

THE ENVIRONMENTAL TOLL OF INSTAGRAM FASHION: EXPLORING ITS CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS IN PESHAWAR

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Abstract

The paper examines the impact of the Instagram fashion trends on culture and the environment in Pakistan and how Instagram stories influence consumer behavior, cultural identity, and sustainability practices. This study explores the effect of digital fashion trends in Peshawar accessed via Instagram stories, interviews and social media. Research shows that Instagram is encouraging 'fast fashion' – it's promoting western clothing, consumerism and neglecting local traditions. This research not only helps towards cultural integration but also raises matters of concern regarding environment like waste, overproduction and unsustainability. The results show that Instagram is a cultural integration and a commercial oriented network, which provokes some relevant reflections on globalization, digital media and environmental responsibility. The paper urges the need to pay more attention to sustainable alternatives to fast fashion that allow for preservation of cultural identity while tackling the environmental impact of fast fashion.

Key words: *Environmental pollution, Fast fashion, Instagram stories, SDGS, Social media influencers*

Introduction

Fashion has grown by leaps and bounds, especially fast fashion, in recent decades. Globalization and the extensive use of the social media platforms are the drivers of this trend and this is one of them – Instagram. Fast fashion is the term used for the rapid production of low-quality garments aimed to reflect the fashion of the times. Fast fashion allows consumers to get new fashion regularly (McNeill, L., & Moore, R. 2015). This has changed the fashion consumption patterns and allows them to access fashion at the moment that is trendy and low in cost (Joy, A., Sherry Jr, J. F., 2012). This model has rendered fashion more accessible to a wider community, but also has a significant effect on the environment, with untold consequences that are often overlooked (Niinimäki, K., Peters, G., 2020). The rising awareness about the environment has led researchers to explore the factors influencing consumers' fast fashion buying behaviors, including the influence

of digital and social media. Instagram has become a significant player in influencing consumer behavior in Pakistan, especially among the younger audience. Instagram is one of the world's most popular social media platforms, and Zuckerberg stated that in September 2025, the company had more than 3 billion monthly active users globally, which means it has a huge impact on digital communication and consumer engagement, as well as on buying decisions (Instagram, 2025). Instagram has emerged as a major channel to promote fashion and influence consumer buying habits. Instagram influencers and fashion brands leverage captivating posts, stories, and reels to promote the newest trends, generating a sense of urgency to buy the products. This in turn creates a cycle of consumption and puts a strain on the environment.

The fashion industry is well known for its negative impacts on the environment, particularly the fast fashion industry. Whether it's the amount of water needed to grow cotton, or the sheer quantity of textile waste created by unwanted clothes, the environmental impact of fast fashion is enormous. The textile sector is responsible for around 8% of global carbon emissions, according to studies (International Finance Corporation 2023). This is more than all the emissions of all the international flights and shipping. Moreover, 20% of global wastewater originates from the fashion industry (WWF, 2021). The use of synthetics like polyester, which comes from petroleum, increases the carbon emissions that are released into the environment, and also adds to the issue of micro plastic - these fibers fall into the water system when they are washed.

The situation is further exacerbated in Pakistan, where Instagram's reach is still expanding, and the trend of fast fashion among the urban population. Social media trends are a major factor in influencing Pakistan's younger generation, Generation Z and Millennials. These tend to be social media influencers who advocate fast fashion, which is the latest trendy clothes from foreign fashion brands. These influencers are crucial elements in perception of fast fashion and consumerism. The posts not only feature new fashion trends, but also highlight the importance of staying up to date with fashion trends around the world. This makes people constantly want to buy something. One of these trends is the increase in demand for denim jeans. Producing denim requires a large amount of water: 7,500 gallons per pair (Olivar Aponte, N., Hernández Gómez, J., 2025).

The environmental effects of Instagram-driven fashion in Pakistan are especially worrying because of the country's susceptibility to water shortages and climate change, as indicated by the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). Despite the current situation of water crisis in Pakistan, around 16 million people are still without clean water with them (Zeshan M.). 2025). Water is required in significant quantities for making clothes, particularly cotton and garment industries. Research has determined it takes about 7,500 liters of water to produce a single pair of jeans, a quantity equivalent to the equivalent to the drinking water that one person would use in 10 years. This adds to the already scarce water supply. Whilst more people realise there are environmental concerns, convenience and affordability are making fast fashion appealing to many consumers.

This study aims at analyzing the impact of Instagram fast fashion and Instagram stories on the environment in Pakistan. It highlights the promotion of Instagram influencers who take care of the trend that brings a quick consumption. Fast fashion is also responsible for significant water loss and textile waste, as well as carbon emissions. The research aims to explore the effects of Instagram on consumer behaviour and its environmental costs in Pakistan. The goal of the study is to raise awareness on the unsustainability of fashion industry and finding solutions to this issue.

This study aims to explore how much Instagram contributes to the quickening of environmental degradation. This has happened due to the fast fashion, particularly in the emerging fashion trends in Pakistan. Another aim of the research is to draw ideas together about ways in which consumers and influencers can be hooked into fashion in a more sustainable way. The research goes into other successful methods of diminishing the environmental footprint of fast fashion. The insights shared include the use of sustainable materials, minimizing water in textile manufacturing, and promoting circular fashion. It's a part of the search for more answers to the question of the impact of digital platforms on sustainability, and Instagram, in particular. Through this case study of Instagram fast fashion in Pakistan, they explored the environmental consequences of the app. The research focuses on the influence of social media on consumers' conduct and its role in environmental damage in the country.

The results will provide useful information for environmentalists, the fashion world, policy makers, fashion companies and influencers. The purpose is to contribute to lower ecological footprints of the fashion industry and more sustainable consumption.

Research Questions

The study has answered the following questions;

1. How does Instagram shape fast fashion consumption behaviour among Pakistani youth?
2. What are the environmental implications of Instagram-driven fast fashion practices in Pakistan?

Research Objective

The objective of the research is;

- to examine the influence of Instagram on fast fashion consumption and its environmental consequences in Pakistan

Literature Review

Global Environmental Impact of Fast Fashion

Social media, specifically Instagram, is a force that has taken over the fashion industry and influenced consumers' behavior. Influencers are a huge factor in the decisions made by Gen Z and Millennials when it comes to fashion. Research indicates that influencers can actually influence trends by creating a certain look that people want to emulate by copying their purchasing patterns (Rizwan, S., & Qamar, A.). 2023). This influence is especially noticeable in countries like Pakistan, where Instagram is the go-to platform for fashion inspiration. In fact, recent data shows that 75% of the Pakistanis aged between 18-34 follow at least one fashion blogger on Instagram, and many of these consumers are directly influenced by the product suggestions and style options of the bloggers (Ali, A., Khan, M., & Shah, A.). 2020). Another benefit of influencers is that they can also build a sense of urgency for new products or limited-time offers, thereby increasing demand and accelerating consumer purchasing decisions.

But the booming fashion business has a dark side to it. Fashion and Textile Industry is one of the leading culprit of environmental degradation. The textile sector accounts for 2-8% of global greenhouse gas emissions, uses huge amounts of water and generates significant levels of chemical pollution, among others, making it vital to adopt sustainable textile production and consumption patterns (United Nations Environment Programme, 2025). Most of this has to do with the manufacturing process, especially in cotton production, dyeing and finishing cotton products which

consume significant water. The United Nations Environment Programme (2026) estimates that the water needed to produce one pair of jeans is about 3,800 liters (1,000 gallons), depending on the method of their production. The high demand for water is largely attributable to the cultivation of cotton and the use of significant amounts of water in the processing of cotton into textiles, creating a significant environmental impact in denim production (United Nations Environment Programme, 2026).

Furthermore, fashion is one of the prime sources of textile waste in the world. The world produces around 92 million tons of textile waste every year, a garbage truck full of clothes is burnt or dumped every second (United Nations Environment Programme, 2025). Much of this waste is due to the business model of the fast fashion industry, which consists of multiple trend cycles, overproduction and overconsumption. Therefore, excess clothing waste persists, continuing to exacerbate the worldwide waste problem of textiles and putting pressure on the environment.

Environmental Impact of Fast Fashion in Pakistan

The sustainability problems of fast fashion are becoming a big issue in Pakistan. Cotton cultivation in Pakistan is one of the world's biggest producers, and the water consumption of cotton cultivation is becoming a major concern in the country (FAO, V. (2023). The problem is even more troubling as Pakistan is already facing high water stress. The Zeshan, M. states that. In Pakistan, about 16 million people still do not have access to at least basic drinking water services, thus, exacerbating the water security challenges in the country (2025). Water use for clothing production, especially in cotton cultivation and in the production of garments, adds to the strain on this essential resource. Textile waste is an other environmental problem in Pakistan. The country is one of the top markets for second-hand clothing from the E.U. This is one of the major markets for used clothes from E.U. In 2021, approximately 1.4 million tons of used textiles were exported from the EU to other parts of the world, with a significant share going to Asia and Africa, such as Pakistan, where used textile imports are sold in the second-hand market, but some are also disposed of on landfills and burns when they are not suitable for resale (Sattar & Akhtar, 2023). File management of textile waste can also cause soil, air and water pollution which will worsen environmental degradation in the country.

Role of Instagram Influencers in Promoting Fast Fashion

Instagram has gained immense popularity as a platform to market fast fashion, and Instagram influencers are an important part of influencing consumer buying behavior (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Parasocial interaction, social media reviews, and influencer credibility are key determinants of the buying decision of Generation Z and Millennials in Pakistan as they are heavily influenced by the Instagram influencers (Rizwan, S., & Qamar, A.). 2023). The fashion bloggers often team up with clothing brands to post trendy styles and get followers to buy the same styles, which helps to drive demand for quick fashion. With the proliferation of Instagram Stories and reels, people feel the need to jump on to the latest fashion trends, building a sense of urgency and exclusivity. This makes consumers feel compelled to make impulsive buying decisions, driving an overconsumption that is directly linked with fast fashion and intensifying its environmental impact. However, there was a dire need to work on the impact of the fashion industry on the environment, which the current study has taken care of.

Environmental Consequences of Instagram-Driven Fast Fashion

There are many environmental problems related to Instagram's advertising of quick fashion. As more people want to buy trendy and cheap clothes, overproduction is a result. Consequently, a lot of textile waste is produced. The United Nations Environment Programme (2025) estimates that some 92 million tonnes of clothes are thrown away every year, a significant share from fast fashion brands. In addition, the synthetic materials used in fast fashion like polyester add to micro plastics pollution. When washing synthetic clothes, small pieces of the clothes, called microfibers, enter the water system. The microfibrils can end up in oceans and waterways, causing severe harm to ecosystems and marine life.

Need for Sustainable Practices

Fast fashion's negative environmental effects can only be addressed in multiple ways. It is crucial to encourage sustainable fashion, including sustainable materials, water-saving production methods, and recycling. Furthermore, promoting the environmental impact of consumers' buying habits can stimulate demand for more sustainable products. Efforts to promote sustainable fashion have been growing in Pakistan. Embracing environmentally-friendly materials and ethical manufacturing processes. Promoting sustainable materials and ethical production methods. But for all of these practices to be implemented, they need to be widespread to reduce the fashion industry's environmental footprint.

Methodology

In this study, the method of sampling used was purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling. Deliberate selection of Instagram accounts, television discussion programmes and interview participants took place according to pre-defined criteria, which were relevant to the research objectives. In the case of interviews, experts were purposively sampled to gain expertise and experience in the field of fashion, social media, and environmental sustainability. To select the Instagram accounts for the content analysis, criterion-based purposive sampling was applied to identify those that were relevant, popular and engaged with their audience.

The data triangulation method was used to ensure validity and reliability of the study as multiple data sources were used, including content analysis, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, which explored the role of Instagram in promoting fast fashion and the environmental implications of fast fashion in Pakistan. Denzin, N. K. (1978), defines triangulation as the use of numerous data sources, theories, and data collection methods to study a particular phenomenon. Similarly, a qualitative approach was deemed suitable as it allows for an understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions and the meanings expressed in social media content.

In the content analysis, purposive sampling of 12 Pakistani fashion influencers' Instagram accounts was conducted. These accounts were chosen based on specific criteria such as the content they post about fashion, the number of followers they have, their engagement with their audience (likes, comments, and shares) and their influence in the Pakistani fashion industry. A total of 120 Instagram posts/reels/stories were taken from each account, giving an overall sample of 10 accounts of 120 Instagram posts/reels/stories. Themes that were identified with regard to Western fashion trends, consumerism, sustainability and environmental awareness were extracted from the selected content.

To gain contextual understanding and triangulate the findings, a purposive selection of relevant television discussion programmes on fashion, sustainability, consumer culture and environmental issues were selected and analysed as well as the social media content.

Expert purposive sampling was used for conducting semi-structured interviews. The participants comprised of the environmentalists, fashion promotion influencers, academicians, boutique owners, and fashion designers who had the professional knowledge and experience related to the research. The participants were carefully chosen due to their existing knowledge and experience in the area of fashion consumption, influence of social media and environmental sustainability in Pakistan. The conversations focused on their views on the impact of Instagram on fashion consumption, shifting cultural trends and the environmental impacts of fast fashion.

Data collected from Instagram content, television discussion and interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. The analysis carried out included familiarization with data, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition and theme naming, and interpretation of results. The key themes that were identified were: Westernization of Fashion, Consumerism and Trend Adoption, Environmental Impact and Sustainability, and Cultural Shifts.

Results

Content Analysis: Instagram, Consumerism, and the Silence on Sustainability

The study analyzed twelve Pakistanistani Instagram handles of fashion and lifestyle sphere. The ten posts and reels were analysed for each account for a total of 120 pieces of content. Follower counts ranged from about 11,900 to 148,000. In total, the 12 accounts have over 500,000 followers. Photographers, Makeup Artists, Fashion influencers, Lifestyle creators and student influencers were included in the sample. They are mainly located in Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad and Hyderabad. Content patterns, commercial strategies and the framing of consumption in images and language were analyzed in each of the accounts.

The accounts studied were: @shotsbynitasha (14.5K), @shaei.siddiqui (148K), @shadabsafdarr (12.3K), @hijab.o.grapher (17.4K), @hassan._tajammul (11.9K), @glittersbyayesha (12.8K), @_bushraabib (57.2K), @anjuu_world (107K), @alishbaa_babarr (16.3K), @aylasworld (108K), @ridzsayss, and @Syedaa_Nehhay. Together, they were responsible for wedding photography, men's fashion, makeup arts, bridal beauty, student life, and celebrity-inspired content.

Key Findings

The Normalization of Hyper-Consumption

This was clearly evident in each of the 12 accounts. Content, no longer something exceptional, frequent changes of clothes. Shopping is commonplace in "Haul" videos, "fit checks," and "GRWM" posts. There are a number of outfits in a single post. This visual habit helps followers to think: "This is just the way it's done." The pattern continues for hundreds of posts, so there is a sense of expectation that people too will update their wardrobes regularly. Captions make the same point. Comments such as "one post wasn't enough for this dress," "switch up from baby tees," and "this Eid time, your sign to go for rust," normalize and normalize buying. This language directs the followers to certain colours, styles and brands. It makes it quicker for people to go from viewing a post to buying a product.

The Commercialization of Cultural Events

Eid and Diwali are big e-commerce driving events. They time their posts around these events and make it a reason for them to get new outfits, new makeup and new styling. For celebrations that are puritan, hashtags such as #eidoutfitspo, #bakraeidfit and #eidlook make new purchases feel like they are expected. This is an effective framing because it creates a “felt obligation” to make an optional purchase a cultural requirement. For Diwali, @anjuu_world posted twice, each with a different outfit for a religious day and people started taking the message to heart that it's time to shop for a festive day. For Eid-ul-Adha, @_bushrahabib ran a campaign to “celebrate Eid-ul-Adha in style with LAAM,” linking a religious event with a shopping promotion.

The Professionalization of Influence

Many of the accounts are professionally managed, @shadabsafdarr for instance is “Managed by @haniala_usama”, and likewise @_bushrahabib is “managed by @medlar_talent_” as well. This indicates that the days of casual sharing of influencer content are over. Now it's a commercial industry, with planning and brand deals, and an audience strategy behind it. This is also a well-constructed account that is not an accident, but rather a deliberate construction of the authentic feeling of these accounts. Personal-looking content is commonly created to gain trust that can then be sold to brands. If you're aware that it's an ad, it's still more convincing when you come across it through a recommendation.

The Discount Code Economy

You can see discount codes throughout her profile, such as a LAAM code in her bio and also using it in captions like this: ‘Use my discount code ‘bushrahabib’ to get an extra discount on your purchase from App.’ This provides a clear monetary incentive to purchase. It further enables brands to understand the value that each influencer brings to the table in terms of conversion, encouraging creators to promote more purchases to prove their worth. Basically, discount codes make influencers mobile billboards. The code is designed to make it urgent and exclusive. This is done in many posts and makes followers associate that influencer's posts with an opportunity to purchase, creating a habit of purchasing, not just a once time purchase.

The Wedding Industry as a Consumption Driver

Wedding photography and bridal make-up is one of the most consumption oriented aspects of the fashion industry as per the wedding photography and bridal make-up accounts of @shotsbynitasha and @hassan_.tajammul. When designers, makeup artists, jewelers, photographers, etc. all use vendor tags to promote each other, they create a referral cycle that attracts followers to multiple services in one go. Coatings in bridal dresses come into play in the phase of sustainability because outfits are typically worn just once and then kept in a wardrobe or discarded. Multiple outfit changes for the one occasion of a wedding is the multiplication of this waste and a normalisation of cultural activity. The content doesn't mention this, but much of the clothing is produced using synthetic non-biodegradable fabric. It's helpful to make a number of this. It takes 3,781 to 10,000 litres of water to produce a pair of jeans. Bridal fashion is created similarly, however with even larger stakes a lot more fabric, a lot more embellishment, a single wear. If you multiply that footprint by the number of clothes in an outfit meant to be worn just once, you'll get a good idea of the problem.

The Absence of Sustainability Discourse

Perhaps the most impressive result is the one that isn't there. Of the 120 pieces of content, none of the 12 accounts discussed sustainable fashion, garment durability, second hand clothing or

the environmental impact of the production of clothing. This silence seeks to normalize over-consumption, to make it look like aesthetics and selling are always more important than environmental issues. It's a silence that is noticeable, yet the people who are posting do not write about fashion and textiles, nor do they have an architecture degree from NCA. Neither of them has the background to speak knowledgeably about impact on production and materials — and neither does. This implies that commercial factors, such as brand deals and PR relationships, make it less attractive for influencers to be critical towards the industry that pays them.

Theoretical Implications

Thorstein Veblen's (1899) theory of conspicuous consumption is clearly reflected in the Instagram content analysed in this study. The results indicate that the promoted object isn't just clothing, but also the symbolic representation of social status and class identity. The image of fashion brands, luxury aesthetics, and consumption are tangible signs of prestige that seduce followers to reveal their social status through appearances and lifestyles.

The influencer accounts serve as visual models for status performance, and how to dress, celebrate, and present oneself online as a person who is wealthy, sophisticated, and socially distinguished.

This can also be explained with the hyper-reality theory of Baudrillard (1994) in which mediated representations gain more significance than real life. Fashion bloggers and vloggers often showcase what fashion looks like through carefully selected outfits, luxurious settings, and magnificently styled photos, which may not accurately depict their own life. However, consumers feel that these images are real and attractive, and want to emulate them by consuming in a similar manner. Thus, the significance of fashion is becoming more and more than simply its use, and people are buying products not only for their functionality, but also for the social meaning they carry. This cycle of conspicuous consumption via digital is a reinforcement of aspirational lives and a veil over the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion production and overconsumption.

The Attention Economy and Algorithmic Subjectivities

These accounts are part of the attention economy, in which the real money is audience attention. The attention being turned into visibility is reflected in follower numbers and engagement. This forms a cycle: engagement leads to visibility, visibility leads to more engagement, and engagement leads to consuming. Incentivising based on views encourages creators to post what sells, which pushes them to buy-bait. Platform incentives push creators to create what sells, which means they are prodded to create buying bait. A way of highlighting this algorithmic driven approach are hashtag trends such as #explorepage, #fyp, and #trending. The constant posting of these products accelerates their turnaround, as well as their location. Just the energy used for content creation is a big burden on Instagram's billions of users' energy used in data centres, networks, and device manufacturing.

Environmental Justice and the Export of Consumption

The influence economy promotes consumption and its environmental justice implications are seldom discussed. When @shadabsafdarr declares that fashion consumption doesn't have to be expensive, it means the fashion industry was made more accessible: but it's through offshore production in low-cost, low-regulation nations, synthetic petroleum-based fabrics, shorter fashion lifetimes and faster fashion cycles. In essence, it is a one-for-one exchange: if some people can

afford it, others must pay the environmental price for the exports. This applies to the ways that festivals are marketed. Wearing new clothes for Eid and Diwali puts the followers into consumption cycles that have a tangible environmental impact, despite the cultural justification to do so. This kind of silence is not only unhelpful as it normalises consumption as being a harmless practice, but it also leaves the structural inequality and environmental burden of the fashion system unspoken.

Summary

A consistent pattern has emerged across the 12 Instagram accounts and 120 posts/reels. These stories reinforce ideas of consumerism, visually, linguistically, and in terms of the business setup. They promote over consumption, use culture as a shopping opportunity, manage it as a business yet never speak about the environment. These are not just passing comments, given their numbers of followers, engagement and management. They are valuable commercial platforms which inform concrete purchasing decision. These narratives serve as virtual guidebooks for Veblen's classes, read through his lens. The attention economy and algorithmic incentives are dependent on content that sells and the lack of sustainability conversation is a result of a larger problem in the influencer economy. The environmental justice angle also plays a crucial role: greater availability of fashion at home has come with the exportation of the environmental burden. The general principle is straightforward. These influencers are not objective. They play an active role in a real consumption system that has an environmental impact. They are very effective in supplying the fast fashion industry, with cultural and seasonal framing, complemented by professional management and commercial infrastructure. The influencers and their teams will not be held accountable for the environmental impact of what they promote, and they will continue to be a part of a fashion system that is slowly working its way into ecological fragility.

Influence of Instagram on Consumer Behaviour

Through the content analysis, it was found that Instagram is an important platform for the dissemination of Western-style fashion. In over 70% of posts analysed, the influencers promoted western styled fashion. Many of those posts generated a sense of urgency, such as by pointing to offers that are only available for a limited time or pointing to the rarity of the products. Consumers, especially Millennials and Generation Z, said that these posts made a huge impact on their purchasing decisions, with them buying within a few hours of seeing the products.

Environmental Impact

One of the main points that came up during the interviews was the negative effects of fast fashion on the environment. A number of the boutique owners and influencers expressed concerns over the rapid fashion and quick change of clothing, which is discarded after a few wears. Approx. 70% of the Boutique owners said that the Pakistanis were seen purchasing clothes according to the trends seen in Instagram without bothering about the environmental impact. Fashion students and influencers have additionally directed attention to textile waste, a few of whom admitted to overconsumption due to the constant over promotion of affordable fashion. Furthermore, the use of synthetic fibres, particularly polyester, was highlighted as a major factor contributing to the environmental damage caused by fast fashion in Pakistan.

Cultural Shifts

Instagram has been promoting western fashion thus reducing the popularity of traditional Pakistani clothes. Over 60% of those interviewed noted that some youth were opting for western style clothing over traditional clothing such as *shalwar kameez* and *sarri*. It is an indication of a larger cultural integration trend that has been shaped by social media.

Discussion

We are often delighted by beautiful dresses and happy, but we rarely think about the harm that fast fashion does to our environment, surroundings and climate. We talk about climate change so much but not much about how fast fashion is damaging our environment. It is crucial to be able to differentiate between weather, season, climate variability and climate change (Khan, 2025). Weather is conditions of the atmosphere reported daily in the media while the seasonal patterns are observed over a period of months. Climate variability, on the other hand, is defined by having a longer period of analysis, lasting for several decades, and climate change is the long-term changes in climate observed over a period of some thirty years. Khan also pointed out that findings from the World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) State of the Global Climate Report 2025 show that the carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels in the atmosphere are the highest in about 800,000 years, meaning global climate change is accelerating. Khan also highlighted that according to the State of the Global Climate Report 2025 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentrations in the atmosphere are the highest in approximately 800,000 years, and global climate change is accelerating (Khan, 2025).

Pakistan is one of the most climate change-susceptible countries with less than one per cent contribution to the global greenhouse gas emissions, Khan (2025) pointed out. He said that the country has seen a drop in water levels, a decrease in winter months and more extreme weather events such as flooding, cloudbursts, and long durations of drought. Climate change, he said, is largely caused by anthropogenic activities that are associated with the increase in GHG emissions and the loss of natural carbon sinks because of unsustainable land use and deforestation. In addition, Khan (2025) noted that despite the significant reduction in forest cover, Pakistan still does not meet the forest cover targets as recommended by the international scientific community to sustain the ecological balance of the country and its ability to sequester atmospheric CO₂. He highlighted that the rate of deforestation, unplanned urbanization, and poor environmental management have worsened the climate-related risks even more. Khan said the impact of these environmental issues in the long term was reduced agricultural output, food insecurity, water shortage and productive land degradation that would affect the sustainable development of Pakistan.

Khan (2025) further pointed out that Pakistan had around 13,000 glaciers, which provides a huge source of freshwater, but were being deprived due to the rising temperatures. Pakistan's contribution to global GHGs is very small and yet the risks it faces from climate induced disasters make it more vulnerable than other parts of the world. He also stressed that industries that had a significant environmental impact – such as the fashion and textile sector, which uses extensive amounts of water and energy and natural resources – should be part of climate mitigation policies. He, therefore, highlighted the importance of enhanced environmental governance, sustainable production methods and public awareness of climate change issues among policy makers, industries and public (Khan, 2025). A brand owner, Dur-e-Shahwar (Personal Communication 1, 2026) feels that people know the negative impacts of fashion and are concerned about it, however the social pressure makes it difficult for them to accept the reality of fast fashion and its impact. It's our joint responsibility to take this matter seriously. Consumerism is higher than ever today and very few consumers consider how a product will be used for the longterm and how reliable it will be. Very few people ever re-use or recycle, they enjoy wearing a dress one time and the latest fashion takes priority.

Social media is a big factor; content creators help to push the consumerist agenda by demonstrating how a single dress can be styled in various different ways. Fashion is all about

creativity and not buying something that isn't needed. If you are a true fashion creator, then you don't have to overspend. Environmentalists call fast fashion a Killer by stealth. It pollutes water and air, leaves land bare, and often we just change our clothes without addressing the underlying issues. Dr. Hizbullah Khan, (Personal Communication 2, 2026), a professor of Environmental Sciences, is of the opinion that sadly, fast fashion is having a significant impact on the environment. The credible international reports show that the textile industry generates 9,200,000 tons of waste every year, of which 20 percent is released into the water, polluting them. Current day, micro plastics are another concern of the environment, as it can be seen everywhere in rivers, on land, in dumping sites and even in fabrics with harmful effects to the environment and marine life. Education and awareness of micro plastics and “green” clothing and materials are critical.

New fashions and trends are introduced every day via social media, promoted by influencers and for no accountability and devastating impact on lives of humans and animals. According to Marukh (Personal Communication 3, 2026), a social media influencer, we are getting products and dresses mostly for the benefit of sales and value of the product. There's a psychology to it, and we make audiences think that certain outfits are trends. As soon as people are marketed by influencers, they tend to start buying things, such as the Labubu Doll. The audience trusts these influencers and thinks they can achieve the same styles by themselves. The trend, encourages youth to purchase products that they may not afford, while giving the influencer the products for free, and forcing the audience to purchase them at any cost, to be accepted by society. Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest have emerged as powerful influencers in today's fashion landscape, according to fashion designer Rida Zainab (Personal communication, April 2026). She said these platforms constantly feed their users with fresh styles and fashion articles which make them aware of the new trends and make them opt for them. Consequently, many people like to buy fast fashion clothing as it is cheap, readily available and fashionable. It is essential that while fashion is a vital means of self-expression and culture, it is not to be sacrificed for environmental sustainability, Rida Zainab added. She believes the present way of fashion consumption is leading to environmental degradation as a result of overproduction and overconsumption. Hence, she emphasized that people should not only have the right to wear clothes, but also have a moral duty to do what they can to keep the environment clean by making better choices when it comes to the clothes they consume (R. Zainab, personal communication, April 2026). Zaman (2026) reports that climate change is one of the major concerns in Pakistan where temperature has been increasing, precipitation changes are occurring and extreme events such as flooding, droughts, and heat waves are becoming common. About 40% of the country's population is engaged in agriculture rendering the sector very vulnerable, posing a threat to food security and rural livelihoods. Water scarcity is also a pressing issue, as glacial melt in the Himalayas is expected to decrease, adding to the water scarcity problem.

Climate change impacts are already being experienced, with 1,700 fatalities and \$30 billion in economic losses in 2022 due to flooding impacting 33 million people. The low forest cover (5.4%) and its rapid deforestation worsen the situation and pose a risk with regard to landslides and flooding. Facing challenges are more frequent and intense heat waves, water shortage and food insecurity. By 2050, the World Bank estimates that water availability will drop 50%, impacting the food sector, water supply and energy production. The results of this study confirm that Instagram plays a key role in promoting fast fashion in Pakistan. Western fashion, particularly with the use of Instagram stories and reels, has created a demand for trendy and affordable clothing among consumers. This has resulted in significant environmental damage, such as waste in textiles, carbon emissions, and excessive consumption of water. While Instagram has made fashion more accessible

and everyday and global trends more commonplace, it has also created a culture of overconsumption and unsustainable practices. With clothing items being constantly exchanged to keep up with the latest trends set by influencers, this further exacerbates the fashion industry's environmental footprint.

The results of this study indicate that Instagram has become more than just a social networking site – it is now a major cultural and environmental facilitator for fast fashion consumption in Pakistan. The content analysis found that the majority of the analyzed Instagram posts, reels and stories were using persuasive marketing strategies such as messages that suggest a sense of exclusivity, limited-time offers and the constant introduction of new styles referring to Western fashion trends. These tactics make consumers believe that the fashion is fleeting and thus they are more inclined to buy again and again and adopt the idea of overhauling clothes often. The findings of the interview also support the findings of the content analysis. Everyone from boutique owners to fashion designers, university professors to greenies to bloggers and social media influencers agreed on the big impact that Instagram has on consumer shopping decisions. In particular, boutique owners noticed that people were making choices on what to buy on the Instagram platform through fashion, as opposed to actual need, garment quality and durability. This is a sign of the times as consumers' preferences and buying habits are increasingly influenced by their exposure to social media via their digital devices.

The results indicate that Instagram has a significant role in fueling the quick lifestyle of fast fashion with the creation of trend-driven consumption and permanent demand for new clothes. This kind of eating behavior reinforces consumerism, raises the amount of textiles being produced, and leads to the production of more waste. It is observed from the study that Instagram is a culture revolution revolving fashion trends across the globe and in turn it is an indirect cause of environmental issues caused by fast fashion industry in Pakistan. This culture of trendy buying comes with environmental consequences which were expressed by several of the interviewees directly. Khan (PC 2) said that the global textile industry creates about 92 million tonnes of waste annually, of which 20% is dumped into water bodies along with micro plastics now being discovered in marine organisms, soil and rivers. These figures match – and surpass – other reports that suggest the fashion industry is responsible for about 8% of global carbon emissions and 20% of global wastewater (Greenfield & Roberts, 2019; WWF, 2021), which is equivalent to the carbon emissions of international aviation and shipping.

Water shortage came up as a critical issue in the context of Pakistan. It takes about 7,500 litres of water to produce one pair of jeans, which is equivalent to the water consumption of 10 people for 1 year. This is very crucial as Pakistan already has more than 100 million people who do not have access to clean drinking water and per capita water availability is only 160 cubic metres. In his book "Pakistan's Climate Journey" (2025), Khalid Khan has placed this resource stress in a larger context of a 1.55 degrees increase in the global temperature, a reduction of the winter season by 37 days and a long-term decline in the country's water table. With 33 million people and estimated \$30 billion of economic damage, the 2022 floods highlight the magnitude of vulnerability that resource consumption from fast fashion adds. The research also revealed that there was a psychological aspect to Instagram's influence. As Marukh (PC 3) explained, “trend promotion turns consumer wants into perceived needs” – in doing so the audience believes that it is “needed” to “be like” an influencer, and that it is “possible” to do so. Rida Zainab (PC 4) said that fast fashion is becoming a normal way of life on Instagram, TikTok and Pinterest, as it becomes fashionable, accessible and low risk despite the high environmental and ethical implications.

In parallel to these pressures on consumption, the data reveal a parallel cultural change. Over 60% of the interviewees said that younger consumers are more inclined to buy western clothes than to buy *shalwar kameez* and *sarhi*. This implies that Instagram's impact goes beyond merely influencing shopping habits and impacts the local sartorial identity, making traditional clothing seem 'out of date' in comparison to the 'trending' clothing that is disseminated globally. One theme that came through in all the interviews, was that of awareness and action in terms of behaviour with regard to the environment. Dur-e-Shahwar (PC 1) pointed out that consumers know the environmental impact of fashion, but their sense of fashion will take precedence, leading to low re-use and recycling rates. The knowledge-action gap suggests that awareness-raising efforts will not lead to changing consumption patterns if no structural or policy changes are implemented.

Conclusion

All these findings indicate that Instagram is a double-sided sword in Pakistan's fashion realm. In a positive sense, it has made fashion more accessible to everyone, making it easily visible to the young people in Pakistan, and allowing smaller fashion outlets and designers to reach large audiences. In positive terms, it has made fashion more accessible for everyone; the young people of Pakistan are now able to see international fashion trends, and smaller boutiques and designers can now reach larger audiences. This on the one hand has fostered a culture of disposability, one that promotes trend-driven, throwaway buying with little attention paid to how long garments last, where their materials come from or their environmental impact. As this research demonstrates, these consumption patterns are not accidental, but are designed as part of the Instagram algorithm, which pushes high engagement content, the systems of incentives for influencers who are motivated to create new and novel content, and a marketing language that emphasizes urgency and scarcity. The environmental implications range from water scarcity to textile waste and micro plastic pollution, adding to Pakistan's overall climate sensitivity and making the country's fast-fashion consumption a local priority—one that is not only abstract, locally but, too. Meanwhile, there is a persistence of awareness, but no corresponding behavioural change, which was reported by several interviewees, and which shows that it will be necessary to do more than just educate individuals about this issue. It demands a shared responsibility: influencers taking responsibility for their part in normalizing consumption, brands implementing greater transparency and sustainable production, and the introduction of policy measures regarding the management of textile waste and environmental disclosure. In the end, the ease and the popularity of fashion created by Instagram are hardly divorced from the environmental cost. In Pakistan, where climate risks are mounting due to global warming, whether it be the loss of glaciers, irregular weather patterns or a reduction in arable land, the environmental impact of fashion consumption is no longer an afterthought, but a factor that directly affects the country's overall resilience. To do so will involve a rethinking and reconceptualization of fashion as less than just self-expression or social performance, and more as a practice that has tangible impacts on the environment and on future generations.

Recommendations

1. Consumer awareness: Encourage consumers to be aware of the environmental consequences of fast fashion.
2. Sustainable Fashion Promotion: Promote use of eco-friendly materials and slow fashion.
3. Influencer Responsibility: Fashion influencers need to be responsible for promoting sustainability with trends.
4. Government Intervention: Implement measures to decrease textile waste and promote sustainability in textile production.

5. Cultural Preservation: Encourage the use of traditional Pakistani dresses in addition to contemporary styles.

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