



PART 1

Read the text below and answer questions 1–13.

THE TRUE COST OF FAST FASHION

Fast fashion is often described as a retail revolution built on speed, but it is more accurately a production system engineered for high turnover. Instead of treating clothing as a durable good, the model treats garments as short-lived units designed to be replaced quickly. This logic resembles a linear economy: resources are extracted, converted into products, sold at scale, and then discarded. Low prices and constant “newness” make this cycle feel normal to consumers, while the hidden costs are distributed across supply chains, waste systems, and environments that do not appear on a receipt.

Overproduction is not an accident but a structural feature. Brands do not only manufacture to meet forecast demand; they manufacture to maintain constant novelty and occupy retail space with frequent drops. That increases the likelihood of unsold stock, which may be discounted aggressively, moved into secondary markets, or destroyed to protect brand positioning and avoid storage costs. The crucial point is that surplus still contains “embedded impacts”: land for fibres, water and heat for processing, chemicals for dyeing, packaging for shipping, and fuel for transport. Even a garment that is never worn has already consumed energy and generated emissions.

Material sourcing amplifies these impacts because fast fashion optimises for low input costs, not long product life. Conventional cotton can depend on intensive irrigation and pesticide use, especially in regions where pests are prevalent and water is diverted from already stressed river systems. Synthetic fibres such as polyester and nylon are derived from fossil fuels and therefore carry upstream emissions from extraction and refining. Their popularity is driven by cost, durability, and performance, yet those same properties create persistent pollution. During ordinary laundering, many synthetics undergo microplastic shedding, releasing tiny fragments that pass through wastewater systems and accumulate in waterways and soils. Unlike visible litter, these particles are difficult to capture at scale and can persist for long periods.

The most visible human costs cluster in manufacturing, where the pressure for low prices and rapid turnaround collides with weak labour protections. The Rana Plaza legacy still shapes how observers understand garment supply chains: safety disasters revealed that cheap clothing can be enabled by unacceptable risk and fragile oversight. Yet the underlying problem is often supply chain opacity. Production is frequently outsourced through layers of contractors and subcontractors, and work can be shifted to unregistered sites when orders surge or deadlines tighten. Brands may publish codes of conduct and



commission audits, but inspectors can be misled by coaching, selective documentation, or advance notice. This diffusion of responsibility makes it easier for abusive practices—such as excessive overtime, wage violations, and unsafe conditions—to persist while public-facing commitments remain intact.

Fast fashion also reshapes consumer psychology in ways that stabilise the system. When garments are priced like disposable items, repair becomes irrational: it can cost more to mend a seam than to buy a replacement. Planned obsolescence in clothing is rarely mechanical; it is cultural and aesthetic. Trends are accelerated by social media, where novelty is rewarded and repeating outfits can feel like a social penalty. At the same time, individual “choice” is constrained by what is affordable, available, and heavily advertised. This does not remove consumer agency, but it shifts the debate from blaming individuals to analysing how pricing and marketing architectures steer behaviour toward frequent purchasing.

Waste is the predictable endpoint of this high-turnover model. Many countries report textiles as one of the fastest-growing household waste streams, driven by both volume and short use cycles. Donation systems cannot absorb unlimited inflows, and the export of used clothing can overwhelm local markets in receiving countries, undercutting domestic producers and distorting prices. Recycling is often promoted as a technical fix, but the material reality is stubborn: blends are difficult to separate, trims and dyes complicate processing, and fibre quality typically degrades with each cycle. As a result, “recycling” may become downcycling into lower-grade products, which delays disposal but does not eliminate the need for virgin inputs.

Policy responses increasingly target incentives rather than simply encouraging better shopping habits. Extended producer responsibility (EPR) is one prominent approach, shifting financial responsibility for end-of-life management onto brands so that waste becomes a cost of doing business rather than a burden on municipalities. Transparency rules can require companies to map suppliers and report environmental impacts, making it harder to hide behind complex subcontracting. However, critics argue that disclosure alone can become performative if it is not paired with enforcement and limits on overproduction. A credible transition would therefore combine durable-design standards, stronger labour protections, and economic signals that reward longevity—so that profitability depends less on selling more units and more on keeping garments in use for longer.

Questions 1–5



Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

- 1** The passage suggests that fast fashion encourages people to replace clothing after relatively little use.
- 2** The passage says brands destroy unsold stock only after attempts to discount it or sell it through secondary markets have failed.
- 3** The passage states that cotton production always requires heavy pesticide use and intensive irrigation in every region.
- 4** The passage suggests that labour abuses may continue even when brands publish ethical codes and run audits.
- 5** The passage indicates that exporting used clothing can overwhelm markets in receiving countries and harm local producers.

Questions 6–10

Select the correct answer.

- 6** What does the passage emphasise about overproduction in fast fashion?
- A** It happens only when forecasting is inaccurate.
 - B** Surplus garments still impose environmental costs because impacts are embedded during production.
 - C** It is limited to small brands trying to build visibility.
 - D** It reduces waste by keeping inventory scarce.
- 7** Why does the passage suggest accountability is hard to enforce in garment manufacturing?
- A** Most factories refuse to share any information about materials.
 - B** Production is concentrated in a single site that brands directly control.
 - C** Subcontracting can move work to unregistered locations outside effective oversight.
 - D** Audits are always unannounced and therefore unreliable.
- 8** What does the passage imply about consumers' responsibility for fast fashion's harms?
- A** Consumers are fully responsible because advertising has little influence.
 - B** The main cause is individual taste rather than pricing.
 - C** Responsibility lies entirely with manufacturers, not buyers.



D Consumers matter, but their choices are shaped by affordability, availability, and marketing.

9 What limitation of textile recycling is highlighted in the passage?

A Blended fabrics are hard to separate and fibre quality typically declines with each cycle.

B Recycling is legally prohibited for inexpensive clothing.

C Most textiles can be recycled repeatedly without any loss of quality.

D Recycling increases fibre strength as processing is repeated.

10 Which policy approach mentioned would make brands financially responsible for waste management?

A Voluntary “conscious collection” advertising guidelines

B Extended producer responsibility

C A ban on social media fashion marketing

D Mandatory seasonal limits on runway designs

Questions 11–13

Match each statement with the correct stage, **A–C**, below.

List of Stages

A Raw materials and fibre production

B Manufacturing and supply chains

C Waste and end-of-life

NB You may use any letter more than once.

11 Donation and export systems may struggle because discarded clothing volumes can exceed what can be absorbed by second-hand markets.

12 Brands may fail to detect poor working conditions when orders are shifted to unregistered subcontractors.

13 Producing some artificial fibres involves environmental impacts linked to obtaining and processing fossil-based raw materials.

Answer Key

1. TRUE

2. NOT GIVEN

3. FALSE



4. TRUE

5. TRUE

6. B

7. C

8. D

9. A

10. B

11. C

12. B

13. A