

Week - 8

Based on the lecture this week, I watched a documentary called 'The Story of Plastic'. It explores the production, use and disposal of plastics and reveals the danger to oceans, wildlife and human health. Plastics are widely used in packaging, daily necessities, building materials and other fields, in part because of their lightweight, durable and cheap properties. Among them, the documentary mentioned the ideas related to today's overconsumption and consumerism.

Consumerism tends to drive large-scale production and consumption, resulting in a large demand for plastic products, especially single-use plastic products. This consumption behavior intensifies the production, use and disposal of plastics, causing significant environmental impacts.

At the same time, the widespread presence of plastic products and consumerist means such as advertising have affected people's shopping decisions, prompting them to buy and use plastic products more frequently. This reinforces dependence on plastic, creating a vicious cycle that accelerates the plastic crisis.

The book 'The Consumer Society' points out that the consumerism is essentially a tool of exploitation, but what is different from ancient slavery is that consumerism can make people feel that they are not slaves, but people striving for a better life. After the Industrial Revolution, productivity was greatly improved, and a large number of goods flooded into the market to meet people's growing needs. However, these goods also brought about class conflicts (for example, goods that were once only owned by some nobles are now available to everyone). Some rulers have discovered that if ordinary people can buy some high-end products, they will have the illusion of being on equal footing with the nobles, and will no longer resist the existing social order and work for the rulers with peace of mind. On the other hand, consumerism is the pursuit of respectability, treating desires as needs, and enjoying

material things without restraint.

The most obvious example is fashion and fast fashion merchandise. The Industrial Revolution in the 18th centuries brought about the mechanization of the textile industry and enabled the mass production of ready-made garments. Fashion has changed from a work of art for nobles to a product that everyone can afford.

Fast fashion as imitations of famous designer brands, crazily copies high-end brand products and sells them to the world at ultra-low prices. Such high-end fashion products and low prices stimulate consumers' desire to consume. The New York Times once reported that Zara's annual output is as high as 840 million pieces. By 2014, the global fashion industry produced 100 billion pieces of clothing, and by 2030, it will reach 100 million tons of clothing.



Acne's shearling jacket (left) retails for \$2,700, while Zara's copy (right) costs \$149. Acne & Zara

This is an extremely resource-intensive product, producing large quantities of cheap clothing, causing consumers to throw away old clothing more frequently. These garments often contain difficult-to-degrade materials such as synthetic fibers, making them more difficult to process and recycle. According to statistics, 87% of the textiles used to make clothing around the world end up in landfills and incineration. At the same time, in order to maintain low costs, they often rely on cheap labor, resulting in poor labor conditions and low wages in some areas. This business model and production method has a significant negative impact on the environment and society.

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