

Research Proposal:

‘What are the Ethical Concerns Associated with Fast Fashion and their Social and Environmental Impact?’

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Introduction

The research question used in this assignment is; 'What are the Ethical Concerns Associated with Fast Fashion and their Social and Environmental Impact?'

Fast fashion is the over production of cheap, trendy, low quality clothing driven by consumer demand (Kelleher, 2025), (Hayes, 2024). Fast fashion companies usually follow unethical practices such as poor labour and mass product waste. These companies include, Shien, Primark, Zara, H&M, ASOS and Nike.

Issues and impacts that arise from fast fashion production include labour concerns such as child labour, working hours, wages, health and safety. Environmental concerns such as wastage and chemicals used. Gender discrimination such as unfair treatment, assault and pay gaps. Societal norms such as pressure for newest clothes, bullying and self-image.

The topic matters as it is a major issue, being the second largest water consumer and liable for 10% of carbon emissions globally (Maiti, 2025). Problems with fast fashion are often not visible to consumers as a lot of the issues happen behind the scenes in factories, waste lands or countries with weak laws, making this topic important to research and bring awareness to.

Fast fashion is an ongoing and increasing problem pushed by hyper consumption with the industry being worth \$150.82 billion with a growth of 10.74% between 2024 and 2025 and expected to reach \$291.1 billion by 2032 (Cardona, 2025). Again, drawing importance to this severity of this topic.

This proposal will cover a rationale, aims and objectives, a literature review, a methodology, ethical considerations, expected outcomes, limitations and a timescale.

Rationale

After discovering the Rana Plaza disaster that happened in Bangladesh, it has encouraged this research project to bring justice to all who the people effect by the tragedy. 24th April 2013, the Rana Plaza 8 story factory building, holding 5 clothing factories, collapsed. This disaster killed over 1,100 people and injured or left people with life-long debilitating injuries, with accounts of people amputate their own limbs to get free from the wreckage. The search and recuse took over 17 days (Gov, 2014) (Campaign, 2013).

The topic has been chosen to highlight the problem and ask the question on how social and environmental factors are affected as a result of this industry. This topic has also been chosen out of personal interest of the subject in hopes to become more familiar and educated on the concerns and hopefully change personal consumer habits and

behaviours, as well as influencing the reader to do the same. This is an issue worth exploring as explained previously; it is an ongoing and uprising issue that will affect future generations and the planet.

Seeing information from articles, news and social media on this topic has influenced the desire to further research, collect data on the subject and has piqued interest out of concern and empathy around the topic.

Discovering issues within fast fashion such as labour exploitation, environmental issues, gender discrimination and societal issues frames the topic as a large problem that is important to research to improve transparency within this industry (Helm, 2024).

Research Aim and Objectives

The overall aim for this report is to investigate ethical concerns surrounding fast fashion and assess the link between the concerns and social and environmental impacts, in hopes to gain a wider understand of the extent of the issue.

Objective 1:

To explore the scale of fast fashions negative effect and identify who is responsible and what effect this will have now and in the future.

Objective 2:

To produce data collection using qualitative and quantitative methods and identify why these methods are suitable for this research proposal.

Objective 3:

To establish a clear and realistic timescale that matches the scope of the research proposal to support structure and manage stages of the proposal.

Objective 4:

To identify limitations within the research proposal and explain how they could affect the research and its outcomes.

Literature Review

Multiple concerns surround fast fashion practices, largely focusing on labour exploitation and environmental challenges. As well as the neighbouring concern of brands pushing the desire of excessive purchasing by providing new items each time a consumer visits a brand (Lana et al., 2025), contributing to mass consumerism. According to a Rest of the World investigation, they found that between July and December 2021, Shien released an average of 6,000 new designs every day, and up to 10,000 a day (Matsakis et al., 2021).

This comes at the expense of factories workers. BBC conducted an investigation where they visited 10 fast fashion factories and spoke to 20 workers in China. They discovered that majority of workers only have a day off each month and work around 75 hour weeks (Bicker, 2025), however, Chinese employment law states weekly hours should be 40 max and one rest day a week must be guaranteed (Global, 2024).

In 2024, South Korean authorities revealed high levels of toxic chemicals that are linked to heart disease, fertility issues and cancer were found in children's products from Shien, Temu and AliExpress, with items up to 428-times the allowed levels of hazardous chemicals such as phthalates (Le Monde, 2024), (Harrell, 2024) (Pinto & Mizrahi, 2025). Exposure to dust, cotton, fumes, raw materials and these chemicals are all present in the manufacturing process, with lack of PPE (Seidu et al., 2024), resulting in health-related issues in workers alongside long shifts with improper posture and poor environments causing effect to wellbeing and health (Boman et al., 2025).

Gender discrimination is existing in the industry especially in places like Bangladesh where women garment workers earn around 20% less than male workers (Menzel & Woodruff, 2021) and '8 in 10 have personally experienced or have witnessed sexual harassment and violence at work' (Actionaid, 2019) (Schirrer, 2019).

Interlinking environmental and social impacts of fast fashion Gillian Miller from the Ecology Centre, who has a Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering (Centre, 2026) explains that most cheap clothing is synthetic and synthetic fabrics are particularly bad at shedding microplastics, this means when washing clothes the microplastics from the synthetic clothing, that make up around 60% of fast fashion fabric (Balasaraswathi & Rathinamoorthy, 2022), end up into waters and landfills (Bruckner, 2024).

A study was conducted on six human placentas to identify if microplastics were present in the placentas. The results showed 12 fragments of pigmented microplastics in 4/6 of the placentas (Ragusa et al., 2021). This can be an effect of the microplastics from fabrics ending up in the water we drink, contaminating food and through the air we breathe (Cox, 2025).

Fashion has an effect on society's self-image and identity resulting in some individuals feeling pressure to buy the latest trends or not being able to keep up with trends and feeling different or left out (Choudhary & Singh, 2024). Trends like 'colour analysis' are fuelling production and consumers emotional responses leading to impulsive buying (Mulenga, 2025).

Looking at the future, improper disposal without upcycling or repurposing leads to large waste lands, chemical pollution and water wastage (Lana & Duarte, 2025). This is seen currently in Ghana protected wetlands where 15 million items of discarded garments arrive each week. Unearthed and Greenpeace identified this waste land and found threatened wildlife habits and inadequate wetlands used to source food an income

(Quashie-Idun et al., 2025) If the industry does not make change, then these waste lands will only grow and spread.

Methodology

This study will use a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to investigate the question; 'What are the Ethical Concerns Associated with Fast Fashion and their Social and Environmental Impact?'.

Quantitative research for this study will be carried out through secondary research as a data collection method. Secondary research is research collected and conducted by other people or organisations, this can be financial reports, official statistics, journals, books, reports or articles (BBC, 2022).

This method is suitable for quantitative research, in relation to this study, as it can provide accurate data from reliable sources such as government websites, specialised sources and peer reviewed sources. Secondary research also saves time and money as most sources are easily accessed and free to access. Furthermore, you do not have to wait on responses or produce participation forms, again saving time (Kelly et al., 2024).

The secondary research will be collected and analysed by themes and relevance to the research question. This data will help fill research gaps and aims to discover further knowledge and expertise on the question.

Qualitative research for this study will be carried out through a small-scale questionnaire and 3-4 interviews. Both will ask a series of questions to help understand the social impact of fast fashion and discover what consumers know about fast fashion and its ethical concerns.

These methods are suitable as it allows to pick a specific group of people to gain in depth data and firsthand experience. Both methods are also free and certain software's help analysis and present questionnaire data, including creating graphs to better understand results.

Participants will be over 18 and must have an understanding of fast fashion or have shopped from fast fashion businesses before. Participants will be a mix of individuals who disagree with fast fashion practices and those who dismiss practices. The questionnaire will be sent out via email and interviewees will be recruited using social media.

Questionnaire data will be analysed using software that clearly presents the data and results, this will include graphs and visual methods. Both the questionnaire and interview data will be grouped into themes similar to the secondary research, to showcase findings in relation to the question.

Ethical Considerations

When producing a questionnaire and interviews as part of the qualitative research an ethics form and participant form will be developed.

When individuals are carrying out either the questionnaire or interview it will be clearly written and explained that participation is voluntary, anonymous and confidential. From this a consent form will be signed by interviewees and explained to questionnaire participants that continuing acts as their consent to be part of this research. It will also be explained that no personal or sensitive data will be collected, and that results will be destroyed after the research project is complete. These statements will be carried out following UWTSD ethical guidelines and a UWTSD ethics form as been completed (See appendix A)

Expected Outcomes

This study is expected to show the scale of ethical concerns associated with fast fashion and how seriously damaging they are to the people and the world. It is also expected to show how these issues will affect future generations and highlight the need for change.

It is expected to show how damaging these organisations are and how they are not transparent about their practices which is affecting consumers views. The questionnaire and interviews are expected to uncover this through investigating consumers behaviours and viewpoints when looking at fast fashion. It is expected that consumers behaviours are not affected by the concerns, as these brands are so popular. The only concern affected is guessed to be price, quality and trends.

It is predicted that there is a large link between fast fashion and social concerns such as self-image, lack of money confidence and bullying. As well as the link between fast fashion and environmental concerns, with emphasis on global warming, waste lands and disposal culture such as wearing an outfit once. However, it is assumed there is an increase of purchasing from organisations such as Vinted, Depop and charity shops, that support a circular economy.

Limitations

Realistic limitations that may affect this research project have been identified, one being that using a questionnaire as a research method means relying on respondents to complete the questionnaire which may take some time, this could affect the research by pushing back progress on the project. This is also relevant to using interviews as a research method as interviewing times need to suit interviewees, which could also push back progress.

Finding the correct sample size and participants for both research methods may be difficult to seek as this is a small-scale research project. This could affect the projects timescale and accuracy in results if the correct sample of participants is not found.

Timescale

[illegible]

Appendix

Appendix A:

ETHICS FORM – IMH LEVELS 4 TO 6 & TAUGHT MASTERS 7 STUDENTS ONLY				
APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL				
In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically.				
The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of research activity: "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications". As such this covers activities undertaken by members of staff, postgraduate research students, and both taught postgraduate and undergraduate students working on dissertations/projects.				
The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the "principal researcher".				
This form must be completed and approved prior to undertaking any research activity.				
SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)				
1	Full Name:	Gabriella Jones		
2	Student Number:	2404975		
3	Email address:	2404975@student.uwtsd.ac.uk		
4	Programme of Study:	BMSF5007 Business Inquiry & Research		
5	Supervisor:	Helen Evans		
SECTION B: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials				
Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, location-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines. You may add rows to this table if needed.				
1	UWTSB Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice	☒		
2	UWTSB Research Data Management Policy	☒		
SECTION C: Details of Research Activity				
1	Indicative title:	Business Inquiry and Research Module Assignment 2		
2	Proposed start date:	05-03-2026	Proposed end date: 15-05-2026	
Introduction to the Research (maximum 300 words in each section)				
Ensure that you write for a Non-Specialist Audience when outlining your response to the three points below:				
- Purpose of Research Activity - Proposed Research Question - Aims of Research Activity - Objectives of Research Activity				
Demonstrate, briefly, how Existing Research has informed the proposed activity and explain				
- What the research activity will add to the body of knowledge - How it addresses an area of importance.				
September 2021 1 Ethical Approval Form – SoA&C Students Only				
ETHICS FORM – IMH LEVELS 4 TO 6 & TAUGHT MASTERS 7 STUDENTS ONLY				
3	Purpose of Research Activity - Understand a critical examination or qualitative and quantitative research exercises - Develop an undergraduate research proposal (this box should expand as you type)			
4	Research Question What are the Ethical Concerns Associated with Fast Fashion and their Social and Environmental Impact? (this box should expand as you type)			
5	Aims of Research Activity The overall aim for this report is to investigate ethical concerns surrounding fast fashion and assess the link between the concerns and social and environmental impacts, in hopes to gain a wider understand of the extent of			
6	Objectives of Research Activity: - To explore the scale of fast fashions negative effect and identify who is responsible and what effect this will have now and in the future. - To produce data collection using qualitative and quantitative methods and identify why these methods are suitable for this research proposal. - To establish a clear and realistic timescale that matches the scope of the research proposal in order to support structure and manage stages of the proposal. - To identify limitations within the research proposal and explain how they could affect the research and its outcomes. (this box should expand as you type)			
7	Proposed data collection methods (maximum 600 words) Provide a brief summary of all the methods that may be used in the research activity to collect data, making it clear what specific techniques may be used. If methods other than those listed in this section are deemed appropriate later, additional ethical approval for those methods will be needed. You do not need to justify the methods here, but should instead describe how you intend to collect the data necessary for you to complete your project.			
8	Participant observation without their knowledge? ☐ ☒			
9	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent? ☐ ☒			
10	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive? ☐ ☒			
11	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem? ☐ ☒			
12	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities? ☐ ☒			
13	Use of procedures that involve deception? ☐ ☒			
14	Administration of any substance, agent or placebo? ☐ ☒			
15	Working with live vertebrate animals? ☐ ☒			
16	Procedures that may have a negative impact on the environment? ☐ ☒			
17	Other primary data collection methods. Please indicate the type of data collection method(s) below: Details of any other primary data collection method: (this box should expand as you type) ☐ ☒			
If you have ticked NO to every question, then the research activity is (ethically) low risk and you may skip section E and continue to section F.				
If YES to any question, then no research activity should be undertaken until full ethical approval has been obtained.				
SECTION D: Scope of Research Activity				
Will the research activity include:		YES	NO	
1	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	☒	☐	
2	Use of interviews?	☒	☐	
3	Use of focus groups?	☐	☐	
4	Use of participant diaries?	☐	☒	
5	Use of video or audio recording?	☒	☐	
6	Use of computer-generated log files?	☐	☒	
7	Participant observation with their knowledge?	☐	☒	
8	Young offenders?	☐	☒	
9	Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator or a gatekeeper?	☐	☒	
10	People engaged in illegal activities?	☐	☒	
11	Others. Please indicate the participants below, and specifically any group who may be unable to give consent.	☐	☒	
Details of any other participant groups: (this box should expand as you type)		☐	☒	
Participant numbers and source Provide an estimate of the expected number of participants. How will you identify participants and how will they be recruited?				
10	How many participants are expected?	3-4 interview participants		
September 2021 3 Ethical Approval Form – SoA&C Students Only				
ETHICS FORM – IMH LEVELS 4 TO 6 & TAUGHT MASTERS 7 STUDENTS ONLY				
25 questionnaire participants (this box should expand as you type)				
11	Who will the participants be?	Participants will be over 18 and must have an understanding of fast fashion or have shopped from fast fashion businesses before. Participants will be a mix of individual who disagree with fast fashion practices and those who dismiss practices. (this box should expand as you type)		
12	How will you identify the participants?	Ask where participants if they have an understanding of fast fashion and/or shop from fast fashion brands (this box should expand as you type)		
Information for participants:				
24	Will participants be paid?	☐	☒	☐
25	Is specialist electrical or other equipment to be used with participants?	☒	☐	☐
26	Are there any financial or other interests to the investigator or University arising from this study?	☐	☒	☐
27	Will the research activity involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or the partial or full concealment of the specific study aims?	☐	☒	☐
28	If YES to any question, please provide full details			
Using voice recordings in interviews. (this box should expand as you type)				

SECTION F: Anticipated Risks

Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them.	
1 Risks to participants For example: sector-specific health & safety, emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information. If you have identified in section D that there are no participants then enter N/A and go skip to question 3. Risk to participants: Transfer of personal data and recording of data. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	How you will mitigate the risk to participants: Data will remain confidential and removed once module is complete. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
2 If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities. N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	
3 Risks to the investigator For example: personal health & safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest. Risk to the investigator: Emotional distress- e.g., child labour and animal welfare. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	
How you will mitigate the risk to the investigator: Can withdraw from questionnaire/interview at any time. Sensitive warning at start of interview and questionnaire. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	
4 University/institutional risks For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection. Risk to the University: Data protection. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	
How you will mitigate the risk to the University: Data will remain confidential and removed once module is complete. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	

5 Environmental risks For example: accidental spillage of pollutants, damage to local ecosystems. Risk to the environment: N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	How you will mitigate the risk to environment: <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
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SECTION G: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

If you have identified in section D that there are no participants then enter skip this section and continue to section H.

1 Feedback What de-briefing and feedback will be provided to participants, how will this be done and when? An email address will be issued for participants to contact for further details or results. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
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ETHICS FORM – IMH LEVELS 4 TO 6 & TAUGHT MASTERS 7 STUDENTS ONLY

2 Informed consent Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for participants to provide full consent before data collection begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded in accordance with prevailing data protection legislation. A screen before the questions start that acts as a consent form, informing participants that by clicking on the NEXT button they are providing consent. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
3 Confidentiality / Anonymity Set out how anonymity of participants and confidentiality will be ensured in any outputs. If anonymity is not being offered, explain why this is the case. Participants will not be asked for their name, email, or username. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>

SECTION H: Data Protection and Storage

Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 "GDPR" and the Data Protection Act 2018 "DPA")? 1 <i>"Personal data" means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ("data subject"). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person. Any video or audio recordings of participants is considered to be personal data.</i> If YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected: Audio will be collected to be used as research and to listen back on when conducting the project. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	YES X	NO
Does it involve special category data (as defined by the GDPR)? 3 <i>"Special category data" means sensitive personal data consisting of information as to the data subjects' – (a) racial or ethnic origin, (b) political opinions, (c) religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature, (d) membership of a trade union (within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992), (e) physical or mental health or condition, (f) sexual life, (g) genetics, (h) biometric data (as used for ID purposes).</i> If YES, provide a description of the special category data and explain why this data needs to be collected: n/a <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	YES 	NO X
4 Will data from the research activity (collected data, drafts of the thesis, or materials for publication) be stored in any of the following ways? 	YES 	NO

5 Manual files (i.e., in paper form)?	☐	☒
6 University computers?	☐	☒

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7 Private company computers?	☐	☒
8 Home or other personal computers?	☒	☐
9 Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks?	☐	☒
10 "Cloud" storage or websites?	☒	☐
11 Other – specify:	☐	☐
12 For all stored data, explain the measures in place to ensure the security of the data collected, data confidentiality, including details of backup procedures, password protection, encryption, anonymisation and pseudonymisation. All data will be kept in password protected cloud storage on the University Office 365 system which will not be shared. Audio/visual data will be transcribed and would be shown to participants to check accuracy of reporting. All participants will be given a unique identifier to ensure confidentiality and this list will be kept securely in the password protected folder. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		

Data Protection Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:	YES 	NO
13 Electronic transfer of data in any form?	☒	☐
14 Sharing of data with others at the University outside of the immediate research team?	☐	☒
15 Sharing of data with other organisations?	☐	☒
16 Export of data outside the UK or importing of data from outside the UK?	☐	☒

17 Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers?	☐	☒
18 Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	☐	☒
19 If YES to any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and Data Protection Act (2018) (and/or any international equivalent): All data will be encrypted and kept in password protected cloud storage on the University Office 365 system which will not be shared. All data transfers will be encrypted and password protected. All participants will be given a unique identifier to ensure confidentiality and this list will be kept securely in the password protected folder. The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted. In accordance with the DPA2018, participants will have the right to ask to see what data is held relating to them, and this data will be deleted immediately if the participant requests this, in which case the data will not be used in the project. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
20 List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity: Helen Evans (supervisor) and second marker. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
21 List who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the research activity: Helen Evans <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
22 Give details of data storage arrangements, including security measures in place to protect the data, where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form. All data will be encrypted and kept in password protected cloud storage on the University Office 365 system which will not be shared. The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted.		

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22 Confirm that you have read the UWTSD guidance on data management (see https://www.uwtad.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/) Confirm that you are aware that you need to keep all data until after your research has completed or the end of your funding	☒
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23 Confirm that you are aware that you need to keep all data until after your research has completed or the end of your funding	☒
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SECTION I: Declaration

The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants.

In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice which is published on the website: <https://www.uwtad.ac.uk/research/research-ethics>

1 Signature of applicant:	Gabriella Jones	Date: 13/03/2026
2 Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Helen Evans	Date:
3 Signature:		

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