

UNVEILING THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF FAST FASHION CONSUMPTION: THE ROLE OF LOWER MIDDLE CLASS IN ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS IN INDONESIA?

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ABSTRACT. This article delves into the impact and role of the lower middle class on Indonesia's environmental landscape. Despite their social and economic marginalization, this demographic heavily relies on cheap, easily accessible fast fashion for clothing, leading to detrimental environmental consequences such as ecosystem degradation and pollution. This research was carried out by conducting a literature review through library research, where the data came from library data collection. This study further analyzes literature regarding socio-economic dynamics and environmental problems. This approach unveiled the lower middle class's profound influence of fast fashion consumption on Indonesia's environment. The research highlights the lower middle class's pivotal role in fast fashion waste distribution, exacerbating environmental pollution. Hence, governmental intervention becomes imperative to regulate fast fashion production, manage waste, and restrict the influx of second-hand fast fashion businesses. The article concludes by emphasizing the lower middle class's dual role as both major consumers and victims of global capitalism in the fast fashion industry, necessitating state protection through various policy measures. These include elevating product quality standards, ensuring fair labor practices, enhancing consumer protection, and controlling the influx of foreign fast fashion products. Ultimately, the study underscores the necessity of comprehensive governmental interventions to mitigate the environmental repercussions of fast fashion consumption, safeguarding both the lower middle class and Indonesia's environment.

Kata kunci: Lower Middle Class; Fast Fashion Consumption; Environmental Impact; Government Intervention; Socioeconomic Class

ABSTRAK. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan pengaruh dan posisi masyarakat *lower middle class* terhadap kualitas lingkungan hidup di Indonesia. *Lower middle class*, yang terpinggirkan baik secara sosial maupun ekonomi, menggunakan produk-produk *fast fashion* yang murah dan mudah didapat untuk memenuhi kebutuhan pakaian mereka, namun menimbulkan dampak buruk terhadap lingkungan seperti degradasi ekosistem, pencemaran air tanah, dan penumpukan sampah di sungai, laut, dan tempat pembuangan sampah. Metode kepustakaan digunakan dalam penelitian ini dengan mengumpulkan dan menganalisis jurnal, buku, dan dokumen terkait kelas sosial ekonomi dan lingkungan. Pendekatan ini memungkinkan peneliti untuk memperoleh wawasan mendalam tentang pengaruh konsumsi *fast fashion* oleh *lower middle class* terhadap lingkungan di Indonesia. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan pentingnya peran *lower middle class* dalam distribusi sampah fast fashion di Indonesia, yaitu sebagai konsumen utama yang mengakibatkan peningkatan volume sampah fast fashion di lingkungan. Oleh karena itu, intervensi pemerintah sangat penting dalam mengatur produksi dan distribusi fast fashion, pengelolaan limbah, dan membatasi masuknya bisnis fast fashion bekas ke dalam negeri. Tulisan ini menyimpulkan bahwa selain sebagai konsumen utama, *lower middle class* juga dianggap sebagai korban kapitalisme global sehingga memerlukan perlindungan pemerintah melalui kebijakan yang dapat melindungi mereka dari dampak buruk sampah fast fashion di alam. Kebijakan tersebut antara lain meningkatkan standar kualitas produk *fast fashion*, memastikan upah yang adil, langkah-langkah keselamatan bagi pekerja, perlindungan konsumen, dan pembatasan masuknya produk *fast fashion* asing ke Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya intervensi pemerintah yang komprehensif untuk memitigasi dampak lingkungan dari konsumsi fast fashion, sehingga dapat melindungi *lower middle class* dan lingkungan hidup di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Lower Middle Class; Konsumsi Fast Fashion; Dampak Lingkungan; Intervensi Pemerintah; Kelas Sosial Ekonomi

INTRODUCTION

The world's lower middle class grows at varying rates in each country (Chow et al., 2005). The addition of the lower middle class depends on income and consumption. This trend can be seen through increased demand for spending on goods and services, consumption, and lifestyle, which also drive the local and global economy (Rasch, 2017). However, this situation is not without consequences. For example, increasing consumption of fashion

products has significant environmental consequences such as pollution, carbon emissions, depletion of natural resources and space, and ecological damage due to landfills. In other words, the emergence and increase in the number of lower-middle-class people impacts the environment. This article examines the status of the lower middle class, including the production, consumption, and distribution of fashion, towards the worsening environmental quality in Indonesia. The research question is: How do fast fashion and the lower middle class affect the

environment in Indonesia? What lessons can we take from policies regarding environmental protection and management for the lower middle class?

Lower middle class define as people whose income is close to the poverty line (Felski, 2000). Therefore, they are more vulnerable to falling into poverty. On the other hand, they are also conservative and risk-averse, so they always look for stable and economically predictable jobs. However, they have always been the forgotten middle (Stearns, 1979). They are often neglected and missed by government policies because they are considered above poverty, without considering the costs of living, such as housing, education, and health, which continue to increase, and vice versa. With the amount of income you have. This group is developing in Asia and the Pacific (de Koning et al., 2016; Never & Albert, 2021; Rasch, 2017; Tschirley et al., 2015).

Apart from that, many scientists think that talking about the lower middle class is considered less attractive, let alone revealing the aspirations, lifestyle, and worldview of the lower middle social class, even though they are large in number. Some of the reasons are: first, it is difficult for the lower middle class to come to power and become a power elite. Second, they had no protection, so they did not pose a revolutionary threat. Third, they are not pathetic enough to be part of the romanticized misfortune many people sympathize with. They need to pay attention to the presence of the lower middle class, which eliminates their character and role in the country, including on crucial issues such as environmental issues. In England in the 20th century, for example, British scientists failed to explain the causes of the instability of the lower middle class. Even Marxists do the same thing by allowing the lower middle class to experience disorientation when facing a crisis (Bailey, 1999).

The expression lower middle class is currently used widely in everyday language or political rhetoric and social science discourse, although it is still timid. Scientists are beginning to appear to be trying to define the middle class, although the definitions may vary according to location. In simple terms, the lower middle class is those who have sufficient education and salary. Still, their socio-economic status is below the middle class and is one of the largest social classes (Stephens et al., 2014). In developed countries, the lower middle class is a sub-division of the middle class that refers to households and individuals who are sufficiently educated and usually have a steady job but have yet to achieve the educational, occupational prestige, or income of the upper middle class. Even in America, the lower middle class comes from the division of the middle class, namely the lower middle class and the upper middle class (Verchere, 2017).

Based on the period, in pre-capitalist and pre-industrial times, the lower middle class consisted of independent farmers, artisans, and shopkeepers. In the period of mature capitalist industry, they became employees, technicians, and professionals who were largely dependent on industry. Today, the lower middle class tends to hold low-status professional or white-collar jobs, such as schoolteacher, nurse, or paralegal, which require some education but usually do not require a college degree. Therefore, the lower middle class has been and continues to be part of a world-historical and political moment that is important enough to be used for study regarding its economic roots, structure, life, place, role in society, and political behavior. So, ignoring the presence of this group in social and political dynamics, including the environmental conditions of a country, can no longer be done (Crossick, 2021; Mayer, 1975).

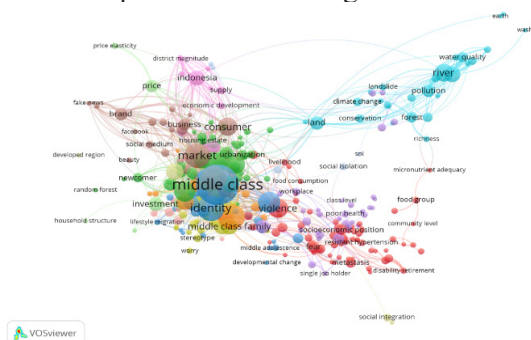
The lower middle class previously received less attention and was considered a low social class in the history of class theory. First, it is getting its spotlight because discussions about the growth of the lower middle class are starting to be discussed again due to economic globalization (Cochrane, 2007). Second, the lower middle classes benefited from structural reforms and economic and industrial adjustments (Ganguly-Scrase, 2003). Third, the lower middle class are people whose income is close to the poverty line and are more vulnerable to falling into poverty because of the middle income trap in the picture of institutionalism, namely that there are institutional factors such as government policies, market regulations, and social norms that influence the ability of the lower middle class to move out of lower middle income status and into a higher social or economic class. The World Bank (2018) measured this class division based on the daily expenditure per individual.

Table 1. Upper Class, Middle Class, Lower Middle Class and Lower Class Expenditures

No.	Class	Pengeluaran Per Hari
1.	Upper Class	>\$ 38
2.	Middle Class	\$ 7.5-38
3.	Lower Middle Class	\$ 2.2-7.5
4.	Low Class	<\$ 2.2

So far, studies on the lower middle class have not been widely researched; research is still limited to the middle class and not the lower middle class, which, according to many scientists, is difficult to identify even though, in the field, the lower middle class is the most numerous and vulnerable to moving from middle class to lower class status. This void in the study of the lower middle class is what researchers then want to fill. Apart from that,

if you look at the 4517 pieces of literature sourced from the Scopus database from 2018-2024, which researchers have summarized using VOSviewer software, it can be seen that there are no studies about the lower middle class at all. The lower middle class is still considered one unit with the middle class. Apart from that, the existing map of studies on the middle class is still limited to studies on class identity, markets, middle-class families, violence, and aspects of middle-class consumption. The blue color with thin tissue fibers in Figure 1 shows that few studies link the influence of the growth of the lower middle class in a country with an increase in the potential for environmental damage such as pollution, decreased water quality, conservation, and climate change. No one links the presence of this lower middle class to the accumulation of waste due to excessive consumption of fashion products in nature. Therefore, this research is very fundamental to fill the existing gap by focusing on the consumerist orientation of the lower middle class by deepening the source locus of environmental degradation and its dilemmatic position as something new.



Source: Processed by VOSviewer Software (2023)

Figure 1. Map of Study of the Influence of the Lower Middle Class on the Environment

The selection of the lower middle class in this paper is based on the consideration that they are a socially and economically marginal group of people, but at the same time, they are the group that interacts the most and has the most impact on the environment. Karl Marx once divided society into two economic classes: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (Andrew, 1975; Rosenberg, 1974; Wright & Perrone, 1977). However, this article groups economic groups into four groups: upper class, middle class, lower middle class, and lower class because the lower middle class is a middle-class society whose income is close to the poverty line (Duncan, 1996). Therefore, they are much more vulnerable to falling into poverty because they do not receive stimulus through assistance, subsidies, and other incentives from government policies (Brueckner et al., 2018).

The lower middle class is a group of poor people who are sometimes included in the middle class because they are challenging to identify and

are considered not to have enough influence in the dynamics of the ruling elite or are not enough of a concern for romantics of poverty and injustice. Based on the international poverty line set by the World Bank, Based on the international poverty line set by the World Bank, a poor person is someone with an income below \$1.25 per day (2005), then the threshold was updated to \$1.90 per day (2011), and \$2.15 per day (2023). So, the lower middle class usually has incomes above this figure because, even though they have not received formal education at the level of a bachelor's degree, they have jobs that rely on skills. However, their work can only support the needs of food, education, health, and other things covered by the state, like those of the lower class. It influences consumption patterns, such as whether the country focuses on food or non-food consumption. According to Easterly (2001) this situation can be seen in countries such as Guatemala, India, the Ivory Coast, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Pakistan, where people spend their income on food consumption.

Indonesia presents an interesting case regarding consumption patterns from income the lower middle class earns. Indonesia's lower middle class does not prioritize food consumption, instead, they spend much of their income to fulfill their desires and the latest lifestyles (Suyanto et al., 2019). One of them is spending income to buy fast fashion products. Several studies have seen that the increasing spending on fast fashion products in Indonesia, apart from the increasing growth rate of the lower middle class, is also motivated by social pressure and the desire for symbolic recognition of economic status (Pratomo et al., 2020). This causes lower middle class people to buy certain consumer products, such as luxury and modern clothing, compared to their use value and exchange value in the form of investment. The latest fashion products that can meet demand and suit their purchasing power are fashion with low prices and low-quality materials, referred to as fast fashion. Research shows that Indonesian lower middle class people do not care about the quality of the fashion they buy and the authenticity of the clothing as long as the status symbol they want is achieved, namely that other people are considered capable of using luxurious and up-to-date fashion products (Joy et al., 2012).

This situation is increasingly supported by post-COVID-19 pandemic conditions, where the Indonesian Government is boosting domestic economic growth by focusing on increasing consumption of goods and services, one of which is fast fashion products. This desire of the Indonesian Government contradicts the household economic condition, closely related to people's income, which continues to weaken after the COVID-19 pandemic. Data

from the Ministry of Finance notes that Indonesia's economic conditions were cut by 4.81% in the fourth quarter (2023) even though it had been boosted through policy packages such as El Nino social assistance, cheap housing for low-income people, and Tax Value Added assistance borne by the Government. The Indonesian economy has only experienced an average growth of 5% in the last decade. Although based on figures from the National Socio-Economic Survey (2023), the Indonesian population's economy has experienced significant growth. However, the reality on the ground is that people who were previously in the middle-class experience poverty and are trapped in lower middle class status due to increasing economic inequality (Peet, 1975).

The increasing rate of inequality in Indonesia, according to the Central Statistics Agency, can be measured through Indonesia's gini ratio in March 2023 of 0.388 and March 2022 of 0.384, which shows a downward trend and then divides the Indonesian population based on consumption into layers: upper class, middle class, lower middle class, and lower class. The lower middle class consists of people whose socio-economic status is the opposite of the upper class but whose economic conditions are complex and far from prosperous. However, they have big dreams of moving up in class, one of which is using fashion products that 'imitate' the latest trends. Fast fashion is the term for low-cost clothing collections that imitate current luxury fashion trends (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Fast fashion products have many fans because they help lower middle class economic groups satisfy their deep desire for the luxury fashion industry. According to many academics fast fashion products do not reflect sustainability (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Mihm, 2010; Tokatli, 2007).

The political aspect of this research lies in the interaction between government policy and the consumption patterns of lower middle class people in Indonesia, primarily related to purchasing fast fashion products. Despite being socially and economically marginalized, Indonesia's lower middle class allocates its income to fulfill the latest desires and lifestyles, including buying fast fashion products. Studies show that the increase in spending on fast fashion products in Indonesia, apart from being caused by the growth of the lower middle class, is also triggered by social pressure and the desire for symbolic recognition of economic status. The increasing economic inequality in Indonesia is also in the spotlight in the political context. The Indonesian government must face challenges in managing this inequality, especially because some people's economic conditions

continue to weaken. In this case, purchasing fast fashion products by the lower middle class is an essential indicator of the political dynamics that govern the relationship between government policy and economic inequality in Indonesia.

METHOD

This research was carried out by conducting a literature review through library research, where the data came from library data collection. The aim is to strengthen the investigation process with data sources that have information about the influence of the lower middle class on the environmental damage caused by fast waste. Therefore, the data collection method used by researchers is to elaborate on various types of literature. This literature method was chosen because of the broad research scope, which is impossible with field research (Henczel, 2014).

The stages in this method are: first, collecting research references that can be used as empirical data information sourced from journals, books, research reports, and other literature that supports this research theme such as fashion industry and consumer behavior, environmental impact and sustainability, and government policies and social implications. Second, read library material. In reading research materials, readers must dig deeply into the reading material, enabling them to find new ideas related to the research title and be assisted by using VOSviewer software to map and look for research gaps.

Third, the researcher then makes research notes. The researcher proceeds by making meticulous research notes, capturing key findings, insights, and relevant information from the gathered sources. These notes serve as a comprehensive record of the literature review process, ensuring that no critical details are overlooked. Fourth, in the subsequent stage, the existing research notes undergo thorough processing. This involves organizing, synthesizing, and analyzing the collected material to derive meaningful conclusions. The researcher critically examines the content, identifying recurring themes, patterns, and discrepancies within the data. Moreover, any contradictions or gaps in the literature are carefully noted for further exploration. To facilitate the analysis, the researcher employs content analysis, which is particularly suitable for library-based research utilizing journals, books, and documents as primary data sources. Content analysis involves systematically examining and interpreting the textual content to uncover underlying meanings, relationships, and implications.

Table 2. The content analysis process follows a structured approach, encompassing several key steps.

No.	Key Step	Activities
1.	Determining the Problem	The researcher clearly defines the research problem or objectives, establishing the scope and focus of the analysis. This step ensures alignment with the overarching research goals.
2.	Developing a Framework for Thinking	A conceptual framework is developed to guide the analysis process. This framework serves as a theoretical lens through which the data are interpreted, providing a structured approach to understanding the research topic.
3.	Developing Methodological Tools	Methodological tools, such as coding schemes or categorization frameworks, are devised to systematically organize the data. These tools help streamline the analysis process and ensure consistency in data interpretation.
4.	Analyzing Data	The collected data are systematically analyzed using the established methodological tools. This involves categorizing, coding, and structuring the data according to predefined criteria or themes. The researcher examines the content in-depth, identifying patterns, trends, and relationships across the dataset.
5.	Interpreting Data	Finally, the analyzed data are interpreted to draw meaningful conclusions and insights. The researcher reflects on the findings in relation to the research problem, drawing connections between the identified themes and the broader research context. The implications of the findings are discussed, and recommendations for future research or action may be proposed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Fast Fashion Consumption and Socio-Economic Inequality

In Indonesia, fast fashion consumption has become an inseparable part of everyday life for many people, especially the lower middle class. The concept of fast fashion, which offers fashion products at low prices and the latest trends that change quickly, has become a symbol of social and economic status for many individuals in an ever-evolving society.

However, there is a more complex reality behind the glitter of fashion trends and the excitement of shopping. Fast fashion consumption is often a reflection of the socio-economic inequality that exists in society. The lower middle class, marginalized socially and economically, is often fixated on unsustainable consumption models to fulfil the desire for a modern and fashionable lifestyle. Factors such as social pressure, the drive to achieve a higher

economic status, and the inability to access expensive branded fashion items push them to switch to more affordable, fast fashion products.

Thus, fast fashion consumption has become about lifestyle and complex social and economic expression. Fast fashion consumers from the lower middle class may need to continue to follow trends and display a “modern” style to be accepted and recognized by the surrounding community. This creates a dynamic where fast fashion consumption becomes a way for them to obtain a desired social and economic identity, although perhaps at the expense of environmental sustainability and long-term economic stability.

In a political context, fast fashion consumption by the lower middle class also reflects inequality in access to resources and opportunities. When most of their income is spent to fulfil consumer needs, the socio-economic gap between the lower and upper middle classes widens. These disparities create social tensions between various groups in society and raise questions about fairness and inclusion in political and economic systems.

In terms of environmental politics, the growth of society, especially the growth of the lower middle class, has a close relationship with the environment because when there is an increase in population, there will be an increase in the volume of waste in an area (Breeze, 2018). Meanwhile, the traditional approach to looking at waste still needs to be expanded to how to reuse the waste produced (Hajad et al., 2022; Kristanto & Koven, 2019). As a result, human consumption activities cause problems such as destroying the environment, damaging social order, and harming bilateral relations between countries. Here, the socio-economic status of the lower middle class loses access to fulfilling personal needs and consumption. Here, the status of the lower middle class is tested because the tough economic life makes them focus on efforts to meet personal needs and consumption. They have been unable to allocate time and money to create a sustainable environment.

There are numerous reasons why the lower middle class ignores environmental issues. First, there are limited resources. The lower middle class frequently has little resources, both in terms of income and property. They must prioritize spending their money on fundamental necessities like food, shelter, and education. The second source of pressure is economic. Difficult economic conditions frequently trap the lower middle class in a cycle of poverty or financial difficulties that they find difficult to break free from. They may have to labor hard to meet their basic requirements and remain above the poverty line. Third, prioritize essential needs. Under severe economic conditions, the lower middle class

prioritizes meeting personal wants and consumption. They frequently lack the time and funds to devote to larger endeavors such as promoting sustainability. Fourth, a lack of access and awareness. The lower middle class also has limited access to the knowledge and resources required to create a sustainable environment. Furthermore, people may be unaware of the significance of environmental protection or have inadequate knowledge of how to do so.

The growth of the middle class in countries like Indonesia has far-reaching consequences for the environmental and political aspects of waste management, for example, regarding the importance of the potential of local wisdom to be utilized by the lower middle class in protecting the environment from the threat of waste to the global environment, beyond regional boundaries (Bryant, 2000). Thus, the participation of most middle-class people in Indonesia can be maximized through community empowerment in recycling activities and operating waste banks in each region (Armadi, 2021; Hadi et al., 2020; Sukmawati, 2021). The lower middle class is essential in preventing the potential impact of waste on the environment (Bryant, 2006; Kristanto & Koven, 2019) because the lower middle class is always directly affected by environmental damage due to waste.

In Bryant's environmental and political approach, the lower middle class's ignorance about the negative impacts of waste can endanger their environmental and economic sustainability (Bryant, 1998). The lower middle class simply become consumers and victims of capitalism, and this cycle of environmental and economic destruction continues. However, the Indonesian government has focused too much on household plastic waste (Fletcher & Mackay, 1996; Geyer et al., 2017; Hajad et al., 2022; Krieg, 1998). However, in recent years, fast fashion waste has begun to be watched as the cause of various damages to nature, such as land contamination and flooding.

Several reasons why the lower middle class are always interested in buying fast fashion products are: first, consuming an extravagant lifestyle by buying cheap clothes is widespread among the lower middle class. Second, because the price is low, the quality produced is also low, and the service life is short, so it is often thrown away as waste. Third, fast fashion waste is difficult to decompose, so it needs to be managed properly; it will avoid problems in the future and can threaten the environment in Indonesia and globally (Mahyudin, 2017; Singh, 2023). According to Zero Waste Indonesia (2020), textile waste is currently the leading contaminant in Indonesia's waterways, surpassing plastic waste. As a result, it is critical to handle fashion waste from a political perspective (Zero Waste Indonesia, 2020).

Therefore, a political approach is essential in understanding the phenomenon of the increasing middle class in Indonesia and the increasing trend of daily use of fast fashion products in society due to the high lifestyle and tastes of the lower middle class for clothing, jewellery, furniture, food, family structure, and domestic life (Bailey, 1999; Never & Albert, 2021; Suyanto et al., 2019; Tschirley et al., 2015). However, the lower middle class has political weaknesses because they tend to need a clear class consciousness (Heberle, 1959; Lawson & Elwood, 2014), which has the impact of not having good economic awareness in allocating income – limited money but a high lifestyle. This can be seen as compensation for the lower middle class for the heavy work pressure so that they spend their income on lifestyle consumption (fashion is one of them) rather than investing. In their view, there is no point in allocating their income to investment because the amount is small, so they spend their income on cheap fashion (fast fashion) (Banerjee & Duflo, 2007).

Environmental Impact of Fast Fashion Consumption

In environmental politics, the mass consumption of fast fashion by the lower middle class in Indonesia is a serious concern. It negatively impacts the ecosystem and environmental sustainability because it depletes natural resources. Indonesia's exposure to issues related to fast fashion consumption is contextualized globally and correlated with global supply chains. The reason is related to production. Indonesia is a major manufacturing centre for the global fashion industry, with many international clothing brands outsourcing their production to factories in Indonesia. This means that most fast fashion products consumed domestically are produced in Indonesia, contributing to economic growth and environmental challenges.

Apart from that, consumption patterns in Indonesia, including the low and middle class, are influenced by global fashion trends and marketing strategies carried out by multinational companies. The desire for the latest fashion trends at affordable prices drives the consumption of fast fashion products, in line with global consumer behaviour patterns seen in other countries. Another reason is that the environmental impact of fast fashion consumption in Indonesia is part of a broader global issue. The production, transportation, and disposal processes of fast fashion goods contribute to local and global environmental degradation. Waterway pollution, deforestation and carbon emissions associated with the fashion industry impact Indonesia and the global ecosystem. So, the government, as a policy maker in Indonesia, should be increasingly aware of the need

to address the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion consumption.

This phenomenon reflects individual consumption issues and highlights the need for public policies oriented towards environmental protection and sustainable resource management. First, fast fashion consumption causes environmental degradation through water and land pollution. The chemical-based textile production process uses many dangerous chemicals that pollute water and damage the water ecosystem's balance. Fast fashion requires a lot of natural textile materials and chemicals. For example, approximately 90% of fast fashion clothing is made from cotton or polyester, emitting toxic chemical pollution and carbon dioxide during manufacturing, thereby causing environmental damage to the ecosystem (Agarwal, 1998; Vaccaro et al., 2013).

Moreover, if the water flows from rivers to residential areas, it will impact health. Thus, with the demographics of Indonesia's lower middle class population, most of whom live along riverbanks, the opportunity for negative impacts due to waste flowing in rivers is increasingly threatening the health of the lower middle class (Nolan et al., 2019). Figure 2 illustrates how the lower middle class lives along the river and is a direct victim of hazardous waste from fast fashion products. This calls for political intervention to implement stricter regulations on the textile industry and ensure that higher environmental standards are enforced to protect our water resources.



Source: (DetikNews, 2019)

Figure 2. Urban Poor Community Housing

Second, fast fashion consumption patterns also contribute to broader ecosystem damage. Demand for raw materials such as cotton drives intensive agricultural practices that often damage the environment. Deforestation to create new agricultural land threatens the sustainability of forests and natural habitats, worsens environmental damage and reduces the ability of ecosystems to absorb carbon and maintain biodiversity. Apart from that, there is also degradation of agricultural land and housing due to the construction and expansion of fast fashion factories. The lower middle class, who work as farmers and fishermen along rivers and coasts, bear the brunt of this waste (Shildrick & MacDonald, 2013).

Third, fast fashion consumption causes an increase in the volume of textile waste, which is difficult to decompose (Salleh, 1995) due to excessive consumption (Fletcher & Dunk, 2018). Fast fashion waste is waste generated from the production of fast fashion goods, such as cheap clothes, which are sold in large quantities in the retail market with products following the latest luxury fashion trends such as H&M, Zara and Uniqlo products (Tokatli, 2007) so that many consumers who are interested in buying (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Joy et al., 2012; Mihm, 2010). The lower middle class is aware that the quality of fast fashion products is low.

Nonetheless, because of their low cost, they are still widely produced and consumed (Ganguly-Scrase, 2003) and produce textile waste quickly generated and thrown away irresponsibly. The production and consumption of fast fashion creates a sizeable environmental burden (Bick et al., 2018). According to Arifin Rudiyanto (2022) from the Indonesian Ministry of National Development Planning (PPN), currently, Indonesia produces 2.3 million tons of textile waste every day, 12 per cent of household waste, and only 0.3 million tons of textile waste can be recycled. Meanwhile, the remaining waste will be burned by fast fashion product companies. This shows that the environment in ecological politics becomes an arena for competition between various social actors to gain access and control over natural resources. So, government policy protecting nature from fast fashion waste is a competition for environmental control by the state, entrepreneurs and lower middle class society. With solid political attention to the environment, legislative action is needed to encourage more effective recycling and waste management practices and promote public awareness of the importance of reducing textile waste.

Fourth, fast fashion production has long been criticized for its poor social and environmental contribution (Aljazeera.com, 2021; Krieg, 1998). Poor working conditions, exploitation of child labour, and property problems are some of the social impacts it causes. One of the most shocking cases in the fast fashion industry was the Rana Plaza Incident in 2013, which killed 1,136 tailors in Bangladesh. They are underpaid, work in dangerous conditions, and are exposed to chemicals that are harmful to their health (Bick et al., 2018).

Thus, a holistic and inclusive political approach is needed to overcome worsening socio-economic inequality. The government must empower the lower middle class through policies promoting social inclusion, fairer access to education and employment, and opportunities to participate in sustainable economic development. In addition, efforts are

needed to limit the negative impacts of fast fashion consumption through regulations that strengthen environmental and social protection for all levels of society. Moreover, fast fashion consumption can be a starting point for a more inclusive and sustainable socio-economic transformation in Indonesia.

The environmental politics perspective emphasizes the need for proactive and sustainable public policies to respond to the environmental crisis caused by fast fashion consumption. This involves formulating and implementing stricter regulations for the textile industry, incentives for more environmentally friendly production and consumption practices, and educating the public about the importance of maintaining environmental sustainability for a better future. With the right political action, Indonesia can move towards a more sustainable direction and prioritize environmental protection for future generations.

Government Intervention and Environmental Policy

In facing the environmental crisis caused by the mass consumption of fast fashion, government intervention is critical in implementing policies to protect the environment and reduce its negative impacts, especially on the lower middle class. For example, by applying the Environmental, Social, dan Governance (ESG) concept in fashion waste management in Indonesia by highlighting the environmental impact, social aspect, and governance related to the production, distribution, dan processing of fashion goods, including fast fashion. Bryant & Bailey (1997) say that the government is the leading actor that plays a role in protecting the environment and humans (middle to lower class) from potential damage, apart from other actors such as entrepreneurs, multilateral institutions, non-governmental organizations and the community. The government can solve problems through policy innovation and legal regulations to support or prohibit fast fashion production.

First, the government can adopt stricter regulatory policies towards the textile and fashion industry. So far, regulations related to the fast fashion industry could be more sustainable, especially regarding waste management during industrial processes. So, it is essential to tighten control over hazardous chemicals used in the textile production process and introduce higher environmental standards to ensure that industrial waste does not excessively pollute the environment. By implementing this policy, the government can provide better environmental and public health protection.

If this is not done, there will be a phenomenon of mountains of clothing waste like what happened

in Chilli Country—figure 3. The following is a desert phenomenon in Chilli, namely the Atacama Desert, which has become a dumping ground for fast fashion clothing waste. Every year, 39 thousand tons of fast fashion waste is thrown away and comes from goods produced in China and Bangladesh to meet the needs of clothing companies in the United States, Europe, and Asia. It takes at least 200 years for this type of waste to decompose because fast fashion products are made from synthetic fabrics and chemicals which, if thrown into nature, will pollute water sources and soil with toxic chemicals and cause health problems for the lower middle class.



Source:(Aljazeera.com, 2021)

Figure 3. Piles of Fast Fashion Trash in the Atacama Chilli Desert

So far, the Indonesian government has known the negative impact of fast fashion waste. However, the rapid development of the global fast fashion industry has meant that Indonesia has chosen to ignore environmental issues. The Business Research Company reports that the global fast fashion market is USD 25.09 billion (2020), USD 30.58 billion (2021), experienced a slight decline during the COVID-19 pandemic (2022), but will strengthen again in 2023-2025 with a projection of USD 39.84 billion in 2025.

Politically, this condition is dangerous for the protection of the lower middle class, so government intervention is needed, such as tightening regulations on the fast fashion industry, creating regulations for fast fashion waste management, and prohibiting used fast fashion products from entering the market. This is important because first, there are no specific regulations regarding fast fashion waste management in Indonesia. Law Number 32 of 2009, which regulates environmental protection and management, still regulates waste in general and does not explicitly regulate fast fashion waste.

Second, governments can encourage more sustainable production and consumption practices through incentives and regulations. For example, governments can provide fiscal incentives for companies implementing environmentally friendly production practices, such as using recycled raw materials or more energy-efficient production technologies. Governments can also impose taxes or fines on fast fashion products that do not meet specific

environmental standards, encouraging manufacturers to switch to more sustainable practices.

Third, public policy regarding fast fashion waste requires collaboration between ministries such as the Ministry of Environment and Forestry and the Ministry of Trade. The ministry can develop regulations and standards to regulate environmental practices in the fashion industry, such as guidelines for sustainable production processes, waste management and pollution control. Government can collaborate with industry stakeholders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international partners to overcome environmental problems in the fashion sector. Ministries can invest in research and innovation to develop environmentally friendly alternatives to conventional fashion materials and production methods while pursuing policy advocacy.

Fourth, the government could conduct awareness campaigns to educate consumers, manufacturers, and retailers about the environmental impacts of fast fashion consumption. These campaigns promote responsible consumption practices, such as buying fewer but higher quality clothes and reducing waste and recycling. It is essential to strengthen public awareness regarding the impact of fast fashion consumption on the environment through information and education campaigns. By increasing public understanding of the negative impacts of unsustainable consumption patterns, the government can encourage changes in behaviour that are more environmentally friendly. The government can also strengthen cooperation with NGOs and environmental organizations to increase public awareness and action in protecting the environment.

Moreover, as consumers and victims of industrial capitalism, the lower middle class experiences difficulties sustaining environmental resources from an environmental and political perspective. The government can play several roles in strengthening the awareness of the lower middle class, including, first, formulating policies that focus on efforts to reduce consumption of fast fashion products and choosing environmentally friendly fashion products, such as those made from organic and easily recyclable materials, as well as formulating policies that can educate the public. The lower middle class only buys products that carry sustainable aspects.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that lower middle class fast fashion consumption in Indonesia highlights the complexity of society's socio-economic, political and environmental problems, especially the lower middle class. Although fast fashion consumption has become an integral part of everyday lifestyle,

especially among the lower middle class, more profound impacts must be considered. First, fast fashion consumption reflects lifestyle trends. It provides a means for individuals to achieve a desired social and economic identity, often at the expense of environmental impacts and long-term economic stability. Second, in the political arena, fast fashion consumption exacerbates socio-economic inequality and creates a dilemma for governments between economic growth measured by high production and consumption and the environmental desires desired by the Environmental, Social And Governance (ESG) concept. The government must balance these two aspects but is often trapped in policies prioritising economic growth over environmental sustainability. Third, government intervention is needed to overcome the environmental crisis caused by fast fashion consumption. Measures such as stricter regulation of the textile industry, incentives for sustainable production and consumption practices, collaboration between ministries, awareness campaigns and public education initiatives are essential in promoting more sustainable consumption behaviour and increasing environmental awareness.

This article critiques the integrated way of looking at governments that might adopt ESG ecological principles as a vision of education for citizens. Thus, the key to achieving balanced economic and environmental sustainability is to be aware of integrating Environmental, Social And Governance (ESG) values in government decision-making. Only by taking into account environmental and social impacts in a balanced manner can government policies be more sustainable and contribute to the welfare of society as a whole.

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