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FAST FASHION BUSINESS MODEL: A REVIEW OF INNOVATION POTENTIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS

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ABSTRACT: The fast fashion industry has revolutionised the clothing industry by emphasising rapid production, low cost and trend responsiveness. However, its environmental and ethical consequences raise concerns about long-term sustainability. This article aims to conceptually examine whether fast fashion constitutes a platform for innovation or a source of environmental degradation, by synthesising key academic and industry sources and systematically comparing the practices of leading global companies. The analysis is based on a structured review of the literature, including the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, which were used to identify key studies related to the topic. The study also includes a comparative assessment of selected industry practices. A thematic framework was applied to evaluate business model innovations and environmental trade-offs across leading global companies. Key characteristics of fast fashion business models were categorised by their level of innovativeness and environmental impact. The findings show that while fast fashion enables significant innovations in supply chains, digital design, and customer engagement, these advances often coexist with unsustainable practices such as resource overuse, waste generation and consumerism. The article concludes by outlining critical trade-offs between innovation and sustainability and suggests directions for transforming fast fashion into a more circular and responsible model.

KEYWORDS: business model, fast fashion, sustainable development, environment

Introduction

The fast fashion business model has become a dominant trend in the clothing industry in recent years. This concept refers to the rapid production model adopted by retailers to sell inexpensive clothing in a variety of styles available for purchase in a short period of time (Fang, 2023). The essence of business models is based on the methods of creating value while simultaneously capturing part of this value for the company. The fast fashion business model is a modern modification of the concept of value creation, which fits into the framework of the broadly understood economy 4.0. The article presents a literature review and an analysis of leading companies in the fast fashion industry. An analysis of global leaders was made to understand their management strategies, environmental impact and market reactions. All company-related information presented in this article is based solely on publicly available data derived from academic publications, industry analyses, and official sustainability reports. The inclusion of company names serves exclusively academic and illustrative purposes and does not imply any legal or evaluative judgment.

Companies use a variety of supply chain management strategies, which allow them to quickly respond to changing consumer trends (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Tokatli, 2008). At the same time, mass production and short product life cycles lead to excessive resource consumption and increased waste generation, which poses a significant threat to the environment (Kozłowski et al., 2012; Cline, 2012). "Fast fashion products contribute significantly to global textile waste, and many companies lack the capacity to manage used clothing in a circular economy" (García Medina & Salinas Vázquez, 2025). Studies highlight the need to address concerns about the ethical implications of the fashion industry, including issues related to sustainability, fair employment practices and environmental impact by brands and maintaining brand integrity on social media platforms (Pérez et al., 2021).

This study does not aim to present original empirical research. Instead, it provides a conceptual contribution that explores whether the fast fashion business model fosters innovation or exacerbates environmental degradation. This is achieved through a structured synthesis of literature, supported by a PRISMA-based selection protocol and a comparative analysis of selected international companies operating in the sector.

The results of the conducted analysis emphasise two main accents: the fast fashion business model allows companies to generate significant profits, while on the other hand, it contributes to causing significant ecological problems. The conclusions presented in the text emphasise the need for a sustainable approach to clothing production to minimise negative environmental effects. Ensuring sustainable development within the fashion industry has become a key challenge for the future, as emphasised in numerous studies (Fletcher, 2008; Joy et al., 2012; Niinimäki & Hassi, 2011).

An overview of the literature

The practice of enterprises is realised in two ways in connection with science. On the one hand, enterprises use the theory that has been created to apply it in their environment. On the other hand, researchers try to answer numerous questions, making an effort to learn the essence of a given business as well as the possibilities and motives of decisions made in enterprises. In this context, it is important to address the subject of business models. Despite the emergence of numerous studies and publications, no single, universally accepted definition of this term has been adopted. This is primarily due to the complexity and diversity of applications in various economic sectors.

One of the most popular approaches defines a business model as "a description of the principles by which an organisation creates, delivers, and captures value" (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). It contains three key aspects related to value, which reflect the priorities of running a business. Teece, on the other hand, defines a business model as "an architecture of products, services, and information flows, including a description of the various business actors and their roles; a description of the potential benefits for business participants; and a description of the sources of revenue" (Teece, 2010). This approach emphasises the interactions between different parties, which is important when describing the complex supply chains characteristic of the manufacturing sector. In this perspective, Zott and Amit define a business model as "a system of activities designed and implemented by an

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enterprise in order to exploit business opportunities" (Zott & Amit, 2010). There are also definitions that emphasise the enterprise's ability to adapt and be flexible. Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart emphasised the need to adapt business models in the manufacturing sector caused by globalisation and intensification of competition (Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010). In their opinion, an efficient business model of an enterprise should be flexible and able to integrate new technologies and management practices. From the perspective of contemporary priorities in manufacturing enterprises, the business model of these organisations comprehensively reflects the structure of creating and delivering value through effective management of production processes, the supply chain and innovations. In the face of market and technological changes, manufacturing-based enterprises must constantly analyse and update their business models to maintain and then strengthen their competitive position and implement the assumptions of sustainable development.

The fast fashion business model has become a major trend in the clothing industry in recent years. Its assumption is to quickly introduce new clothing collections to the market, inspired by the latest fashion trends. Over the years, this approach has gained importance, and global companies have begun to dominate the clothing production market. "The removal of barriers to international trade and the continued incorporation into production of countries with very low labour costs has fuelled the rapid growth of fast fashion companies." (Miranda & Roldán, 2023).

Fast fashion is an approach not only to production and distribution but also to the impact on society and the environment. The concept of fast fashion has been known for about two decades. Barnes and Lea-Greenwood described it as "a system of clothing production and distribution that focuses on the rapid design, production and delivery of clothing to retail in short time cycles, which allows for rapid response to changing fashion trends" (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). Shortening organisational time is important in this context. "An extremely shortened product life cycle in which clothing companies offer consumers new designs just weeks after they appear on the fashion runway" (Joy et al., 2012). The time aspect is the basis of the approach of the fast fashion business model. It moves away from the classic seasonal design of clothing in favour of a continuous and dynamic process of change. It is therefore a business model that combines "quick response, frequent assortment changes, fashionable design and affordable" (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015).

Authors even notice that modern consumers lack awareness of traditional clothing companies. Elías-Zambrano noticed that society must notice and understand that there is an alternative to fast fashion, which is slow fashion (Elías-Zambrano et al., 2023). The fast fashion industry, to be identified, has been described by a few features that differentiate it from classic enterprises (so-called slow fashion). The distinguishing features of fast fashion companies, compared to slow fashion, are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison between slow fashion and fast fashion industries

	Slow fashion	Fast fashion
Basic orientation	Quality	Time
Model base	Designer dictate (Sull & Turconi, 2008); make and sell model (Day, 2011)	Attracting opportunities (Sull & Turconi, 2008); Adaptive model (Day, 2011).
Key Features	Quality over quantity, responsibility, sustainability, transparency, eco-friendly, ethical, multi-season fashion.	Highly responsive supply chains, fast market reach, sensitivity to trends "from fashion shows", image of product shortage, new product every week, flexibility.
Production and materials	Local manufacturers, recycling, high-quality materials (cotton, silk, linen, hemp).	Outsourcing, external suppliers, production in low-wage countries, synthetic materials (polyester, nylon, inorganic cotton).
Price	Higher, reflecting quality and durability	Lower, designed for quick turnover

Source: author's work based on Sull and Turconi (2008), Day (2011), Gockeln (2014).

Table 1 presents a comparative overview of slow fashion and fast fashion models, highlighting fundamental differences in strategic orientation, value creation, and environmental responsibility. While slow fashion emphasises quality, durability, and local production rooted in ethical and ecolog-

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ical values, fast fashion focuses on speed, adaptability, and cost-efficiency. The comparison also shows a shift from traditional craftsmanship to scalable, outsourced mass production – often using synthetic materials. These distinctions reflect not only different operational logics but also opposing long-term implications for sustainability.

At the same time, this industry is characterised by several innovations implemented at different stages of the company's operation. The first feature of innovation is a Fast Supply Chain. Companies implement innovations in the supply chain to shorten the time from design to delivery of products. They use modern production and logistics systems that allow for quick response to changing fashion trends (Christopher & Towill, 2000). The next innovative feature is Digital Design. Companies in this industry use digital technologies to design and create clothing prototypes. They are used to quickly create and modify patterns (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Data Management is extremely important at each stage of operation. Modern analytical tools and big data are used here, which allows for collecting and analysing data on customer preferences. As a result, this leads to more effective inventory management (Turker & Altuntas, 2014). In response to the growing pressure from both supervisory and government bodies, fast fashion companies are also implementing innovations in sustainability. Modern approaches to recycling materials, new types of fabrics and responsible production can be indicated here to reduce the impact on the environment (Caniato et al., 2012). Innovative approaches can also be observed around external activities. In the area of multi-channel sales (Omnichannel Retailing), integration of various sales channels is implemented, such as mobile applications, stationary and online stores. This allows customers to seamlessly shop in various channels and improves the perception of the store in the eyes of the buyer (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). New approaches to sustainability in fast fashion increasingly rely on collaborative consumption models, garment reuse platforms, and hybrid circular strategies (Zamani et al., 2021). These innovations challenge the conventional linear model and create pressure for systematic change. Another area of innovation is Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in the form of personalised offers, loyalty programs and interactions in social media. This increases the bond with the customer and meets their needs (Rathnayake, 2011). The presented categories of innovation are key to maintaining the competitiveness of companies in the dynamic environment of the fast fashion industry.

Interestingly, with the development of the industry in the fast fashion model, organisations emerged that exhibit characteristics of the so-called ultra-fast fashion business model. Table 2 summarises the distinguishing features of this model, including its operational speed, digital integration, and emphasis on high-volume, short-cycle production.

Table 2. Comparison of the fast fashion and ultra-fast fashion industries

	Fast fashion	Ultra-fast fashion
Source	Physical stores	Online, applications
Big data and AI	In selected areas	At every stage of the value chain
"Throwaway culture"	Creating a tendency to throw away unnecessary clothes	Creating a tendency to throw away unnecessary clothes + aggressive marketing using influencers
Speed priority	Production in regions with low labor costs, cooperation with large factories, creating "your own" celebrities	Matrix structure of suppliers, cloud management, individual designers
Assortment	About 500 new products per week	Up to 1000 new products per day
Price level	low	Low, even 50% lower than the competition
Corporate responsibility	Yes/No. Individual decisions of companies based on reporting	No. Lack of transparency, reporting. Declarative nature.

Source: author's work based on Uchańska-Bieniusiewicz and Obłój, (2023), McKinsey & Company (2022) and brand documentation.

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Table 2 expands the comparative framework by highlighting key differences between fast fashion and ultra-fast fashion companies. While both models rely on speed and cost-efficiency, ultra-fast fashion represents a more radical evolution, characterised by full digitalisation, higher product turnover, and lower pricing. Companies like FF-F exemplify this shift with massive daily product launches, AI-driven design cycles, and minimal reliance on traditional retail infrastructure. The operational logic of ultra-fast fashion is more fragmented, data-dependent, and responsive to social media dynamics, but also far less transparent and environmentally accountable.

Ultra-fast fashion companies have emerged primarily as online platforms or mobile applications. Their business logic relies heavily on the use of artificial intelligence, micro-trends, and fast design-to-market cycles. This allows them to capitalise on changing consumer behaviour but raises serious concerns about transparency and environmental responsibility.

Research methods

This study follows a structured narrative literature review integrating the PRISMA 2020 guideline (Page et al., 2021). The protocol comprised a database search, duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, full text eligibility assessment, and qualitative synthesis. The goal was to synthesise existing academic and industry knowledge on fast fashion business models, innovation strategies, and their environmental consequences. In addition, a conceptual framework was created linking innovation areas (e.g., supply chain, data analytics, sustainability practices) with corresponding business model features. This enabled consistent comparisons between companies and reinforced the analytical structure of the article.

Search Strategy

Searches were conducted in Scopus and Web of Science databases, using the following search string TS=("Fast Fashion") AND TS=("Business model*") AND TS=("innovation"). The search was limited to the period 2019-2025, to capture the most recent developments in the field. Only publications in English and Polish were considered. Document types were restricted to peer-reviewed articles and books.

Inclusion criteria

The eligibility of studies was determined based on both topical relevance and methodological quality. The inclusion criteria required that publications addressed the fast fashion or ultra-fast fashion sector with a clear link to business models, innovation and/or circular or environmental implications. Only peer-reviewed articles and books available in full text were considered. In contrast, the exclusion criteria ruled out studies focusing solely on technical issues of textiles without business model implications, papers dealing with generic supply chain management outside the fashion context, and purely commentary or opinion pieces without empirical or conceptual contribution.

Selection process

Two-stage screening was implemented, comprising an initial evaluation of titles and abstracts followed by a full-text assessment. The search identified 107 records (Scopus = 41, Web of Science = 66). After the removal of 19 duplicates, 88 records were retained for screening. Of these, 24 were excluded at the title/abstract stage. The remaining 64 full text were assessed for eligibility, of which 47 were excluded (26 out of scope, 12 conceptual only without a business-model link, 9 too technical/operational). Ultimately, 15 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the synthesis. The search and screening process is summarised in Figure 1.

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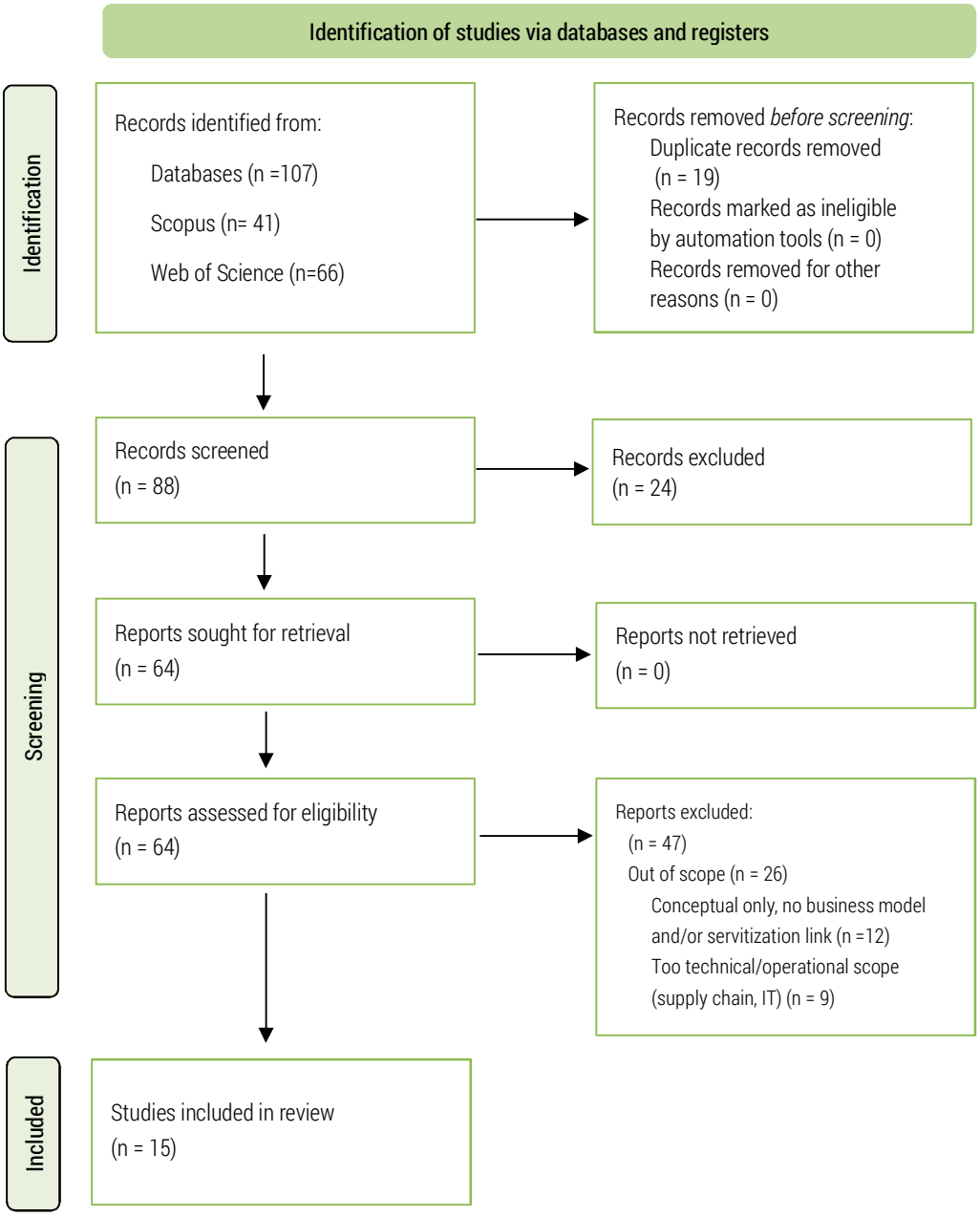

Figure 1. Flow Diagram of PRISMA process

PRISMA research results

The characteristics of the 15 studies included in the final synthesis are summarised in Table 3. This overview provides the empirical and conceptual foundation for the thematic synthesis and subsequent discussion.

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Table 3. Studies included in the systematic review

No.	Title	Authors	Year	Source / Publisher
1	Patrizia Pepe: Unconventional Innovation and Internationalization	Signori P., & Guercini S.	2019	Springer / Lecture Notes in Business Information Processing
2	The circular economy in the textile and apparel industry: A systematic literature review	Jia, F., Yin, S., Chen, L., & Chen, X.	2020	Journal of Cleaner Production
3	The Challenge of "Depeche Mode" in the Fashion Industry	Moran, C., A., Eichelmann, E., & Buggy, C. J.	2021	Sustainable Environment
4	The Sustainable Fashion Quest: Innovations in the Fashion Industry	Anguelov, N.	2021	New York: Productivity Press.
5	Business Model of Garment Enterprises: A Scientific Perspective	Jin, Y., Song, X., Tang, J., Dong, X., & Ji, H.	2021	Textile Research Journal
6	The Uniqlo Case: Fast Retailing Recipe	Kumar, R., & Majumdarr, S.	2022	Rutgers Business Review
7	A framework of circular business models for fashion and textiles: the role of business-model, technical, and social innovation	Coscieme, L., Manshoven, S., Gillabel, J., Grossi, F., & Mortensen, L.F.	2022	Science, Practice and Policy
8	The study of value network reconstruction and business model innovation driven by entrepreneurial orientation	Wang, C., Chen, M., Wang, Q., & Fang, Y.	2023	International Entrepreneurship Management Journal
9	From Fast to Slow: An Exploratory Analysis of Fashion Transitions	Abbate, S., Centobelli, P., & Cerchione, R.	2023	International Journal of Production Economics
10	Resale as sustainable social innovation: understanding shifts in consumer decision-making and shopping orientations for high-end secondhand clothing	Lichy, J., Ryding, D., Rudawska, E., & Vignali, G.	2023	Social Enterprise Journal
11	Business strategy and innovative models in the fashion industry: Clothing leasing as a driver of sustainability	Barletta, M., D'Adamo, I., Garza-Reyes, J. A., & Gastaldi, M.	2024	Business Strategy and the Environment
12	The Impact of Improving the Fast Fashion Business Model on Organization Performance: Case Study "Zara" Serbia	Jovičić, A., Savković, M., Mačužić, I., Milojević, D., & Aleksić, A.	2024	Springer
13	Artificial Intelligence-Based Conversational Agents Used for Sustainable Fashion: Systematic Literature Review	Manzo, D. S. H., Jiang, Y., Elyan, E., & Isaacs, J.	2024	International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction
14	Building a Bearable Future: Embracing Sustainable Fashion	Iormom, B. I., Diyoke, K., Eya, C. I., & Ishola, A.	2025	IGI Global Scientific Publishing
15	Advancing Business Strategy in End-Of-Life Management for the Fashion Industry	Bonifazi, G., D'Adamo, I., Grosso, C., & Palmieri, R.	2025	Business Strategy and the Environment

Recent scientific research on business models in the fast fashion sector highlights the importance of innovation and sustainable development. Signori P., & Guercini S. (2019) analyse the case of Patrizia Pepe as an example of unconventional innovation and internationalisation, demonstrating how pressure related to speed and flexibility influences the emergence of new ways of doing business. Circular economy approaches and innovations in business models are addressed by Jia et. al (2020), who have developed a conceptual model based on drivers, barriers, practices and indicators of sustainable performance for applying a circular economy in the textile industry.

The transformational challenges in the fashion industry are highlighted by Moran, Eichelmann and Buggy (2021), who presented how brands are struggling with cultural and operational pressures that require the reconfiguration of existing business models. Similarly, Anguelov (2021) analyse sustainable practices in the fashion industry, emphasising that business model transformation is crucial for integrating design with ethical and environmental imperatives. Jin et al. (2021) present typologies of business models for clothing companies that can be adapted to both the context of servitization and sustainable development.

The subsequent items presented in Table 3 strike a constructive tone for the discussion. Kumar and Majumdarr (2022), describing the case of Uniqlo, illustrates the implementation of a strategy of

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faster production and global expansion adapted to digital integration. Coscieme et al. (2022) propose a broader framework for circular business models in the fashion and textile industry, emphasising the interplay between technical and social innovations and the business models itself.

Among the latest publications, there is a noticeable trend towards focusing on transformations and restructuring. Wang et al. (2023) examine the restructuring of value networks as a driver of innovation in business models. Abbate et al. (2023) analyse the shift from fast fashion to slow fashion, pointing out how such changes determine modifications in consumer relations and supply chain logic. Lichy et al. (2023) expand on this theme by examining resale as a sustainable social innovation and show how second-hand markets are changing consumer decision-making in the luxury fashion industry.

Another business model for fashion companies that has attracted the attention of the research team of Barletta et al. (2024) is clothing leasing. The authors consider it a driver of sustainable business strategies, while Jovičić et al. (2024) assess the impact of the development and improvements of the fast fashion business model on organisational performance based on a case study of Zara. Manzo et. al (2024) illustrated how the use of modern technologies is changing consumer interactions and service logic, signalling the integration of digital technologies with the transformation of business models in the fashion sector. In studies from 2025, proposals for the concept of 'sustainable fashion' can be found, proposed by Iormom et al. (2025), according to whom it combines business model design with long-term sustainable development. Bonifazi et al. (2025) emphasise end-of-life management as a key element of circular fashion business models.

Across the 15 included studies, three cross-cutting insights emerge: (1) business model innovation in fast fashion is predominantly speed- and data-driven, (2) (circular strategies are emergent yet unevenly implemented, and (3) digitalisation simultaneously accelerates innovation and amplifies environmental trade-offs. These findings contextualise the divergence between fast and ultra-fast fashion models presented in a comparative framework (tables 1-2, 4). They also highlight persistent gaps in transparency standards and in the scalability of circular practices.

In addition to the PRISMA-based corpus (peer-reviewed articles and books), selected reports and company documents were consulted outside the PRISMA protocol to contextualise the firm-level comparison. These sources (e.g. reports by McKinsey & Company, Reuters, and corporate ESG disclosures) were not part of the systematic synthesis but served to illustrate practical dimensions of fast fashion strategies. The systematic search was conducted in Scopus and Web of Science with supplementary screening in Google Scholar and ResearchGate. Search terms included combinations such as "fast fashion", "ultra-fast fashion", "business model innovation", "fashion sustainability", "digital fashion", and "environmental impact on clothing industry". To maintain transparency, the process adopted key PRISMA principles, including predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria and iterative refinement of results, thereby enhancing methodological reliability.

Company Analysis and Data Synthesis

To analyse the structure of the fast fashion and ultra-fast fashion sectors, representative firms were selected based on criteria such as global market presence, business model characteristics (e.g. online-first, high frequency collection rotation), and scale of operations. These include FF-A, FF-B, FF-F, FF-D and others. All data refer exclusively to publicly available documents and academic sources. Company names are used for illustrative purposes within a consistent analytical framework. To maintain an analytical focus and mitigate any potential legal concerns, all company names used in the analysis have been anonymised using a coded system. Each code (FF-A to FF-F) corresponds to a distinct type of fast fashion business model, derived from publicly available sources including academic literature, sustainability reports, and company disclosures. The coding allows for a natural, comparative approach while preserving the informative value of real-world cases.

The following identifiers were used throughout the analysis:

- FF-A: A European based vertically integrated fashion retailer.
- FF-B: A global fashion group with centralised design and partial integration.
- FF-C: An Asian brand focused on tech-driven clothing production and logistics.
- FF-D: A UK online group specialising in low-cost, rapid production.

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- FF-E: A European discount clothing group focused on operational scale.
- FF-F: A Chinese online-native retailer using algorithmic design and micro-production.

The findings were derived by constructing comparative matrices (Tables 1-2 and 4) that juxtapose companies, business models, and innovation strategies along key thematic categories (e.g. sourcing, pricing, customer relationship, digitalisation, environmental practices).

Additionally, six innovation areas were identified that repeatedly appeared in the literature and company data: fast supply chains, digital design, data management, sustainability efforts, omnichannel retail and CRM.

Limitations

This study, while based on the PRISMA 2020 protocol, remains subject to several limitations. The synthesis is constrained by the coverage of the selected databases (Scopus and Web of Science), language restrictions (English and Polish only), which may omit relevant insights. Furthermore, the fast-moving nature of the fast fashion sector means that some of the findings could lose their innovative character. Nonetheless, this approach allows for a deep and contextual analysis of fast fashion models and how they evolve in real time.

Results

The fast fashion phenomenon drives a faster turnover of clothing, which results in the so-called throwaway culture phenomenon (Hassan et al., 2022; Bernardes et al., 2019; Brewer, 2019). According to research, increased demand for fashion products is observed among young people (Wai Yee et al., 2016). Perceptions of throwaway fashion differ between different generations. Those classified as Generation Y prefer to own more low-quality, cheap and fashionable clothing. So-called baby boomers, on the other hand, prefer to buy fewer clothes but of higher quality (Crewe & Davenport, 1992). The buy-use-throw-away concept thus represents an increasingly popular approach to clothing consumption. This assumption forms the basis for the development of the fast fashion industry organisation (Figure 2).

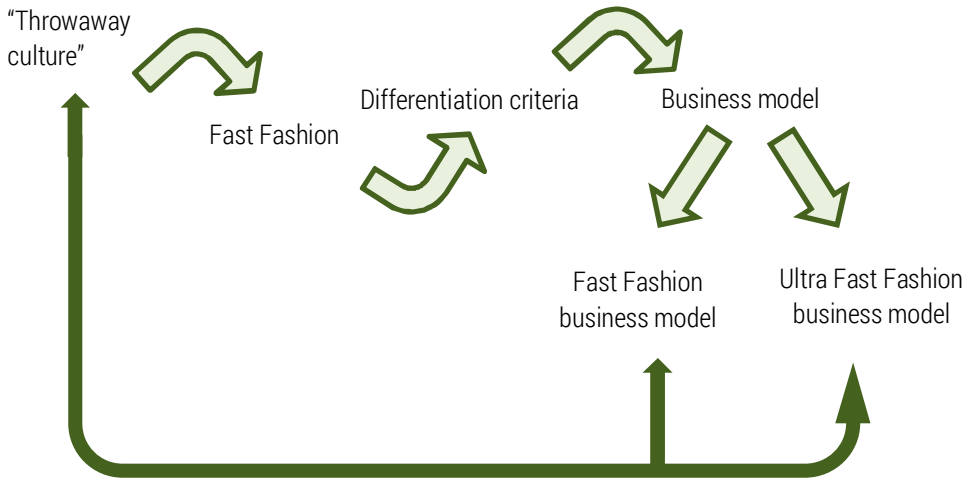

Figure 2. Reinforcing Loop of Fast Fashion and Consumer Behavior

As shown in Figure 2, the fast fashion industry operates within a self-reinforcing cycle. Social media influence, rapid trend turnover, and short product lifespans shape consumer habits and production practices. Companies respond with speed-focused, low-cost models that intensify the throwaway culture and increase environmental pressure.

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The throwaway culture is the starting point of the logic of the fast fashion industry. Depending on the adoption of the differentiating criteria discussed in Tables 1 and 2, these influence the form of the business model. In the fast fashion industry, a distinction can be made between the fast fashion and ultra-fast fashion business models. Depending on the form adopted, with varying intensity, these businesses influence the exertion of 'pressure' on consumers to increase throwaway culture trends. This pressure is primarily exerted in two ways. The first is fashion pressure. This is created by promoting new designs, electronic communication channels, and the use of celebrities, which are of great importance. "The fast fashion industry has gradually started to collaborate with internet celebrities to increase brand awareness and visibility. The brand can attract more traffic and increase sales by establishing social media platforms to build connections with consumers" (Wang, 2023). The second aspect of speeding up the cycle is to reduce the quality of the product. In this way, after a few or a dozen uses, the item of clothing is no longer reusable, and the customer must buy another product.

In 2022, online sales in the fashion industry (overall) amounted to approximately 20-25% of total sales. In the fast fashion sector, it was approx. 35-40% (McKinsey & Company, 20022). At the same time, according to a study from 2024, it is estimated that in Poland as many as approx. 80% of 18–24-year-olds take advantage of online shopping for clothing and accessories.

In the absence of a uniform classification list, an attempt was made to identify individual companies using the previously posited characteristics of the fast fashion industry. Table 4 describes the key differences between the biggest fast fashion brands practices, comparing aspects such as sales channels, usage of AI and Big Data and transparency level.

Table 4. Fast fashion global brands

Group*	Model Type	Sales Channel	AI/Big Data Use	Transparency
FF-A	Fast Fashion	Omnichannel	Moderate	ESG reporting available
FF-B	Fast Fashion	Omnichannel	Moderate	ESG reporting available
FF-C	Fast Fashion	Physical + Online	Low	Limited ESG data
FF-D	Fast Fashion/Ultra-Fast Fashion	Online only	Moderate	Minimal transparency
FF-E	Fast Fashion/Ultra-Fast Fashion	Physical + Online	Moderate	Minimal transparency
FF-F	Ultra-Fast Fashion	Online/App only	Advanced	No public ESG disclosure

* Company codes (FF-A to FF-F) refer to anonymised business entities selected for comparative purposes based on public domain data.

Source: author's work based on company reports, McKinsey & Company (2022), Uchańska-Bieniusiewicz and Obłój (2023).

Table 4 presents a comparison of major players in the global fast fashion market, categorised by model type, sales strategy, use of digital technologies, and transparency. While companies like FF-A and FF-B follow traditional fast fashion models with omnichannel sales and partial sustainability reporting, newer actors such as FF-F and FF-D adopt digital-first strategies with limited accountability. This contrast illustrates the structural divergence between established brands and disruptive entrants in the ultra-fast fashion space.

One model example of a fast fashion company is FF-F. The company was established as a native digital platform. It focuses mainly on online presence using so-called big data and AI algorithms. Its peculiarity is the relatively low transparency of internal operations (Uchańska-Bieniusiewicz & Obłój, 2023). As they describe themselves on their website, they are a global company using 'on-demand manufacturing technology to connect suppliers to our agile supply chain, reducing inventory waste and enabling us to deliver a variety of affordable products to customers around the world'.

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The innovation aspect of the fast fashion industry

As can be seen, significant emphasis is placed by companies on the development of innovations to achieve a satisfactory position in the fast fashion sector. Business model innovations in their specificity can be either evolutionary or revolutionary in nature (Bilińska-Reformat & Dewalska-Opitek, 2021). The evolutionary nature refers to small changes in areas of an already existing model. Rapid, revolutionary changes affect the entire model and create new opportunities for the company. "Solely focusing on product innovation is not enough anymore' (Gockeln, 2014). As a result of the research conducted, six areas leading to significant innovation of the fast fashion industry business model were observed. The first is the widespread **speed of the supply chain.** Quick and rapid responsiveness with the use of dedicated techniques, such as agile supply chains, just-in-time and quick response, can provide value. They can create a competitive edge in the market (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). For this reason, among others, many global brands such as Hugo Boss, Benetton, Inditex (owner of Zara) are abandoning collaboration with global supply chains and choosing manufacturing operations closer to the markets in which they operate (Li, 2023; Anzolin & Aloisi, 2021; Bianchi & Gonzalez, 2021). A second innovation feature is a **digital business trend**. This trend has gained momentum during the pandemic period. Digital business models allow companies to maintain sales in a changing environment. Digital fashion is more data-driven, collaborative, and crucial for a growing non-contact sociality (Akhtar, 2023). The pandemic has highlighted the need to shift priorities towards sustainability and responsible practices in all areas of the value chain (Li, 2023). A related trend is also **omnichannel development**. Omnichannel retail is defined as a synchronised operating model in which all channels are used in the company to support each other and are 'arranged' to present a common, uniform approach to the customer (Bernon & Cullen, 2016). This approach provides the buyer with access to various sources of a given entity at the same time, for example, a physical store, online, mobile application or social media (Beck & Rygl, 2015). Another source of innovation emerges from this area, which is the **development of consumption based on collaboration**. In the scope of the fast fashion industry, it is used by companies with scope to harvest the unique patterns of demand from customers, force the new trends by collaboration with celebrities and get feedback on the design from the buyers. Taking the example of FF-F "Through cooperation with Internet celebrities and stars, they publish fashion matching tutorials, wear and share content, and attract a lot of fans' attention" At the same time, buyers are encouraged to share their purchases and experiences on social media (Wu & Yang, 2024).

Another trend in the fast fashion industry that also occurs inextricably with the other parameters of innovation presented above is **the use of Big Data and AI**. Big data 'is a dynamic and intellectual asset that powers digital innovation (Akhtar, 2023). Fast fashion companies use big data and AI to design clothing, analyse trends, forecast sales and present products (Jin & Shin, 2020). The last area of innovation is the use of **material innovations**. When assessing the overall system of functioning of enterprises, it is noticeable that the priorities of the leaders of the fast fashion industry are focused on materials. For various reasons, new materials, fabric design or their combinations are sought (Lorenzoni, 2016). 'Innovation also encompasses the development of environmentally safe raw materials' (Akhtar, 2023).

Environmental problems

As researchers note, the industry is looking for new material solutions, but on the other hand, the 'fast fashion business model frequently goes hand in hand with the use of cheap, non-durable materials' (Bartl & Ipsmiller, 2023). "The disposable nature of fast fashion and throwaway culture is resulting in a serious environmental, social and economic problem" (Shirvanimoghaddam et al., 2020). These problems can be grouped into four areas: textile waste production, microplastic disasters, water losses, and ordinary CO2 emissions.

According to 2023 estimates, the fast fashion industry produces 92 million tons of textile waste and consumes 79 trillion litres of water (Li, 2023). The amount of waste is forecast to increase to 134 million tons per year by 2030 (Raj & Bajpai, 2022). Most of the industry's products are made from synthetic polymers such as polyester and nylon, which decompose slowly. There are still activities

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involving burning used clothing, which increases CO2 emissions as well as general environmental pollution. Another source of challenge for the industry is microplastic pollution. Due to the use of synthetic materials, microplastics are present in wastewater after the production process, which often enters waterways. Similarly, it is released into sewage treatment plants and the environment after each washing of clothes at home (Narisu, 2023). The textile industry is responsible for emitting approximately 20% of toxins into the world's water supplies (Nguyen et al., 2020). According to estimates, at least 1,750 litres of water are used to produce one long-sleeved shirt (and during this process, it produces about 1.6 kilograms of carbon emissions) (Wang, 2023).

Future research directions

The analysis of previous studies allows not only to learn about the current research and empirical state of the discussed issue but also to determine the direction of further research. As a result of the conducted research, the following tasks can be indicated. Firstly, the essence of legal regulators and their real impact on the functioning of the fast fashion business model. This is interesting because the largest producers can efficiently maneuver among regulations or even move production locations due to local regulations. The second issue is the limit of market saturation. Is it possible for this industry to achieve a state in which enterprises will be forced to intensify competition and, consequently, change business models. The area that business models take up is also the issue of its business ecosystem. The work addresses the issue of moving suppliers closer to the manufacturer's markets. However, other entities and the strength of influence with which producers affect them were not examined.

Due to the adopted form of a literature review and analysis of entities occurring in the industry, the work has several limitations. Firstly, the presented data may be subject to significant devaluation. The specificity of the industry requires frequent and repeatable research to accurately diagnose the market situation. The problem of accessibility of data on enterprises is certainly a limitation of the work. As presented, transparency and reporting in fast fashion industry entities is often very opaque, which makes it difficult to conduct analyses also from the point of view of scientific research. The so-called greenwashing also seems to be an interesting issue to take up in further studies. In the perspective of the challenges and environmental problems generated by the fast fashion industry and the growing ecological awareness of consumers, it is worth thoroughly examining the verification of 'unclean' practices focused not on real environmental protection but on building a positive image.

Conclusions

This study explored the fast fashion business model from a dual perspective: as a catalyst of innovation in global retail and as a significant source of environmental and social burden. Drawing on an integrative review of academic literature and industry reports, the research has demonstrated that fast fashion companies implement advanced innovations across various stages of their operations – including supply chain optimisation, digital design, data-driven marketing and omnichannel retailing. These strategies enable organisations to react quickly to trends, reduce time-to-market and offer low-cost, high-turnover collections that appeal especially to younger consumers.

At the same time, the analysis has shown that the success of fast fashion comes with a high environmental cost. The business model relies on short product life cycles, synthetic materials and aggressive production volumes that lead to large amounts of textile waste, carbon emissions and water usage. Moreover, the rise of ultra-fast fashion amplifies these negative effects by increasing the pace of consumption and minimising corporate transparency and accountability. The pressure on consumers-through trend-based marketing, social media influence and reduced garment durability – has fostered a "throwaway culture" that is increasingly difficult to reverse.

The comparison between fast fashion and ultra-fast fashion firms presented in the paper highlights key differences in terms of structure, scale, digital maturity and environmental commitment. These differences provide valuable insights for industry benchmarking and future policy develop-

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ment. Based on the findings, it is evident that meaningful transformation in the industry requires coordinated efforts from companies, regulators and consumers alike.

It is recommended that fashion companies integrate sustainable design practices, improve supply chain traceability, and invest in circular business models. Policymakers should consider setting stronger standards for reporting and environmental performance. Future research should address the role of regulation in incentivising sustainable behaviour, evaluate consumer attitudes toward eco-conscious brands, and assess how digital platforms shape fast fashion consumption patterns in different demographic groups.

This conceptual review contributes to bridging the gap between theoretical discourse and practical examples in the fast fashion sector, offering a structured platform for future empirical research and stakeholder guidance.

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Adam WIŚNIEWSKI

MODEL BIZNESU FAST FASHION: PRZEGLĄD POTENCJAŁU INNOWACYJNEGO I ZAGROŻEŃ ŚRODOWISKOWYCH

STRESZCZENIE: Branża fast fashion zrewolucjonizowała przemysł odzieżowy, kładąc nacisk na szybką produkcję, niskie koszty i reagowanie na trendy. Jednak jego konsekwencje środowiskowe i etyczne budzą obawy o długoterminowy zrównoważony rozwój. Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu zbadanie, czy szybka moda stanowi platformę dla innowacji, czy też źródło degradacji środowiska. Analiza opiera się na ustrukturyzowanym przeglądzie literatury, w tym wytycznych PRISMA 2020, które zostały wykorzystane do identyfikacji kluczowych badań związanych z tym tematem. Badanie obejmuje również ocenę porównawczą wybranych praktyk branżowych. Zastosowano ramy tematyczne do oceny innowacji modeli biznesu i rozwiązań środowiskowych w wiodących globalnych firmach. Wyniki pokazują, że chociaż fast fashion umożliwia znaczące innowacje w łańcuchach dostaw, projektowaniu cyfrowym i zaangażowaniu klientów, postępy te często współistnieją z niezrównoważonymi praktykami, takimi jak nadmierne wykorzystanie zasobów, wytwarzanie odpadów i konsumpcjonizm. Artykuł kończy się nakreśleniem istotnych kompromisów między innowacjami a zrównoważonym rozwojem i sugeruje kierunki przekształcania fast fashion w model bardziej cyrkularnego i odpowiedzialnego biznesu.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: model biznesu, fast fashion, zrównoważony rozwój, środowisko

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