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## Fast Fashion as a Reflection of Risk Society and the Culture of Unsustainability: Insights from Youth in Croatia

Fast fashion jako odzwierciedlenie społeczeństwa ryzyka i kultury nie zrównoważonego rozwoju – spostrzeżenia młodych ludzi w Chorwacji

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**Abstract:** This paper researches the fashion industry's role in perpetuating global unsustainability, linked to the sociological context of a risk society in high modernity. As one of the world's largest polluters, the industry significantly contributes to textile waste, further intensified by the fast fashion model, highly popular among younger generations worldwide. A 2024 online survey of 802 young respondents in Croatia, including students, high schoolers, employed youth, and the unemployed, reveals that most shop at fast fashion chains, trust brand labels, and do not prioritize biodegradability or recycled materials. While they express some concern about fashion waste, price remains their primary purchasing criterion. Although familiar with concepts of fast and ethical fashion, most are unaware of greenwashing and do not consider ethical practices important when buying clothes. Our findings indicate that the transition to sustainable fashion remains uncertain, not only due to the industry's profit-driven nature but also because of a broader cultural mindset that promotes overconsumption and a throwaway mentality. Without systemic changes to the entire fashion paradigm, the industry will continue to be a battleground between economic profit and environmental sustainability, with lasting consequences for future generations.

**Keywords:** culture of unsustainability, ethical fashion, fast fashion, young people, risk society, sustainable development

**Streszczenie:** Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia rolę przemysłu modowego w napędzaniu globalnego niezrównoważonego rozwoju, powiązanego z socjologicznym kontekstem społeczeństwa ryzyka w dobie "high modernity". Jako jeden z największych trucieli na świecie, przemysł ten w znacznym stopniu przyczynia się do marnotrawstwa tekstyliów, dodatkowo nasilanego przez model typu "fast fashion", który jest bardzo popularny wśród młodszych pokoleń na całym świecie. Internetowe badanie przeprowadzone w 2024 r. wśród 802 młodych respondentów w Chorwacji, w tym studentów, uczniów szkół średnich, pracujących oraz bezrobotnych młodych ludzi, ujawnia, że większość z nich robi zakupy w sieciach fast fashion, ufa uznanym markom i nie stawia na biodegradowalność ani materiały pochodzące z recyklingu. Chociaż młodzi ludzie wyrażają pewne obawy dotyczące marnotrawstwa spowodowanego modą, to jednak cena pozostaje ich głównym kryterium przy dokonywaniu zakupów. Chociaż nieobce im są pojęcia szybkiej, czy etycznej mody, to jednak większość nie zdaje sobie sprawy z praktyk greenwashingu i nie uważa by etyczne postępowanie firm było istotne przy zakupie ubrań. Nasze ustalenia wskazują, że przyjęcie zasad zrównoważonej mody pozostaje niepewne, nie tylko ze względu na nastawioną na zysk naturę przemysłu, ale również z powodu szerszego nastawienia kulturowego, które promuje nadmierną konsumpcję i mentalność wyrzucania. Bez systemowych zmian w całym paradygmacie działania przemysłu modowego, branża ta będzie nadal polem bitwy między zyskiem, a zrównoważonym rozwojem, co będzie miało trwałe konsekwencje dla przyszłych pokoleń.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kultura niezrównoważonego rozwoju, etyczna moda, szybka moda, młodzi ludzie, społeczeństwo ryzyka, zrównoważony rozwój

## Introduction

Many social analysts, particularly sociologists, emphasize that we are living in an era of high, late, or reflexive modernity, characterized by constant contradictions and tensions. The fashion system, as a highly profitable global industry, serves as a prime example of these dynamics.

On one hand, the fast fashion model promotes unsustainable practices, including rapid turnover of trends, accelerated consumption and disposal of clothing as well as mass production of low-cost garments using inexpensive materials. Additionally, the industry is often associated with socially unethical practices, such as exploitative labour conditions in sweatshops coupled with significant environmental degradation (Su and Chang 2018; Gwozdz et al. 2013; Brstilo Lovrić, Zujić, and Šuća 2021; Markuz and Ban 2023).

Research suggests that fast fashion items are designed to be worn fewer than ten times before being discarded (Joung 2014, 689), thus reinforcing a throwaway culture and mentality. On the other hand, sustainable fashion – particularly ethical fashion – presents an alternative paradigm rooted in slow production and mindful consumption. By emphasizing timeless, high-quality designs, it seeks to extend the life cycle of clothing while minimizing environmental and social harm. This approach also promotes corporate and social accountability, advocating for long-term sustainability (Markuz and Ban 2023).

Often described as “the most globalized industry in the world” (Biočina 2016, 25), some sources rank the fashion industry as the world’s second-largest environmental polluter, producing more greenhouse gas emissions than the aviation and maritime industries combined while significantly contributing to the growing textile waste crisis. Currently, around 70 million tons of clothing

are consumed worldwide each year, with estimates suggesting that this number will rise to 93 million tons in the coming years. On a global scale, 92 million tons of textile waste are generated annually, with projections indicating that this figure will reach 134 million tons by 2030 (World Economic Forum 2023; HGK 2023).

In the European Union alone, approximately 5.8 million tons of textiles are discarded annually, which equates to around 11 kilograms per person (European Commission 2022). Globally, a truckload of textiles is dumped in landfills or incinerated every few seconds, while less than 1% of used textiles are recycled into new clothing (European Commission 2022).

The environmental toll of the fashion industry is further evident in the processes of textile production and dyeing, which are responsible for around 20% of global water pollution (HGK 2023). For instance, the production of a single T-shirt requires approximately 400 litres of water, while producing one pair of jeans demands as much as 2,700 litres (Tabishat 2022, 54). Additionally, an estimated 200,000 tons of dye end up in wastewater annually. In countries such as India, China, and Bangladesh, the chemicals used in these processes are often discharged directly into nearby rivers, making them both visibly and invisibly hazardous to local communities (Tabishat 2022, 54). “If these dyes enter freshwater systems, they can cause oxygen depletion, negatively impacting drinking water and irrigation systems, as they are difficult to break down and persist in water for extended periods” (Burgess and White 2022, 39). Given that China produces over half of the world’s textiles, it is disturbing that one-third of its rivers are severely polluted and considered unsafe for human contact (Burgess and White 2022, 48).

The unsustainability of the modern fashion industry is also evident in its heavy

reliance on synthetic fibres, which decompose slowly or not at all. For example, polyester, now used in 60% clothing, doubled in the amount compared to 2000 and accounts for the emission of 282 billion kilograms of carbon dioxide, three times more than cotton (Burgess and White 2022, 29).

The risks associated with the fashion industry extend beyond environmental concerns and are also deeply rooted in social inequalities as industry employs approximately 57.8 million workers, yet their wages account for only 1.8% of the final retail price paid by consumers (Biočina 2016, 22). This disparity largely stems from the widespread outsourcing of production to less developed countries in the Global South (Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, Cambodia, Ethiopia, etc.), where labour rights are poorly regulated. Consequently, workers often face exploitative conditions, meagre wages, and exposure to hazardous chemicals in unsafe garment factories, commonly referred to as sweatshops (Brstilo, Krešić, and Vučković 2016, 290). The industry's disregard for worker safety has led to devastating consequences, as evidenced by historical and contemporary tragedies. Nearly a century after the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York, one of the deadliest industrial disasters, the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Bangladesh in 2013 underscored the ongoing dangers of the fashion supply chain. Housing multiple garment factories that produced clothing for globally recognized brands, the Rana Plaza disaster claimed 1,134 lives and left more than 2,500 workers injured (Brstilo, Krešić, and Vučković 2016, 289).

By focusing on young people in contemporary Croatian society, this paper builds on the argument that the fashion industry today actively contributes to the global culture of waste and unsustainability, aligning with Beck's (1992) concept of a risk society. This discussion will be further elaborated in the theoretical section, followed by an analysis and interpretation of the research findings.

## 1. Theoretical Perspective and Empirical Insights

The risks of today's society are abstract: they are not based on immediate experience, but on scientific insights (Inglehart and Welzel 2007, 47). According to sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992) the contemporary society is referred to as "risk society" whereby risk can be understood as "a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself" (Beck 1992) and which are then aimed to be minimized, channelled, prevented or defined (Brstilo Lovrić 2020, 73).

Following Beck's thesis (1992), risks produced in the late modernity induce systematic and irreversible harm as they generally remain invisible and only exist in terms of the knowledge about them, especially within media and science discourse. Furthermore, expansion and commercialization of risks do not completely break from capitalist logic. Instead, they push it to a new stage taking modern day risks, becoming factors of economic growth and highly profitable big-business risks (Brstilo Lovrić 2020, 77).

When defining risks, there are always "winners" and "losers", with the gap between them shaped by global power dynamics, transcending national borders. From the winners' perspective, the modern-day risks (re)produce international inequality by deepening the rift between the Global North and Global South. However, due to the boomerang effect, global risks democratically affect all social actors, creating a "global risk society". Moreover, this raises the question of unequal distribution of those risks because some social groups are more affected by those dangers than others. This is also the case with the global fashion system which generates two intertwined types of unsustainable risks that can be divided into environmental and social.

According to the *EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles* (2022) by European Commission, both the production and consumption of textile products continue



to grow along with their impact on the environment: global textiles production almost doubled between 2000 and 2015, while consumption of clothing is expected to increase by 63% by 2030, from 62 million tons now to 102 million tons in 2030.

The social risks reproduced by the fashion system indicate that the democratization of fashion has not resulted in the erasure of socioeconomic differences but has only shifted it from the consumer to the production segment (Valentić 2018, 71). While in developed countries clothing is becoming affordable for the majority, in underdeveloped countries a “textile proletariat” is emerging, whose human and labour rights are violated in the factories of today’s famous fashion brands. Rana Plaza, a textile factory in Bangladesh, collapsed in 2013 and became a symbol of the suffering of textile workers around the world (Brstilo, Krešić, and Vučković 2016). However, the fast fashion industry also poses risks to consumers in terms of health, which can be impaired by toxic substances in clothing (Burgess and White 2022).

With the help of marketing activities, efforts are made to mitigate the harmful aspects of a company’s business, such as the sense of environmental pollution (Razum, Pandža Bajs, and Zekić 2017) or creating an embellished corporate image without offering substantial change (Brstilo, Krešić, and Vučković 2016). These efforts are referred to as greenwashing which, according to the Oxford Dictionary, stands for misleading the public by falsely representing a company or product (clothing item) as environmentally responsible. This, in turn, causes further confusion and mistrust among consumers when making their choices, as well as deepening the existing issues in the fashion industry.

Studies across different countries show that Generation Z is increasingly aware of sustainability in fashion but often shows inconsistencies in practice. In Croatia, young consumers see themselves as drivers of change and support ethical practices

(Markuz, Plećaš, and Ban 2022), while U.S. research confirms stronger engagement with climate issues among Gen Z and Millennials compared to older generations (Tyson et al. 2021). Similar trends appear in Europe: Czech youth adopted more sustainable habits during the pandemic, such as wearing older or borrowed clothing (Šimek and Sadílek 2024), and Slovenian students motivated by ethics are more likely to buy second-hand items (Bezjak 2024), though broader concern for sustainability remains limited.

The Ethical Market Report (2023) further supports this growing awareness. Comparative studies highlight notable differences in youth attitudes toward sustainable fashion. German students show stronger concern for environmental and social issues when shopping and are more critical of corporate responsibility (Bögel et al. 2018), unlike Croatian students, who are generally less informed. Similarly, Kalambura, Pedro, and Paixão (2020) found that although Croatian and Portuguese youth understand the negative impacts of fast fashion, most still frequently buy new clothing from major fast fashion brands and rarely consider ethical or environmental factors in their purchasing decisions. When asked to select the five fashion brands they frequent most from a list of fifty, four of their top choices belonged to the Inditex group, along with H&M. Additionally, most participants admitted that ethical considerations, such as the origin of the product, play little to no role in their purchasing decisions, and they are generally not inclined to buy second-hand clothing.

Sociological research on the fashion practices of youth in Croatia revealed that fashion practices are multifaceted in terms of sustainability as young people generally condemned unethical practices of fashion retailers, this disapproval did not translate into their purchasing behaviour because they continued to shop extensively at fast-fashion chains, prioritizing trends and inexpensive trend-driven clothing over ethical and sustainable aspects (Brstilo Lovrić,

Zujić, and Šuća 2021, 63). A similar conclusion was reached by the study conducted by Razum, Pandža Bajs, and Zekić (2017) on factors influencing Gen Z's environmental awareness, which found that family plays a significantly greater role than media and peers, while environmental awareness alone does not translate into ethical fashion consumption.

Building on the established theoretical framework and a synthesis of existing research and authorial perspectives, this paper advances to an original empirical research of young consumers' attitudes and practices in Croatia regarding fast fashion and sustainability, followed by an outline of the research methodology and an in-depth analysis of the findings.

## 2. Research Description

The primary aim of this paper is to analyse the phenomenon of fast fashion and ethical fashion as examples of (un)sustainable fashion, focusing on the attitudes and practices of young people in Croatia. The findings in this paper are based on quantitative research conducted in the year 2024 using a survey questionnaire as a part of a broader research project that employed a mixed-methods approach for the purpose of a master's thesis. The inclusion criteria for participation in the research specified an age range of 18 to 34 years.

The survey questionnaire consisted of 34 questions divided into three thematic sections. The first section explored consumer habits, including shopping frequency, attention to fashion trends, and fashion-related priorities. The second section is about respondents' awareness of issues within the fashion industry, such as environmental and societal impacts. The final section addressed the sociological characteristics of the participants.

The research adhered to ethical standards, with all participants providing electronic informed consent to take part in it. Respondents were informed of the research objectives and purpose, assured of anonymity

and protection of their personal data. They were also notified of their right to withdraw consent at any time. The data was collected solely for scientific purposes, and the research received institutional approval from the Ethics Committee of the Catholic University of Croatia.

The survey was conducted using the LimeSurvey online platform, and the link to the questionnaire was distributed via social media to encourage broader participation. In total, 802 research participants completed the survey, with their characteristics summarized in Table 1.

Female respondents were significantly overrepresented (84.4%) compared to males (15.6%), which is expected given that fast fashion brands primarily target a younger female audience (Chatvijt et al. 2018), and this gender imbalance should be considered when interpreting the findings. The youngest age group, between 18 and 22 years old, accounted for the majority of participants (58.9%), followed by those aged 23 to 27 years old (34.9%). The predominance of students in the sample (76.9%) further underscores the demographic profile of the respondents. Additionally, the majority identified as religious (64.6%) and reported relatively low monthly incomes between 200 € and 400 € per month (56.2%).

The main methodological limitations of this research stem from the online survey format, which limited direct interaction with respondents and the ability to clarify potential ambiguities. Additionally, the non-probabilistic sample limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader youth population in Croatia, though efforts were made to enhance diversity by including students, adult high school students, and both employed and unemployed individuals, with a substantial sample size (N=802).

## 3. Data Analysis

As can be seen from figure 1, regarding following fashion trends, approximately the same proportion of research participants stated that they follow trends (35.3%) or are

**Table 1.** Characteristics of research participants (N= 802)

Variables		%	N
Sex	Women	84.4	677
	Men	15.6	125
Age	18 – 22 years	58.9	472
	23 – 27 years	34.9	280
	28 – 34 years	6.2	50
Status	High school	6.6	53
	Students	76.9	617
	Employed	15	120
	Unemployed	1.5	12
Religiosity	Religious	64.6	518
	Atheists	18.1	145
	Undecided	17.3	139
Monthly income	200 – 400 €	56.2	451
	400 – 600 €	17.7	142
	600 – 1000 €	15.1	91
	1000 € and more	11.0	88

unsure (38%), while the smallest share indicated that they do not follow fashion trends (26.7%). A substantial majority of respondents (73.4%) reported shopping at fast fashion retailers such as Zara, H&M, or Bershka, while smaller shares indicated that they do not shop at these stores (15.5%) or were uncertain (11.1%), just like in Kalambura et al. (2020). This confirms the detected paradox of mass exclusivity. On the one hand, young people claim not to follow trends, but on the other hand, they all buy the same brands and notice how alike they look (Brstilo Lovrić, Zujić, and Šuća 2021).

Nearly half of the respondents (48.8%) expressed trust in labels regarding the origin and production of clothing, compared to 15.5% who distrusted such labels, and 35.7% who were undecided (Fig. 1). This confirms the results of the comparative study of both Croatian and German students in which the German participants showed more scepticism towards the labels in comparison to Croatian respondents (Bögel et al. 2018). The majority (41.6%) are concerned about the environmental impact of fashion waste, while close to a third (30.5%) were uncertain, and a quarter (27.8%) indicated no concern. The majority

(62.7%) of respondents do not purchase ethical clothing made from recycled materials, over a quarter (27.1%) are not sure about it, and only 10.2% confirmed engaging in such practices (Fig. 1). This confirms the results of the comparative study of Croatian and Portuguese youth (Kalambura et al. 2020). Regarding the biodegradability and recyclability of packaging, the majority (55.6%) considered it unimportant, while nearly equal shares were uncertain (22.2%) or regarded it as important (21.2%).

The results reveal a clear ambivalence between theory and practice. While young people frequently shop at fast fashion chains – major polluters that perpetuate a culture of waste – they also express concern about the impact of fashion waste on ecosystems and the environment. However, their actions often contribute to maintaining the status quo; they do not purchase recyclable clothing, and issues such as biodegradability and recyclability of apparel are not prioritized. This discrepancy aligns with findings from both domestic and international studies, which indicate that young people express a strong desire for greater social engagement and advocate for sustainability practices, environmental protection,

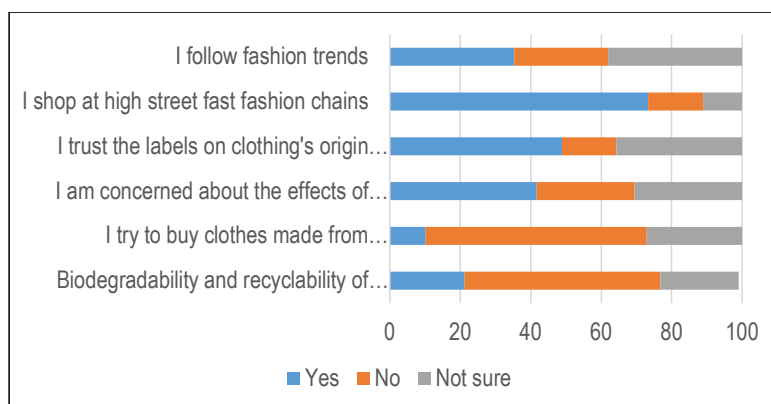


Figure 1. Fashion attitudes and practices

and social activism. Yet, they often struggle to translate these commitments into tangible, actionable behaviours (Brstilo Lovrić 2023; Tyson, Kennedy and Funk 2021; Chan and Wong 2012, Grilec 2018). This is influenced by uncertainties, distrust, and a lack of knowledge, as a survey by Mesić et al. (2023) revealed that over half of consumers are uncertain about their understanding of the term *sustainable packaging* due to limited availability and inadequate information and presentation of sustainably packaged products.

When asked about their fashion priorities (see Fig. 2), respondents identified a clear hierarchy, with price ranked as the most important factor for 85.3% of the young people surveyed, followed by material (77.7%) and quality (75.1%). Price thus emerges as the primary determinant shaping the fashion practices of young people in contemporary Croatian society. This finding aligns with similar global (Joergens 2006) and local studies (Kalambura et al. 2020). It underscores the impracticality of expecting a sustainable fashion future without addressing this factor. Consequently, it can be anticipated that fast fashion will continue to dominate, primarily as a cheaper alternative to ethical consumption. It reopens the matter of democratization of fashion.

Most respondents (81.4%) were familiar with the fast fashion concept, compared

to 18.6% who were not (Fig. 3). This can be linked to a previous study which, while focusing on Generation Z, showed that environmental awareness alone does not translate into ethical fashion consumption (Razum, Pandža Bajs, and Zekić 2017).

The majority (84.8%) of research participants affirmed their knowledge of the term ethical fashion, while 15.2% were unfamiliar with it (Fig. 4). This affirms the argument of Markuz et al. (2022) about how environmental awareness among young people, especially Generation Z, in the context of the fashion system leads to celebrating sustainable practices in the industry. These responses show that young consumers mostly came across the anti-term for fast fashion when discussing the modern-day fashion system and the issues it is facing. This might imply that young people do not make their consumer choices out of pure ignorance or lack of information. What is more, these results could align with the insights of Brstilo Lovrić, Zujčić, and Šuća (2021) about young consumers prioritizing style, trends and price, while disregarding the harmful impact of the industry.

Most respondents (61.8%) stated that they were not familiar with the term *greenwashing*, while only a third (38.2%) indicated that they were familiar with it (Fig. 5). This is not surprising considering they already claimed to trust the labels of the clothing pieces,



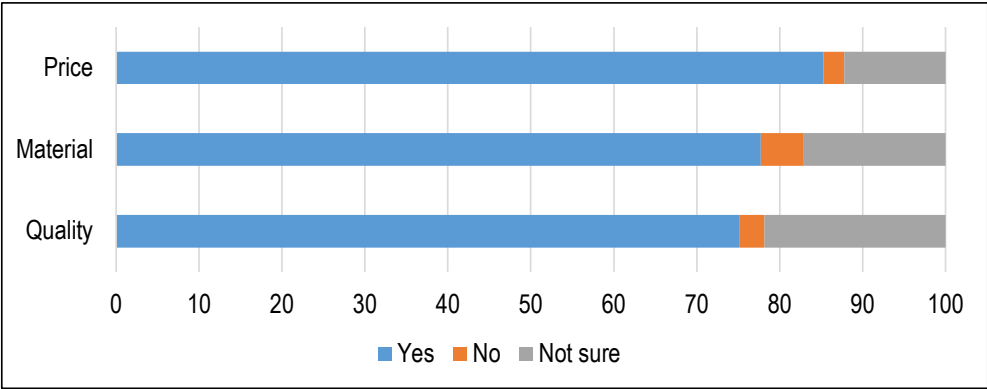


Figure 2. Fashion priorities

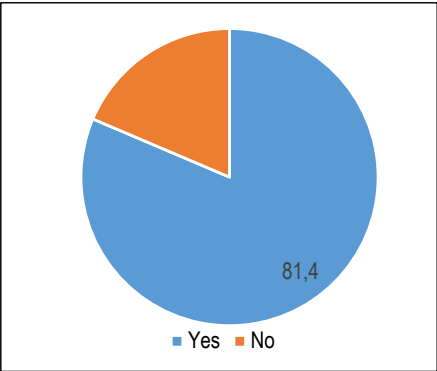


Figure 3. Familiarity with fast fashion

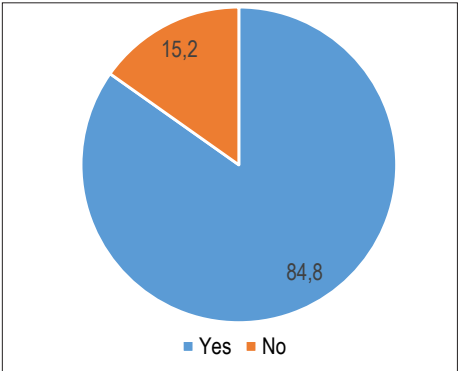


Figure 4. Familiarity with ethical fashion

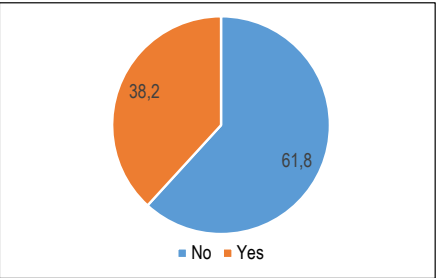


Figure 5. Familiarity with greenwashing

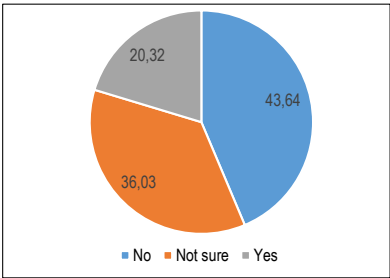


Figure 6. The importance of fashion brand ethics

especially since the findings of Bögel et al. (2018) showed that Croatian students demonstrated less knowledge and scepticism regarding sustainable practices in the fashion system compared to German students. However, this is interesting considering that other studies suggest that consumers’

awareness of these deceptive practices was growing (Muzhen et al. 2025). Most of the survey participants (43.7%) did not consider fashion brand ethics important, while over a third (36%) were undecided, and a fifth (20.3%) stated that it was important to them (Fig. 6). These findings align

with existing research (Brstilo Lovrić, Zujić, and Šuća 2021). Building on these findings, Joergens (2006) concludes that young people possess a certain level of awareness and knowledge about ethical consumption and occasionally purchase products from this category, often expressing criticism toward the fashion industry. However, ethical considerations are not the primary drivers of their fashion consumption.

Respondents expressed their opinions about the obstacles to practicing ethical consumption (see Fig. 7), where every second respondent (53.2%) stated that they did not have enough information, a third of respondents (33.4%) answered that they did not know where to buy, i.e. which brands are ethical, some of them stated that they do not have time (26.9%). As some related studies have shown, price and style are key factors influencing young people's consumption of ethical fashion, as well as its potential for wider adoption in the future (Joergens 2006). Therefore, this research also considers additional barriers to ethical fashion consumption among young people, particularly the lack of information and distrust in the fashion system, as highlighted by some authors (Tallontire et al. 2001). Their findings suggest that what distinguishes ethical consumers from those who are not yet engaged is the need for greater incentives to adopt ethical practices.

Respondents were also given the option to provide open-ended answers, with the majority highlighting that sustainable clothing is too expensive and beyond their

socio-economic means, as expected given their lower socio-economic status, which is reflected in their monthly income levels and the proportion of students in the sample (Table 1). Notably, some participants expressed scepticism about sustainability labels, doubting that any fashion brand can be 100% sustainable. Others mentioned that sustainable fashion does not align with their personal style or taste. Additionally, they pointed out issues with second-hand clothing, such as unpleasant odours, defects from damage, or worn-out materials. Some responses justified a preference for fast fashion, citing its affordability and accessibility, while a few participants noted that they intend to invest in sustainable clothing over time.

## Conclusion

Fashion has always reflected changes and trends in societies, being a tool for identification, socialization and communication. The consumption of fashion is most prevalent in the lifestyles and everyday practices of youth culture around the globe, celebrating their freedom of choice, rejection of authority and the right to self-expression while also posing significant environmental and societal risks. The fashion system, as a lucrative global industry, has shown signs of change by introducing an increasing number of green collections. However, in practice, these efforts often amount to marketing-driven and superficial transformations, frequently falling into the realm of PR strategies rather than genuine sustainability shifts.

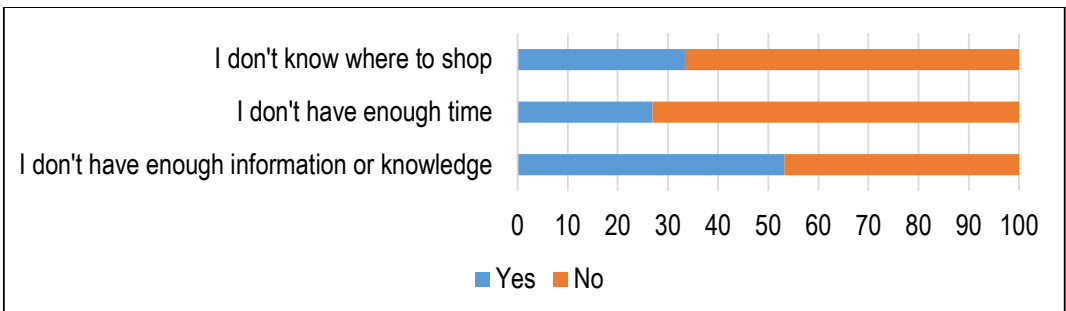


Figure 7. Obstacles to ethical consumption

Our findings suggest that, while research participants, as young people, are somewhat aware of the environmental issues within the fashion industry, however, this awareness does not translate into tangible behavioural changes or a strong motivation to adopt more sustainable choices. Fast fashion consumption remains dominant, and interest in ethical fashion is notably low. In this context, youth engagement with fashion serves as a reflection of the broader risk society we inhabit – both globally and locally.

One of the key paradoxes emerging from our research is the contrast between respondents' perceived detachment from fashion trends and participation in mass exclusivity. Although only one-third of respondents claim to follow fashion trends, the vast majority regularly shop at fast fashion retailers such as Zara, H&M, and Bershka. This suggests an unconscious adherence to dominant fashion norms and a lack of critical engagement with the ethical and environmental implications of fast fashion. Nearly one in two respondents express trust in clothing labels regarding the origin and production of garments, indicating a low level of awareness about potential greenwashing practices within the fashion industry. Furthermore, most participants do not consider biodegradable or recyclable packaging important, further reinforcing the limited environmental consciousness in this context. Financial constraints likely contribute to this behaviour, as fast fashion appeals not only to those with limited purchasing power but also to trend-driven consumers drawn to its affordability and ever-changing collections. This confirms that environmental awareness alone does not necessarily translate into ethical consumer practices.

A possible explanation lies in the contemporary cultural context of consumer society, which increasingly links material goods and status symbols to lifestyle, making it challenging for young people to break free. The fashion industry leverages this cultural

pattern, playing a significant role in what Pope Francis refers to as the *throwaway culture* – a system that perpetuates social exclusion and toxic materialism through the relentless cycle of discarding and replacing goods (2015, 16, 22, 43). Pope Francis calls for a new way of life and an alternative development model, emphasizing the necessity of ecological conversion as a lasting transformation, one that must also involve a shift within communities (2015, 154).

In this regard, Sadowski (2021, 1-2) stresses the importance of adopting an alternative cultural model. He situates this within the broader concept of a culture of moderation, which opposes consumerism by promoting a redefined understanding of progress, a communal mindset, and a lifestyle rooted in reflexivity, responsibility, and solidarity. Accordingly, some Croatian sociologists conclude: "The change must be profound and broad in the Western model in order to achieve a more significant effect. In addition to the necessary political changes, it is necessary to bring changes in one's own life" (Brstilo Lovrić, Brgles and Mravunac 2024, 50).

The issue encompasses both macro and micro dynamics, where we can advocate potential steps toward shifting from a culture of unsustainability to more sustainable lifestyle models. Fashion, as both a symbolic and material domain, is at the forefront of this transformation, requiring systemic change in how we produce, consume, and value clothing.

Given the limitations of this study, the findings suggest that transforming the fashion system is a systemic challenge. Future research would benefit from more balanced sampling and the use of complex analytical methods to better understand gendered and behavioural patterns in sustainable fashion consumption. This calls for a structural approach that combines market-driven dynamics with socially responsible practices and future-oriented public policies, opening opportunities for new

fashion paradigms and broader social models focused on the common good and a sustainable future.

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