). Therefore, organizations are pressuring RMG sectors to hold sustainable practices and prioritize ethical treatment for readmade garment workers globally, but especially in outsourced nations such as Bangladesh.

5.3. Organization and Government Efforts

5.3.1. Clean Clothes Campaign

In the 2013 case of Tazreen Fashions, we recall that the number of safety violations resulted in the deaths of over 110 garment workers and the injuries of over 200 others (Manik, Yardley, 2012; Case Study: Tazreen Fashions (Bangladesh), 2024). In the same year, the collapse of the Rana Plaza building resulted in the deaths of over 1,100 workers and the injuries of over 2,500 others (ILO, 2017). Since the two fatal occurrences happened over five months apart, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, and labor rights organizations took matters into their own hands and brought attention to the human rights violations that fast fashion retailers were committing (ILO, 2017).

“It’s unbelievable that brands still refuse to sign a binding agreement with unions and labor groups to stop these unsafe working conditions from existing. Tragedy after tragedy shows that corporate-controlled monitoring is completely inadequate.” (Tessel Pauli from Clean Clothes Campaign)

The campaign organization discovered many of the same brands that were operating in Tazreen Fashions building were also manufacturing in Rana Plaza after conducting investigations into the remains of Rana Plaza (CCC, n.d.). The Clean Clothes Campaign urges companies outsourcing in Bangladesh to sign the Bangladesh Fire and Building Safety Agreement right away because numerous companies continue to manufacture under hazardous working conditions that violate human rights (CCC, n.d.). To promote a safe and healthy textile and apparel sector in Bangladesh, trade unions and brands have come to an autonomous, legally binding agreement known as the Bangladesh Fire and Building Safety Agreement (Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh 2013). The agreement covers manufacturers of home textiles, knit and fabric accessories, and ready-made garments (RMG), at the discretion of the signatory enterprises (Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh 2013.).

In addition, Clean Clothes Campaign has partnered with local and global unions, and labor rights organizations to develop a sector-wide program (CCC, n.d.). Regular building inspections, labor rights training, public disclosure, and evaluations of safety standards are all part of the implemented program (CCC, n.d.). Its objective was to maintain the support of the major labor stakeholders in Bangladesh and throughout the world while remaining practical and transparent (CCC, n.d.). The US corporation PVH Corporation, which owns Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger, and the German store Tchibo, already signed the agreement, but Clean Clothes Campaign urges all major brands outsourcing in Bangladesh to sign the initiative to ensure rapid implementation (CCC, n.d.). Through the agreement's program, hundreds of thousands of workers' lives will be protected from the *hazards that they currently suffer in unlawful and dangerous garment factories* (CCC, n.d.).

5.3.2. New York City's Triangle Waist Company Trial

In 1911, over a century before the Tazreen Fashions disaster and the collapse of the Rana Plaza building, a deadly fire broke out at New York City's Triangle Waist Company garment factory, killing about 200 people, primarily who were immigrant women who worked in the garment industry (Margolis, T., Keller, K., & Rones, J., 2011; OSHA, 2011). After so many people suffered fatalities because of dangerous working conditions, poor fire protocol and procedures, and managers preventing access to escape routes, people began protesting and demanding a trial against the Triangle Waist Factory's owners and managers who deliberately locked doors during the fire to prevent garment workers from fleeing (Greenwald, 2002).

With substantial pressure from organizations, unions, and society, a state government trial against Triangle Waist Factory's owners, Harris and Blanck, and managers who deliberately locked doors during the fire to prevent garment workers from fleeing, began nine months later in December of 1911 (Greenwald, 2002; Sanchez, 2006). Their argument was based on the claim that the Triangle's doors were deliberately shut during business hours, which could account for the large number of fatalities in the incident (Sanchez, 2006). Unfortunately, the jury delivered a verdict of not guilty against Harris and Blanck, but family of victims continued to pursue legal actions by going to court again for the manslaughter death of another fire victim (Linder, 2019). To bring prosecution against Harris and Blanck, they chose to settle the twenty-three civil cases that the victims' families had brought against them (Linder, 2019; Sanchez, 2006). Their settlement ultimately gave seventy-five dollars per victim which is equivalent to \$2,300.59 dollars today (Linder, 2019; Sanchez, 2006). Although their legal battles were not highly successful, the United States garment sector underwent significant transformation. A nine-member Factory Investigating Commission was established because of the Triangle

Shirtwaist Factory, with the primary objective of investigating the safety and working conditions in factories located in New York (Linder, 2019). Within the time frame of the trials, the Commission was able to enact thirty-six new laws reforming the state labor codes. Through awareness and endless effort from organizations, trade unions, and the people of the nation, the ready-made garment industry was put on the political agenda calling for changes to be made for the rights of the people working in the United States.

“Out of that terrible episode came a self-examination of stricken conscience in which the people of this state saw for the first time the individual worth and value of each of those 146 people who fell or were burned in that great fire...We all felt that we had been wrong, that something was wrong with that building which we had accepted, or the tragedy never would have happened. Moved by this sense of stricken guilt, we banded ourselves together to find a way by law to prevent this kind of disaster.... It was the beginning of a new and important drive to bring the humanities to the life of the brothers and sisters we all had in the working groups of these United States.” (Frances Perkins, Factory Investigating Commission; Linder, 2019).

5.4. Retail Accountability

Many environmental hazards and human rights issues are being brought to light through social media platforms as the popularity of fast fashion continues to rise. Customers are starting to put pressure on fast fashion firms to promote sustainable practices to limit or minimize climate change as the effects of these environmental, social, and economic challenges become more pressing (Khurana, 2011). Numerous manufacturers have pledged to implement sustainable practices in response to pressure from organizations and society. These activities include creating

eco-friendly designs, reducing the use of microplastics in clothes, raw materials, transportation, and correct disposal of used clothing (Khurana, 2011).

Affordable apparel is a major appeal for consumers, which enables fast fashion companies implicated in labor and environmental issues to continue making profits. One example is fast retailer, Fashion Nova which launched in 2006 (Michelle, 2022). Known for being the viral fashion company that dominated social media by launching hundreds of new clothes and accessories every day, and celebrity collaborations, Fashion Nova made an immense impact in the apparel business in 2018 (Michelle, 2022). Fashion Nova made social media presence a top priority to reach as many customers worldwide as possible, while having just five physical clothing stores (Michelle, 2022).

The CEO of Fashion Nova prioritized having a strong social media presence and believed that the best approach to market the brand was to work with well-known celebrities and social media influencers who had large followings to help attract new customers (Michelle, 2022). In less than two years after starting its website, Fashion Nova was able to produce over 400 million dollars in revenue and rank among the top performing companies in 2018 primarily to the sponsorships of well-known celebrities and influencers, and low-cost prices (Michelle, 2022). In addition, Fashion Nova became one of the most Googled fashion companies globally in the same year that it outperformed luxury labels like Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Dolce & Gabbana, and Dior in terms of revenue (Michelle, 2022). With 600 new items being released per week, Fashion Nova has evolved from a fast fashion company to an ultra-fast fashion brand. With a \$906 million revenue, the business is still among the top fast fashion brands despite having little to no commitment to sustainability (Michelle, 2022).

While many companies and retail establishments do not practice sustainable fashion, some, like Uniqlo, have started implementing new strategies and tactics to produce clothing that is more environmentally friendly (Nguyen, 2023). Using eco-friendly materials, implementing a "repair and reuse" program, and establishing a policy that permits them to manage forests in its supply chain to assist minimize water usage are just a few of the ways Uniqlo has started to be sustainable (Hymann, 2022). Uniqlo asserts that it has improved sustainability in its 2,300+ locations worldwide and its manufacturing by implementing sustainable adjustments and practices (Hymann, 2022). Nevertheless, because remarks are often vague, Uniqlo has not yet provided precise information about the new procedures and processes that were put into place (Hymann, 2022). Without transparency, customers frequently wonder if a company continues to adhere to its sustainability-related promises and practices or is just releasing statements to preserve its reputation (Chan, 2022). This is commonly referred to as "greenwashing" when a brand or business makes claims about having sustainable practices but is unable to produce concrete facts (Chan, 2022; Marko, M., & Kusá, A., 2023). Greenwashing is the practice of businesses pretending to be working towards sustainability when their efforts are quite little which has become more in the fast fashion industry (Marko, M., & Kusá, A., 2023).

Nonetheless, several companies and retailers, including Boohoo and Uniqlo, assert to engage in sustainable practices but are unable to offer specific data to support their claims. Being unable to support their claims, but state they are making sustainable efforts is what is known as greenwashing (Marko, M., & Kusá, A., 2023). The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (10th edition) defines greenwashing as "*disinformation disseminated by an organization so as to present an environmentally responsible public image*" (Lu, X.; Sheng, T.; Zhou, X.; Shen, C.; Fang, B, 2022). In similar strategies as Fashion Nova, Boohoo has made partnerships with

celebrities and influencers to help boost the brand's ethical and sustainability image (Chan, 2022). Boohoo and media personality, Kourtney Kardashian Barker, collaborated to develop and release sustainability collections in 2022 (Dzhengiz, T., Haukkala, T., & Sahimaa, O., 2023).

However, many consumers accused Boohoo and Kourtney Kardashian Barker of greenwashing as the fashion retailer does not practice ethical or sustainable methods as they claim (Chan, 2022). For instance, Boohoo regularly claims to provide outstanding compensation and benefits, access to training and development, and a higher payroll commitment to its employees than the average (Chan, 2022; Press, 2023). However, a 2020 investigation found that throughout the pandemic, Boohoo textile garment workers were subjected to hazardous working conditions and were paid as little as \$4.30 an hour (Chan, 2022). Additionally, the company and Kourtney Kardashian Barker jointly made a statement in which they said that the collections were created with sustainability in mind and that they aim to inspire customers to make more environmentally friendly purchases (Chan, 2022; Press, 2023; Wheeler, 2022). However, the clothing pieces in these collaborated collections still contain many harmful textile materials such as cotton, polyester, and microplastics (Chan, 2022). Although brands and merchants will persist in greenwashing consumers about the detrimental impact their clothing has on the environment and human rights, it is incumbent upon consumers to hold them responsible for their conduct to promote improved methods and procedures.

For instance, Levi Strauss & Co., a long-standing company well known for its denim, started looking into and changing ways to help mitigate climate change as a brand in 2011. In late 2011, Levi's introduced their "*Water<Less*" approach, which established more than twenty distinct manufacturing procedures to minimize water usage and increase water efficiency (Levi Strauss & Co, 2020). This manufacturing process and newly adopted procedures can

include tumbling jeans with golf balls and bottle caps instead of fabric softener (Levi Strauss & Co, 2020). By utilizing these substitute methods for fabric softener, it has allowed the company to save ninety-six percent of the water used before *Water<Less* (Levi Strauss & Co, 2020). As of 2020, Levi's has saved over 3 billion liters of water and recycled an additional 5 billion liters with the adopted *Water<Less* method (Levi Strauss & Co, 2020). As of 2021, about seventy-six percent of Levi's products are produced under their *Water<Less* approach (Levi Strauss & Co, 2021, April). Levi's also recognizes that almost 470 million people worldwide will be categorized as high stress by the year 2030, but with the *Water<Less* approach, the company is adjusting their water usage in their manufacturing factories (Levi Strauss & Co, 2020). They will be moving their factories to more local rather than global locations that might be facing high levels of water scarcity (Levi Strauss & Co, 2020). Levi's continues to express their prioritization of sustainability and want their consumers to be aware of the changes and the brand is taking towards it.

“Saving water is more important than profits. That’s why we invited other apparel companies to our Eureka Innovation Lab - so they could learn how to implement our Water<Less® practices in their own factories.” (Levi Strauss & Co, 2020)

During the same year, Levi's also unveiled their *Recycle and Reuse Guidelines* for their production facilities, where guidelines *“aim to minimize the environmental impact of freshwater usage in water-scarce areas by encouraging the reduction of water consumption through water reuse”* (Levi Strauss & Co, n.d.). The program overall was designed to *“provide standards to encourage preservation of fresh water by reducing water consumption in the supply chain through water recycling”* (Levi Strauss & Co, n.d.). Under this new program and guidelines, the brand focuses on intaking less water, reliability on a guaranteed volume of quality

water, and reducing their use of freshwater (Levi Strauss & Co, n.d.). The guidelines mandate that a minimum of 20% of the water used during manufacture be recycled which allows pieces to qualify as a *Water<Less* product (Levi Strauss & Co, 2020). Not only will it be meeting *Recycle and Reuse Guidelines*, but also supporting their *Water<Less* campaign goal. By following these guidelines, the company can avoid fines and the possibility of being shut down by the local government because of water restrictions as most manufacturing facilities are now local rather than global (Levi Strauss & Co, n.d.). *Recycle and Reuse Guidelines* continues to make efforts to reduce their use of freshwater and replace it with recycled water to minimize their water footprint (Levi Strauss & Co, n.d.).

In 2017, Levi's also launched their new climate action strategy which includes setting high goals to cut carbon emissions in our owned and operated facilities as well as throughout our international supply chain (Levi Strauss & Co, 2018b, December 10). The new set targets under this action strategy are aggressive in their aims and timeframes in order to reduce carbon emissions in the apparel industry as quickly as possible (Levi Strauss & Co, 2018a, July 31). The company is committed to obtaining all of their electricity from renewable sources by making investments in renewable energy across all of our owned and operated facilities (Levi Strauss & Co, 2018a, July 31). Through energy efficiency improvements and investments in renewable energy, they are expected to reduce 90% of all owned-and-operated facilities' greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Levi Strauss & Co, 2018a, July 31). In addition, through an innovative public-private partnership with the International Finance Corporation's Partnership (IFC) for Cleaner Textiles (PaCT) to provide suppliers with technical expertise and access to low-cost financing to support sustainable energy and water investments could result in a 40% reduction in GHG emissions in the supply chain (Levi Strauss & Co, 2018a, July 31).

Levi's will be able to fulfill their obligation under the terms of the Paris Agreement to prevent global temperatures from rising by more than 2 degrees Celsius by implementing such climate action plans (Levi Strauss & Co, 2018b, December 10). As a result of the successful climate action strategies just after five months and continuation of obligation to the Paris Agreement, Levi's felt confident that they could join the Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action (Levi Strauss & Co, 2018b, December 10). Alongside the Paris Agreement, the Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action addresses the climate effect of fashion along its whole value chain by bringing together top fashion businesses, retailers, supplier groups, and others (Levi Strauss & Co, 2018b, December 10).

In addition, in 2021—roughly ten years after the first significant sustainability approaches—Levi's introduced their *Buy Better, Wear Longer* campaign, pledging to produce designs that will be in style all year long and composed of recyclable and renewable materials (Levi Strauss & Co, 2023 September 12). Levi's as a brand has always valued themselves on quality and ensuring that their products are durable (Levi Strauss & Co, 2023 September 12). With that, their *Buy Better, Wear Longer* campaign will allow them to encourage consumers to participate in their campaign by purchasing from them as their clothing durability and materials are meant to last generations (Levi Strauss & Co, 2023 September 12). With the first campaign launching in 2021, it became extremely successful that they relaunched the campaign the following year in 2022 (Levi Strauss & Co, 2023 September 12). Because the campaign featured well-known media figures, it had an international impact and gained recognition as the initiative that introduced sustainability into the global discourse (Levi Strauss & Co, 2023 September 12). The United Nations Environment Programme and the UN Climate Change-convened Fashion

Charter even acknowledged the campaign in 2023 for its sustainability commitments (Levi Strauss & Co, 2023 September 12).

In its next attempt to become a sustainable company, Levi's has joined the *Fashion for Good* sustainable initiative foundation, which complies with certain rules and regulations regarding the production of denim for a better environment (Levi Strauss & Co, 2021). Shredded plastic bottles and wasted polyester fabric are processed into chips and used to create recycled polyester, which is subsequently used to create the usable fiber materials used in our newest designs (Levi Strauss & Co, 2021). Recycled polyester additionally lowers their reliance on fossil fuels and requires less energy to produce than virgin polyester (Levi Strauss & Co, 2021). Furthermore, Levi's also pledged in 2018 to cut emissions by 90% in owned and operated facilities, convert those facilities to 100% renewable electricity, and cut emissions by 40% throughout our supply chain by 2025 (Levi Strauss & Co, 2021).

Through such sustainable efforts, the cost of clothing does increase slightly. In the US, the average price of a pair of Levi's jeans is roughly fifty-three dollars, but the cost can range from as low as thirty-two dollars (Levi Strauss & Co, 2021; Numbeo, 2024). Due to their newfound popularity and adoption of sustainable practices, Levi's now generates over 4.9 billion dollars in revenue annually (Michelle, 2022). Despite the promises made by many fashion businesses to embrace more sustainable processes and methodologies, fast fashion is still in high demand because of its low cost. It's thought to be because fast fashion is so affordable that people are willing to forgo sustainability, ethical practices, and quality in favor of affordable apparel. Nonetheless, businesses like Levi's who have committed to implementing sustainable practices and procedures have seen an increase in yearly revenue. By applying pressure from consumers, organizations, and the government, retailers may be compelled to stop their

unsustainable practices and detrimental effects on the environment to provide a safe and sustainable work environment for workers producing ready-to-wear globally.

5.5. Consumer Awareness

According to a report published in 2020, the years 2010 to 2019 were the hottest in the previous 140 years, and 2020 was the warmest year since record-keeping began (Nabi, M.H., Hasan M., Chowdhury, A.T., Naz, F., and Hossian, M., 2023). These findings have brought attention to the fact that climate change is evidently happening globally and cannot be denied. Ecocritics, Marxism, and Corporate Social Responsibility, heavily promote respect for employees, society and the environment. As a society and consumer, it is our responsibility to learn about the causes of climate change and the people it affects.

Fast fashion is still damaging to the environment in many ways, such as increasing usage of plastic, greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption, the use of dangerous chemicals and dyes, and landfill waste. By 2050, the World Bank projects that more than 140 million people in Latin America, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa would be impacted by climate change (Mundial, 2018). Bangladesh and other developing nations are observed to bear the brunt of climate change's effects (Outlook, 2023). Workers in ready-to-wear industries are left to deal with the detrimental effects of climate change at work as it affects developing nations like Bangladesh.

Accountability can be started by raising customer knowledge of the common problems that fast fashion retailers' outsourcing of their production to developing nations with less strict laws and regulations causes for the ready-made clothing industry. In a 2023 study, 155 female consumers were interviewed and asked a series of questions regarding fast fashion and its environmental impact (Hageman, E., Kumar, V., Duong, L., Kumari, A., & McAuliffe, E.,

2024). In this study, over seventy percent of respondents associated fast fashion with cheap, low quality, and not sustainable (Hageman, E., Kumar, V., Duong, L., Kumari, A., & McAuliffe, E., 2024). In another 2023 study, 97 consumers, primarily female, participated in interviews and also asked a series of questions regarding fast fashion and its effect on the environment (Papasolomou, I., Melanthiou, Y., and Tsakouridis, A., 2022). Like the study previously mentioned, about seventy-five percent of respondents stated that they are aware and understand the social and environmental impact that fast fashion practices which include child labor and pollution (Papasolomou, I., Melanthiou, Y., and Tsakouridis, A., 2022). In both studies, it is evident that most consumers are aware that the fast fashion industry negatively affects the environment, however, it also demonstrates that consumers do not precisely know the knowledge of the actual effects (Hageman, E., Kumar, V., Duong, L., Kumari, A., & McAuliffe, E., 2024; Papasolomou, I., Melanthiou, Y., and Tsakouridis, A., 2022).

When consumers were asked, they were aware of the sustainable initiatives of fast fashion companies, about forty percent presented that they were aware of the initiatives, but when asked to name one initiative, over sixty percent of consumers were unable to (Hageman, E., Kumar, V., Duong, L., Kumari, A., & McAuliffe, E., 2024). In the second research study, when interviewees were asked if they feel disgusted when they learn how much waste and pollution are generated by the fast fashion industry, about eighty percent of consumers had strong negative views upon learning about the amount of trash and pollution produced by the fast fashion business (Papasolomou, I., Melanthiou, Y., and Tsakouridis, A., 2022). In the same study, more than eighty-five percent of interviewees had negative sentiments toward labor abuses and violations in the ready-made garment industry after learning about them (Papasolomou, I., Melanthiou, Y., and Tsakouridis, A., 2022). Consumers will be more inclined

to seek out fashion brands that uphold ethical standards for garment workers and sustainability as they become more aware of these practices. In the 155-consumer study, only about forty-five percent of respondents indicated that they would purchase clothing from sustainable brands and companies (Hageman, E., Kumar, V., Duong, L., Kumari, A., & McAuliffe, E., 2024). But the same study also showed that forty-five percent, almost sixty-six percent of consumers interviewed were willing to pay extra to purchase from clothing brands and retailers that are environmentally friendly (Hageman, E., Kumar, V., Duong, L., Kumari, A., & McAuliffe, E., 2024).

Raising consumer awareness can be accomplished in several ways, such as by having consumers do company research before making purchases. Fast fashion will continue to exploit and capitalize on garment workers from outsourced countries and damage the environment if the world continues to not hold retailers accountable. Consumers can hold retailers accountable for their actions by researching their methods of sustainability by visiting retailers' websites directly. There consumers can discover if their favorite brands and retailers are practicing sustainable methods like Levi's *Water<Less* program (Levi Strauss & Co, 2021). By purchasing from more sustainable retailers and brands, companies who do not practice sustainable methods will see a decline in sales and be pressured into practicing sustainability (Gazzola, P., Pelicelli, M., 2009). With constant and effective pressure from consumers, retailers and brands will be forced to become more sustainable and ethical in efforts to maintain a reputation, high consumer traffic, and optimize profits.

6. Discussion and Implications

6.1. Human Rights

I conducted this mixed-method of research study to explore the impact of fast-fashion retailers outsourcing textile workers in developing countries such as Bangladesh and the environmental impact it has on the world. The results of my investigation and my research questions reveal that the ready-made garment industry is exploiting garment workers for their own personal profit. My results also demonstrate that retailers and governments need to acknowledge the human rights violations textile workers are facing daily while working in the industry.

The data sets utilized in this study, found that textile workers in outsourced countries are continuously facing human rights violations in factories. The human rights violations found included unlivable wages and unsafe working conditions and hazards. Bangladesh has been the preferred location for more than 180 fast fashion retailers because it provides low-cost labor, innovative textile technology, and duty-free market access to the European Union (AQF, 2021). With Bangladesh as one of the biggest exporters of clothing to the US, textile workers there are increasingly vulnerable to poor pay, long workdays, and dangerous working conditions (Ahmed, 2004). Data demonstrated that Bangladesh textile workers roughly make about sixty-seven dollars a month when the average cost is approximately \$294 dollars per person, not including housing or utilities (Le, 2020; Cost, 2022; Long, X., & Nasiry 2022). Consequently, even though the textile business produces among the highest earnings, many workers—especially those with families—are left impoverished due to low pay (Le, 2020).

My data sets revealed that many fast-fashion factories not only offer wages that are unaffordable but also unsafe working conditions such as leaks, dim lighting, cracks in the walls, and insufficient ventilation (Le, 2020). As Bangladesh case studies, Tazreen Fashions factory and Rana Plaza, demonstrated retailers and supervisors ignored the many textile factory workers' multiple reports of issues with the infrastructure of the building, unsanitary conditions, and hazardous workstations (Le, 2020). As demonstrated by Tazreen Fashions and Rana Plaza, factories in Bangladesh still fail to consider the potential risks associated with ignored or unfixed reported issues, which could result in numerous catastrophic incidents (Manik, Yardley, 2012; Case Study: Tazreen Fashions (Bangladesh), 2024). Ready-made clothing companies continue to exploit their workers by profiting off their need for food and less strict labor rules and standards, even though fatalities have occurred in fast fashion facilities because of poor working conditions and pay. However, in the United States case of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, with much effort and persistence to hold retailers and factory owners (and supervisors) accountable, twenty-three trials were able to enact thirty-six new laws reforming the state labor codes. The textile industry will face pressure to put workers' rights first because of awareness that it is abusing and violating its employees' basic rights and interests.

This intersects with Marxism theory because Marxists argue that capitalism systems disregard the fundamental rights and interests of the oppressed in an effort of personal gain (Engle, 2008). Data demonstrated that the rapid expansion of fast fashion is accompanied by ongoing violations of the human rights of workers producing ready-made garments in countries where they are outsourced by fashion retailers. With fast fashion retailers continuing to disregard the fundamental rights and interests of textile workers, subjecting them to human rights violations at work in outsourcing countries, Marxism holds that fast fashion companies are examples of

capitalists who prioritize their own financial gain over the basic human rights of those who produce ready-to-wear clothing. Marxists demonstrated that it is essential to look at the historical materialism of human rights and highlight the injustices done by the fashion industry while analyzing the connection between fast fashion and violations of human rights (Pal, 2018). For decades, textile garment workers in outsourced countries, such as Bangladesh, have been deprived of basic human rights and adequate working conditions while the textile industry continues to flourish.

In my data set of media coverage within a one-year time frame of the Tareen Fashions building fire and the Rana Plaza building collapse, it was discovered that there is a dire need of media coverage in regard to human rights violations textile workers face. The numbers in the data set measured that only about 9% of newspaper articles released in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Bangladesh newspaper outlets included the terms *garment workers* and *violations*. Similarly, in the data set for Rana Plaza, it was measured that 4% of newspaper articles released in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Bangladesh newspaper outlets included the terms *garment workers* and *violations*. With such low documentation, under Marxism, it is believed that textile garment workers in outsourced countries will continue to be exploited by the fast fashion industry if there continues to be lack of documentation and media coverage of the violations garment workers sustain. Marxism maintains that because human rights were created by social conceptions and are not being adequately enforced worldwide, they can be seen as fictitious or mythological (Akani, nd; Esther, 2018). However, with the data set provided above of media coverage, Marxism believes that media outlets, such as journalists, need to be more present in conducting qualitative data on the issues garment workers are facing. Marxism also calls upon there to be community and government intervention to maintain and minimize violations

committed against garment workers. Marxists urge the media, society, and consumers to recognize that the capitalist system prioritizes individual profit over the human rights of textile workers (Akani, nd).

6.2. Environmental Degradation

The data in the environmental harm section showed that many fast fashion retailers are practicing unsustainable methods in production and manufacturing. Data demonstrates that the global clothing consumption will increase by sixty-three percent by 2030 if fast fashion continues to design clothing to be discarded after a few wears (Claudio 2007; Maratos, 2023). Creating millions of tons of clothing waste which lead to an increase of greenhouse gas emissions and carbon dioxide which is expected to increase by fifty percent within the next few years (Le, 2020; Whalen, V., & Fellow, S. M., 2022). Data also demonstrates that fast fashion clothing is extremely detrimental to the environment because it is constructed of materials that mostly contain plastic and synthetic fibers (Ganz, 2020). Where about sixty-nine percent of fast fashion clothing is made of synthetic fibers which can take hundreds of years to decompose fully and negatively impacts the oceans (Ganz, 2020; Maratos, 2023).

In addition to oceanic harm, fast fashion has also been accountable for ocean water loss (Whalen, V., & Fellow, S. M., 2022). Research data predicts that by 2030, a forty percent rise in water usage will upset the equilibrium between supply and demand for water (Elrod, 2017). With water contamination and consumption, wastewater contains such dangerous materials that it is almost hard to ever make the water safe again in most cases (Le, 2020). With such evident detrimental effects fast fashion has on the environment, fast fashion retailers continue their harmful methods, practices, and techniques. However, data did demonstrate that some retailers are making

efforts to minimize negative environmental effects through newly implemented methods, practices, and programs.

This intersects with Ecocriticism theory because it asserts that the main advantage of this theoretical framework is its applicability to training, attitudes, and behaviors (Newman, 2002). In addition, they emphasize the importance it is to understand how humans and the environment interact to pinpoint the main forces behind the structure and environmental impacts (Newman, 2002). Considering the continuing increase in fast fashion, it is critical to assess the relationship of environmental impact and the ready-made clothing business. Globally, fast fashion continues to create low quality clothing causing an insane increase in plastic use, greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption, hazardous chemicals and dyes, and landfill debris. Because fast fashion production is projected to grow on an upward trend, ecocriticism heavily urges to raise awareness of the negative effects the ready-made garment industry has on the environment (Newman, 2002).

It is essential to receive appropriate education on the subject to improve awareness of these detrimental impacts, since knowledge can highlight the full gravity of the problem, which is frequently ignored or overlooked (Phillips, 1999). The survey data aligns with the ideas of ecocriticism since it creates social implications as it creates pressure on brands and companies to modify their production and manufacturing processes in a sustainable way through activism, proper education, and awareness. A successful example of ecocriticism is Levi's *Water<Less* method, *Buy Better, Wear Longer* campaign, and their *Recycle and Reuse Guidelines*. Enough pressure from consumers was put on Levi's that they developed new methods and guidelines to meet consumers' demand for sustainability. Through activism and raising awareness, consumers can force companies to adopt sustainable practices and procedures by becoming more aware of the detrimental effects fast fashion has on the environment.

7. Limitations

This study did encounter limitations throughout the research process. The constraints and difficulties that were faced are described in the limitations. A few of the research's limitations include the limited information on abuses of human rights and the working conditions that real textile workers in Bangladesh and other developing nations must report. Existing data on abuses of human rights and the working conditions that real textile workers in Bangladesh and other developing nations do not accurately portray the situation in nations as it is most often generalized. The lack of number of data and statistics could greatly affect the accuracy of numerical data provided, as well as cases. Lack of information could also be the lack of reporting incidents by textile workers in fear of the consequences such as cut work hours, unemployment, or cut pay. The data and statistics reported in the study were estimates as actual numbers are significantly higher.

Limitations were also found while conducting my own data set of media coverage in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Bangladesh. While examining the number of newspaper articles released in all three nations' top newspapers, it was extremely limited when inputting key terms, *garment workers* and *violations*. Numbers dropped drastically after refining with key words. Therefore, making the data and statistics merely an estimate as it is believed that there was many more unreleased coverages nationally and internationally.

Similarly, limitations were found in the selection process of case studies. When using the nation, Bangladesh, to analyze human rights violations in the ready-made garment industry, data did not specify the total statistical number of cases that have occurred and occur regularly. The case studies on human rights violations in Bangladesh analyzed the violations of human rights

when a fatal disaster occurred. However, the data was limited on recent and updated numbers. The Bangladesh government's lack of laws surrounding the treatment of workers and their failure to enact responses to illicit activities can be seen as the main contributing factor to these limitations. In the case studies of human rights violations in the ready-made garment industry in the United States, studies describing human rights violations were difficult. Case studies data were very limited with existing data that was not recent and updated with no reported interviews or survey data from textile workers in the United States facing human rights violations. The United States upheld of enforcing laws and regulations can be seen as the main contributor to these limitations.

In addition, limitations were also found in the existing data on environmental impact. As there are no global definitions for pollution, greenhouse gasses, and more, it is difficult to rely on the numerical data provided. The lack of definitions creates a lack of accuracy in the numerical data provided. The data and statistics reported in the studies were estimates as actual numbers are significantly higher. Another limitation within the realm of environmental data was the abundance of detrimental effects fast fashion causes to the environment. With an abundance, I found it difficult to decide and divide data, but ultimately reported on the issues that were most detrimental to the environment. Existing data on brands' efforts toward sustainability lead to the limitations of results of enforcing newly adopted methods. Outcomes of newly implemented methods were often generalized and not given newly updated numerical data. In the Levi's *Water<Less* method, *Buy Better, Wear Longer* campaign, and their *Recycle and Reuse Guidelines* selection, it was difficult to achieve previous data of implementation. This limitation can be attributed to brands and companies desire of maintaining a reputable name by not displaying accurate or updated numerical data.

8. Conclusion

Textile workers' human rights violations in Bangladesh and detrimental environmental effects are not being effectively addressed. Often, ready-made garment industry factories and retailers in outsourced nations can commit acts of human rights violations against textile workers with few consequences. This is especially true for women and children as they make up the majority of the ready-made garment workers in outsourced countries like Bangladesh (Khurana, 2011; Manik, Yardley, 2012). However, it is important to understand that all ready-made garment workers deserve the right to a safe working environment. One way to mitigate human rights violations manufacturing buildings in outsourced nations is through consumer awareness and retailer accountability.

Marxism and Ecocriticism urges education and activism to hold retailers and the industry accountable for their exploitation of workers and deprivation of fundamental rights and freedoms. As the data set of media coverage measured a lack of coverage of violations garment workers face as only 9% of newspaper articles regarding the Tazreen Fashions fire included the terms *garment workers* and *violations*. In the same data set, it also measured a lack of media coverage including the terms *garment workers* and *violations* for the Rana Plaza building fire as only 4% of newspapers articles included the criteria. In efforts to increase media coverage, it is recommended that journalists conduct substantial qualitative research and conduct interviews of garment workers in Bangladesh. To gain awareness and hold retailers accountable, consumers are called upon to educate themselves in the clothing brands, retailers, and companies that they are shopping at. It is also important to consider the catastrophes that have occurred due to improper work standards and regulations such as the Tazreen Fashions factory fire and the Rana Plaza building collapse.

Becoming educated on the current human rights violations and the history of human rights in the ready-made garment industry, will allow consumers to actively pressure retailers and brands to provide ethical work standards and regulations. As fast fashion continues to grow tremendously, it is essential that consumers be cautious about where their items are being made and who is making their items.

Understanding the working conditions and inadequate income can drive consumers to purchase from retailers and brands who treat their workers respectfully. Ready-made garment workers face unlivable wages due to less restrictive laws and regulations in outsourced countries, which worsen as Bangladesh has become the home to over 180 fast-fashion retailers.

In addition to unethical practices towards ready-made garment workers in outsourced countries, fast fashion also heavily contributes to the detrimental effects of the environment. Fast fashion has become ranked third among global polluters as it continues to produce thousands of new products on a weekly basis. Fast fashion also contributes to negatively affecting the environment through increased plastic use, greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption, hazardous chemicals and dyes, and landfill debris. Similarly to human rights violations, Marxism and Ecocriticism urges education and activism to hold retailers accountable for their lack of sustainable practices, methods, and strategies. Through education and activism, retailers and brands will be pressured into changing their practices, methods, and strategies to more sustainable ways like Levi's have done throughout the past decade.

Ultimately, it is imperative for consumers to understand the complexity of the concerns surrounding human rights and sustainability in the fast fashion sector. Both problems entail a variety of players and methods. To effectively address this situation, consumers, retailers, local

government actors, international government players, and international organizations must work together to find a solution that works for both problems.

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