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The Impact of Ultra-Fast Fashion on Finland's Environmental Sustainability Goals

Temu and Shein in Finland: Environmental and Social Impacts

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Abstract

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The aim of this thesis is to examine how the rise of ultra-fast fashion challenges Finland's environmental sustainability goals. Ultra-fast fashion platforms such as Temu and Shein have rapidly increased low-cost online consumption, leading to higher volumes of imports, short product lifecycles, and growing environmental impacts. While the environmental effects of fast fashion have been widely studied, less attention has been given to the specific impacts of ultra-fast fashion on national sustainability targets in Finland.

The study applies a qualitative, literature-based research approach. The analysis is based on academic articles, institutional reports, and Finnish governmental and media sources. The material is examined thematically, focusing on how ultra-fast fashion affects waste generation, transport-related emissions, and Finland's efforts to promote the circular economy and sustainable consumption.

The findings indicate that ultra-fast fashion reinforces high-volume consumption patterns that conflict with Finland's environmental objectives. Although production takes place mainly outside Finland, the environmental consequences are experienced domestically through increased packaging waste, logistics emissions, and pressure on waste management systems. The thesis concludes that addressing these challenges requires stronger policy measures, increased consumer awareness, and further research on consumption-based environmental impacts.

Keywords: ultra-fast fashion, environmental sustainability, Finland, consumption

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Abstrakt

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Syftet med detta examensarbete är att undersöka hur framväxten av ultrasnabbt mode utmanar Finlands mål för miljömässig hållbarhet. Plattformar för ultrasnabbt mode såsom Temu och Shein har snabbt ökat lågprisbaserad nätkonsumtion, vilket har lett till större importvolymer, korta produktlivscykler och ökande miljöpåverkan. Medan miljöeffekterna av snabb och storskalig klädproduktion har studerats i stor utsträckning, har mindre uppmärksamhet riktats mot de specifika konsekvenser som ultrasnabbt mode har för nationella hållbarhetsmål i Finland.

Studien tillämpar en kvalitativ, litteraturbaserad forskningsmetod. Analysen grundar sig på vetenskapliga artiklar, institutionella rapporter samt finländska myndigheter och mediekällor. Materialet analyseras tematiskt med fokus på hur ultrasnabbt mode påverkar avfallsmängder, transportrelaterade utsläpp samt Finlands arbete för cirkulär ekonomi och hållbar konsumtion.

Resultaten visar att ultrasnabbt mode förstärker konsumtionsmönster med höga volymer som står i konflikt med Finlands miljömål. Även om produktionen huvudsakligen sker utanför Finland upplevs miljökonsekvenserna nationellt genom ökat förpackningsavfall, logistikutsläpp och belastning på avfallshanteringssystemen. Arbetet drar slutsatsen att hanteringen av dessa utmaningar kräver starkare politiska åtgärder, ökad konsumentmedvetenhet samt fortsatt forskning om konsumtionsbaserad miljöpåverkan.

Nyckelord: ultrasnabbt mode, miljömässig hållbarhet, Finland, konsumtion

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Glossary

CO_2	Carbon dioxide
EU	European Union
Tulli	Finnish Customs

1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to look into how ultra-fast fashion causes issues for Finland's environmental sustainability goals. This study examines how ultra-fast fashion consumption harms Finland's environment when production occurs outside Finland and the European Union. The aim is to show how global ultra-fast fashion consumption patterns create local environmental challenges that conflict with Finland's climate and sustainability objectives.

The research question has value because Finland has committed to ambitious and legally binding environmental targets. This includes the goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2035. This is a goal that requires a lot of reduction in emissions, waste, and resource use. Consumption-based emissions are high, and the imported goods, often by Shein and Temu, produced in China, contribute a substantial amount to the Finnish environmental footprint. Ultra-fast fashion represents a rapidly growing consumption model that is only harmful.

Ultra-fast fashion refers to a business model that makes and ships products at a high speed and a low cost. Platforms that are taken as examples are Temu and Shein. They use digital technologies, global supply chains, and aggressive marketing to give a constant flow of new items. The items, such as clothing and other products, are made for short-term use and are shipped directly to the consumers in individual parcels. This is a way of operating that promotes frequent purchasing and overconsumption. This is increasing material use, transport emissions, and waste generation.

Ultra-fast fashion has become more popular in Finland due to the low prices, convenience, and wide selection of products. Consumer behaviour has changed due to the cheap products, making impulse buying easier and more frequent. Even if the products are produced outside the European Union, the environmental harm of the consumption ends up in Finland. Waste management, recycling, and emissions from logistics put pressure on national systems and contribute to environmental harm within Finnish borders.

One of the main harms that is caused to the environment is the textile waste related to ultra-fast fashion. The products that are sold on the ultra-fast fashion platforms are mostly made out of cheap, low-quality materials that are not made to last long. The result is that many items have short life cycles and are becoming waste only after a few uses. This increases the textile waste that Finland must handle. This is in direct conflict with Finland's circular economy goals, which aim to reduce waste and keep materials in use for longer.

In addition to waste, the way the logistics are handled by the ultra-fast fashion companies has a huge environmental impact, in the most harmful way. Unlike traditional retail models, which focus on bulk importing, ultra-fast fashion companies are shipping the products individually to the end consumer. This parcel-based delivery model greatest higher transport related emissions. This is important as the volumes of ultra-fast fashion ordered to Finland are increasing, from the already high volumes. This challenges the efforts to reduce the carbon footprint of consumers based in Finland.

Previous research has shown that the sustainability impact of ultra-fast fashion increases problems such as overproduction and environmental damage. However, a lot of research focuses on the harm created by ultra-fast fashion on an international level, while not looking at the harm caused on a national level. Especially, there are not enough studies that examine how ultra-fast fashion affects environmental sustainability goals in smaller economies, such as Finland. In the smaller economies, Finland’s consumption patterns and regulatory contexts differ from those of larger markets.

This thesis looks at the research gap by focusing on Finland as the case study. Instead of analysing the global supply chain alone, this study looks into how ultra-fast fashion becomes an environmental challenge on a national scale. Economic and social impacts are also looked at, but primarily in relation to their environmental consequences. The research is based on a literature review that takes on academic studies, policy documents, and Finnish institutional sources.

1.1 Background

Globally, even if the awareness amongst consumers in the Western world is getting better, the problem still stands. Companies like Temu and Shein offer ultra-fast fashion extremely cheaply. The ultra-fast fashion brands exploit cheap, often even child labour, and produce excessive waste. Many studies have been done on fast fashion and the harm it causes. There is a gap in research when it comes to ultra-fast fashion, especially when comparing ultra-fast fashion to slow fashion, in terms of their ways of operating.

The issue is extremely important now, seeing ultra-fast fashion brands are growing at a fast pace, finding global consumers via online platforms, and especially via social media platforms. In 2024, Shein had sales of about USD 38 billion (Financial Times 2025), and Temu's sales were around USD 70.8 billion. (Backlinko 2025)

Even if fast fashion has been criticized for its bad environmental and social impacts, ultra-fast fashion takes the issues to the max by increasing the speed of both the delivery and production. At the same time, it lowers the quality and the durability of the clothing and other items. This causes a lot of overproduction and pollution. The supply chains are partly hidden, and that raises concern about working conditions and the harm that is being caused to the environment. The slow fashion movement promotes more ethical and sustainable alternatives to fast and ultra-fast fashion. When using recycled materials, make sure the labour is fair, and the main focus is on quality over quantity. There is still limited research comparing these two opposites. Looking into how production, labour, logistics, and environmental impacts will be identified from what point of view, the problem can be fixed.

When scaling down from the global point of view and looking into the situation in Finland in 2024, the situation is alarming. Statistics from *Tulli,* the Finnish customs, show that small parcel imports from China to Finland have increased. According to *Kaupan liitto*, statistics from Finnish Customs show that the

number of low-value shipments (valued under €150) arriving in Finland from outside the EU grew explosively in 2024, reaching 28.2 million parcels, compared to only 3.6 million the previous year, with Chinese shipments increasing by over 800 percent. (Kaupan liitto 2025)

1.2 Problem Statement

Companies like Temu and Shein offer ultra-fast fashion extremely cheaply. These brands exploit cheap and sometimes even child labour and produce excessive waste. Ultra-fast fashion increases the speed of production and delivery while lowering product quality and durability. This leads to overproduction, pollution, and hidden supply chains that raise concerns about environmental harm and working conditions.

Ultra-fast fashion has become an environmental problem as it is based on a model of low prices, high volumes, and fast delivery. This model is leading to overconsumption. People buy more often, and the products only last for a short time. From the environmental point of view, this is very harmful as it increases material use, transport emissions, and waste generation. The production is outside Finland and the EU. But the waste, recycling burden, and emissions linked to the delivery and disposal are a local issue.

This is especially important in Finland because Finland has ambitious environmental goals. The goals require lowering emissions and reducing waste. Meanwhile, the ultra-fast fashion consumption becomes higher every year. According to Tulli, the amount for 2025 is expected to be over 50 million in 2025. This is almost double from the year 2024. (Yle 2024) This creates an issue on the national level, when Finland is promoting sustainable consumption and the circular economy. The conflict is between the cheap consumption on one side and the long-term environmental targets on the other.

This thesis focuses on the environmental dimensions of this issue. The main problem is not only the ultra-fast fashion's negative impact on a global scale, but it also slows down Finland in its goals of sustainability.

1.2.1 Finland-specific problem

In Finland, the situation is alarming. Small parcel imports from China under €150 increased to 28.2 million in 2024, up 823% from the previous year. (Yle 2024) This creates four major risks: overconsumption and waste, environmental burden, loss of tax income, and reduced competitiveness of Finnish and European companies that follow stricter labour, tax, and environmental standards. There are also product safety risks, as many items arrive without proper inspection. The environmental impact of ultra-fast fashion is closely linked to the consumption patterns of consumers in Finland. Ultra-fast fashion is an environmental challenge in Finland, more so because of consumption than production. Most ultra-fast fashion brands produce their products outside the European Union and outside Finland. Even if the production is not happening in Finland, Finland is affected by the increased waste generation, transport-related emissions, and pressure on national waste management and sustainability systems.

The Finnish customs, Tulli, says that the number of small parcels arriving in Finland from outside the European Union has increased a lot in recent years. Most of the parcels are coming from China. Between 2022 and 2024, the number of parcels arriving has grown to tens of millions of parcels every year. This is mostly because online platforms like Temu and Shein have become more popular in Finland. (Yle 2024)

That ultra-fast fashion has become more popular in Finland conflicts with the environmental and climate objectives set by Finland. The goals are ambitious, and the focus is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Finland wants to promote more sustainable consumption patterns and the circular economy. (Finnish Ministry of the Environment 2024) Because ultra-fast fashion companies promote frequent purchasing and rapid disposal of the items, it is making it more difficult for Finland to reduce consumption-based emissions and, therefore, waste.

In addition, the environmental burden that ultra-fast fashion causes is not evenly distributed. The production-related impacts occur outside Finland and the EU, but the environmental cost of transport, packaging waste, and disposal is a burden on Finland. This is a key challenge for Finland's environmental policy, as the current consumer-based environmental harm continues to grow (Yle 2024)

1.2.2 Why this needs to be researched

Many studies focus on fast fashion globally, but there is limited research on ultra-fast fashion and its impact specifically in Finland. There are not enough studies to date that focus on how ultra-fast fashion affects national environmental sustainability goals, based on consumption-based impacts. This is relevant for Finland because in Finland, consumption patterns play a significant role in the overall pressure on the environment.

Studies that focus on Finland are needed as national sustainability targets are not only dependent on production practices, but more so on the amount of goods that are consumed and how they are being disposed of. Ultra-fast fashion is making it harder to reach the environmental sustainability goals because of the business model they use. Ultra-fast fashion companies promote overconsumption, leading to short product lifecycles, more waste, and emissions.

By showing this gap, this thesis contributes to existing literature by connecting ultra-fast fashion consumption with the environmental objectives set by Finland. This study will provide a focused understanding of how global fashion platforms can harm national sustainability outcomes and why polices and consumption-related responses are necessary on a national and international level.

1.3 Research aims and questions

This thesis aims to examine how ultra-fast fashion is affecting Finland’s progress towards environmental sustainability goals. The study looks into the

environmental consequences that ultra-fast fashion consumption has a large effect.

Ultra-fast fashion brands are operating with a business model that focuses on low prices and fast delivery. This promotes overconsumption, and the products have a short lifecycle. This links to increased material use, transport emissions, and waste. In Finland, this is important as Finland has plans on reducing emissions, limiting waste, and promote circular economy. The research, therefore, aims to connect the global ultra-fast fashion business models outcome with Finland, which has environmental sustainability objectives. This is important as there is a clear mismatch between the environmental sustainability goals and the fact that Finnish consumers order more each year from ultra-fast fashion companies.

The thesis addresses a research gap by focusing on Finland. While it has been studied what ultra-fast fashion does on a global level. Fewer studies are done on the analysis of how this business model is harming national sustainability goals. By applying the already existing research to the Finnish context, this study is contributing to a wider understanding of how ultra-fast fashion is hindering environmental progress on a national level and in a smaller economy that has clear and ambitious climate targets.

The main research question in this thesis is:

How does ultra-fast fashion hinder Finland’s progress towards environmental sustainability goals?

As support for the main research question, the thesis also addresses these sub-questions:

How does ultra-fast fashion influence consumption patterns in Finland in ways that increase environmental pressure and emissions?

How do logistics and parcel-based delivery associated with ultra-fast fashion contribute to environmental impacts in Finland?

How does ultra-fast fashion increase waste-related challenges in Finland, particularly in relation to textiles and packaging?

Answering these questions, this thesis aims to show the environmental challenges that are caused by ultra-fast fashion in Finland.

1.4 Scope and limitations

This thesis focuses on the environmental harm and impact that ultra-fast fashion has on Finland, with a focus on consumption patterns, logistics, and the overall effect on Finland's progress towards environmental sustainability goals. By using Finland as a case study, this thesis aims to show how global consumption models create environmental issues on a national scale.

The scope of this thesis is limited to secondary data and existing literature. The analysis is based on academic research, policy documents, and reports from Finnish institutions and authorities, such as the European Union. Primary data collection, such as interviews or surveys are not included in this thesis. The result is that the finding relies on the availability, quality, and relevance of existing sources.

This study focuses on environmental sustainability. Economic and social aspects, as a part of the harm that ultra-fast fashion has caused is discussed as they are related to the environmental impacts. Examples of this are overconsumption, waste generation, and emissions. Ethical, cultural, or psychological dimensions of consumer behaviour are not included in the scope of this thesis.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. Primarily, consumption-based environmental impacts are complex and therefore also difficult to measure exactly. This becomes especially difficult when production takes place outside

national borders. Secondly, the fast change of this topic, and the fast change in the ultra-fast fashion platforms and regulations, means that the data that is available and that has been used in this thesis can become outdated even within a short period of time. Lastly, because the study doesn't include quantitative emissions calculations, the analysis is interpretative and not predictive.

Despite these limitations, the scope of the choices allows for a focused examination of how ultra-fast fashion challenges Finland's environmental sustainability goals and provides a solid basis for discussions and recommendations.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured in the following way. Chapter 1 introduces the topic of ultra-fast fashion, explains why this is relevant in Finland, the research aim, research question, and the scope and limitations of this study. Chapter 2 shows a literature review and defines key concepts such as fast fashion, ultra-fast fashion, and slow fashion. It also shows existing research on the environmental impacts of fashion consumption and how global fashion systems can create national-level sustainability challenges. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology that is used in this thesis. It shows the qualitative, literature-based approach, the main types of sources that have been used, and the outlines of how the material was analysed. Chapter 4 shows the analysis and discussion focusing on the environmental impacts of ultra-fast fashion in Finland. Also showing economic and social factors when directly related to environmental sustainability. Chapter 5 summarizes the main findings, discusses the implications of Finland's environmental sustainability goals, and presents recommendations and suggestions for the future and future research.

2 Background

This chapter presents a literature review on ultra-fast fashion, environmental sustainability, and consumption-related impacts. The theoretical understanding of how ultra-fast fashion contributes to environmental challenges, particularly in countries with sustainability goals, will be analysed. The focus is on Finland. The research that is existing has examined the environmental impact of fast fashion and global supply chains. This includes issues such as overproduction, high emissions, and waste generation. The main research question of this thesis is: how ultra-fast fashion hinders Finland’s progress towards environmental sustainability goals.

Ultra-fast fashion is a global phenomenon, but the environmental issues are experienced locally. This includes consumption patterns, logistics, and waste management systems. For this reason, the literature review connects global research to the Finnish national context.

Recent sustainability research shows that consumption-based emissions have a huge role in the national environmental footprint. Especially when production occurs abroad. (Ivanova et al.,2016) This is highly relevant for Finland, where a large amount of environmental impact is linked to imported goods. Ultra-fast fashion contributes to this because of relying on global supply chains and parcel-based delivery models that create large volumes of transport-related emissions. (Niinimäki 2020) The patterns used by ultra-fast fashion companies challenge national efforts to reduce emissions and promote sustainable consumption and the circular economy.

The circular economy is the opposite of the traditional linear economic model. In the linear economic model, resources are extracted, products are made, and discarded as waste at the end of the product's life cycle. The idea of the circular economy is to have the material in use for as long as possible, and therefore reducing the need for new raw materials. (Ellen MacArthur Foundation n.d.)

In a circular system, the value of materials is maintained through reuse, repair, remanufacturing, and recycling. (Ellen MacArthur Foundation n.d) The circular economy is reducing the environmental pressure as fewer natural resources need to be extracted, and less waste is produced.

The European Environment Agency is explaining that the circular economy aims to separate economic growth from resource consumption. Economic activity is created in a circular economy without the increasing of material usage. (European Environmental Agency 2019)

One of the key sustainability strategies in Finland is circularity. To reach environmental targets, expanding product life cycles and increasing reuse are important. (Sitra 2026) Preventing waste is more effective than handling it afterwards, as the environmental impacts are mostly determined during production. (Sitra 2016)

Products having a shorter lifetime weaken the circular economy system as materials are leaving the cycle quickly. As products get replaced at a fast pace, recycling systems can't recover material efficiently, and the amount of waste increases. (European Environmental Agency 2019)

Ultra-fast fashion is harming the circular economy model as it is based on overconsumption. When the amount of low-cost items is imported, it reduces reuse, repair, and the second-hand use, which weakens the circular economy goals (Sitra 2016)

Consumption-based emissions include all emissions that are generated during the production and transportation of items or services that are consumed by residents, even if the emissions are not physically occurring in the same place. (Helsinki Region Environmental Service Authority n.d)

Traditional emission statistics measure the greenhouse gas emissions that are produces in a country's borders. The global production chains create

environmental impact in different countries. The products are often made in a country other than where they are consumed. (Yamano and Guilhoto, 2020)

The household consumption is causing emissions that occur outside the national borders when global supply chains are used. (Ivanova et. Al., 2015) This is the reason why national emission statistics can show a decrease in domestic emissions, even when the real environmental impact increases. Production-based measurements can give a false picture of the sustainability process. (Yamano and Guilhoto, 2020)

Ultra-fast fashion is a clear example of this. When the products are made outside the European Union, but consumed inside it, it means that the environmental impacts are driven by the local consumers. (Ivanova et al., 2015)

To conclude, the consumption-based emissions give a more accurate picture of the environmental impact of modern consumption.

2.1 Definitions and Key Concepts

Fast fashion is an inexpensive, trend-driven clothing that has been influenced by designs seen on the runways. Previously, different fashion brands updated their collections a few times a year. Fast fashion brands make new styles more often, even every week or month. Often, cheap labour is used, and the quality of the materials is not the highest. Popular fast fashion brands are Zara and H&M.
Ultra-fast fashion is fast fashion, but everything is sped up. The brand examples in ultra-fast fashion are Shein and Temu. The clothing is made from the cheapest possible materials, designed to be worn only a few times. These companies release new clothes every day. The factories making the clothes face poor conditions and very low pay. Also, the environment suffers from all the pollution. Ultra-fast fashion as a business model represents speed, volume, and the reduction of cost. All of this is taken to an extreme level. This is possible because of the digitalized supply chains, real-time data collection, and on-

demand production models that respond extremely rapidly to online trends and customer behaviour patterns. (Chen et al. 2022; Kumar et al. 2023)

The main characteristic of ultra-fast fashion is its reliance on data-driven design, especially the algorithm-based decision-making. The platforms in question, Temu and Shein, are using consumer data, social media trends, and online search behaviour to identify popular styles. The production is easy to scale up fast if a trend changes. (Kumar et al 2023)

Ultra-fast fashion is different from fast fashion in the logistics and distribution models used. The products are shipped to the end customer in individual parcels. This is often done via air freight to minimize delivery times. This logistics structure increases transport-related emissions and waste from the packaging in comparison to centralized distribution systems used by traditional retailers. (Chen et al. 2022) Production often takes place outside Finland and outside the EU.

From a sustainability perspective, ultra-fast fashion has been criticised for promoting overconsumption to consumers. Especially highlighting disposability.

Slow fashion is the opposite of fast fashion. The idea is quality over quantity. The focus is to encourage consumers to buy fewer, better-made clothes that will last for as long as possible. The slow fashion idea is to find clothing that is ethically produced, uses fair labour, and has a small environmental impact. The slow fashion movement focuses on timeless designs and finding companies that produce locally, in small quantities, often from natural or recycled materials.

Research shows that fast and ultra-fast fashion leads to overproduction, shorter product lifecycles, and an increase in waste. The most important thing is low prices and speed in the ultra-fast and fast fashion world. Therefor the consumption becomes higher, consumers buy clothing more often, and when the durability of the clothing is low quality, it leads to the clothing being disposed of only after a few uses. The result is that fast fashion, and especially ultra-fast

fashion, is a major contributor to environmental pressure within the global fashion industry. (Chen et al., 2022)

Ultra-fast fashion is relying on fragmented logistics models, and individual items are shipped directly to the end consumer, often via air freight. This increases the emissions and makes it more difficult to regulate. Because the transparency is missing in the supply chain, labour conditions, environmental responsibility, and product safety, it becomes difficult to know what is going on. This raises concerns. With the relatively recent emergence of ultra-fast fashion, it has not yet been studied as extensively as fast fashion. This creates a gap in the academic literature (Kumar et al., 2023)

Research shows that slow fashion is challenging the idea of overconsumption by branding clothing as something that is a long-term investment instead of a disposable product. Repair, resale, rental, and recycling are very important in the slow fashion business models. The main goal is to reduce the environmental harm and, at the same time supporting more responsible consumer behaviour (Chen et al., 2022)

2.2 Global Context: Environmental and Social Issues in Fashion

The ultra-fast fashion industry has huge negative impacts on the sustainability aspect. One part of that is the supply chain. Because supply chains are global, it is difficult to completely monitor the environmental and social impact and responsibility. Overproduction is also a key issue; a maximum of 60% of clothing is sold at full price, and the rest is waste. The use of synthetic fibre, as an example, polyester, causes huge emissions. (Chen, Y., Chen, Z., Tang, R. & Yu, S. 2022)

In addition to the overproduction that ultra-fast fashion makes, the clothes that are being produced are often made from less sustainable alternatives like polyester. Polyester is made from fossil fuels and therefore increases carbon emissions. This, combined with companies using air freight to deliver the

products as fast as possible, makes the CO_2 emissions even higher. (Kumar, A., Kim, Y., & Lim, J., 2023)

Shein's logistics model is focused on air freight. This leads to high emissions. In 2024, the transport-related CO_2 emissions increased by 13.7% from the year before. This means that the CO_2 emissions caused by Shein in transportation alone were 8.52 million metric tons. (Reuters, 2025)

Chen et al. 2022 Says that overproduction is a structural issue. A large portion of the clothing is never sold at full price and often ends up as waste. In 2023 emphasizes the issues that ultra-fast fashion creates when increasing production speeds while reducing the quality and durability. (Chen et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2023)

More recent research shows that sustainability initiatives in the fashion industry do not solve the underlying structural problems. Often, brands tell about sustainability commitments, but actual improvements are often very limited. There is a difference between the planned goals and the real outcomes; this is one of the main issues in sustainable supply chain management research. (Schiaroli, Dangelico and Fraccascia 2024)

2.3 Research Gap

Fast fashion has been widely studied for its sustainability issues and unfair labour practices. However, there is limited research that focuses specifically on ultra-fast fashion and its impact in Finland. Most existing studies approach the topic from a global perspective and do not address the local environmental, economic, and social consequences in Finland. There is also limited comparison between ultra-fast fashion and slow fashion in terms of their supply chain strategies and long-term sustainability. This thesis addresses this gap by examining how the rise of ultra-fast fashion affects Finland and how slow fashion may offer a more sustainable alternative.

There is less studies on how sustainability challenges affect individual countries like Finland. The problem is more often looked at on a global scale. There is not enough research done on the connection between ultra-fast fashion consumption and national sustainability goals, regulatory capacity, and the economic impact. This thesis shows this gap by looking at how ultra-fast fashion challenges the environment. Economic and social sustainability in Finland by and by exploring potential policies for regulatory responses.

2.4 Finland Context

In recent years, ultra-fast fashion has become very popular in Finland. The extremely low prices that the online stores offer have made online platforms like Temu and Shein very popular. The items are cheaply made, and the low price easily leads to overconsumption. Another issue with the pricing is that it encourages impulse buying, especially when the ultra-fast fashion apps offer the consumer different discounts and campaigns.

The number of small packages entering Finland from China has increased rapidly. In 2022, approximately 850,000 packages arrived in Finland outside the EU. In 2024, the number was 28 million. The number is expected to grow by 2025. (Yle 2025) The items ordered from ultra-fast fashion platforms often have quality issues. This decreases the amount of use, and the products are often short-lived. This puts pressure on the environment and Finnish waste management systems.

Ultra-fast fashion creates challenges for Finland. Overconsumption creates waste problems. The products are made outside the EU, and taxes are not paid to the EU or Finland. It is harder for Finnish companies to compete in different fields with the ultra-fast fashion companies, as they are making products much more cheaply. To conclude, ultra-fast fashion is not only a trend, but also a big harming factor for Finland's environment and economy.

Ultra-Fast Fashion Consumption in Finland

Statistics from Tulli, the Finnish customs, show that small parcel imports from China to Finland have increased ninefold. The volumes are so high that customs cannot inspect them properly. The platforms create serious issues for authorities, businesses, and the environment. Low prices encourage overconsumption, create waste, reduce tax revenue, harm Finnish companies, and create product safety risks. (Yle 2024)

Temu is the most popular online store for over-50s and in rural areas. The term “Temutus” refers to ordering many small packages under €150 from Chinese platforms. A consumer survey from Postnord in 2024 showed that Temu is most popular among age groups 50+ and rural consumers in Finland and other Nordic countries. (Yle 2024)

“Krääsävero” - environmental tax

The Finnish politician Antti Kaikkonen suggested a “junk tax” to address the issue of cheap imported goods. The aim would be to reduce low-quality imports that create waste and harm Finnish producers. (Yle 2024)

Tax Revenue Loss

Kaupan liitto calculated that Finland received only 29.4 million euros in taxes from small online orders under €150 in 2024. If even 30% of these purchases had been made from Finnish sellers, tax revenue would have been over 97 million euros. Ultra-fast fashion harms Finland through waste, health risks, and obstacles to the circular economy. (Taloustaito 2024)

Political Perspectives

Finnish political parties disagree on solutions. Some call for taxes or bans, while others argue it is unrealistic without EU-level action. (MTV Uutiset 2024)

Human Rights Perspective

The organization Eetti notes a lack of transparency and possible human rights violations in Temu's supply chains. Reports indicate poor labour conditions and possible forced labour. Eetti argues Temu's sustainability messaging is greenwashing. (MTV Uutiset 2024)

This rapid growth has put pressure on Finnish authorities, mostly in customs and product safety regulators. The large amount of arriving parcels, the effective monitoring of the safety of the products, environmental compliance, and tax obligations have become more difficult (Yle 2024). The result is that the environmental burden of waste management and the risks associated with the use of unsafe products are on Finland and, in the bigger picture, also on the EU.

Kaupan liitto has estimated that if the low-value online purchases were made from retailers operating in Finland, the tax revenue would be up to 324.2 million euros. The harm that ultra-fast fashion has is harming the economic situation and fairness in Finland (Kaupan liitto 2025)

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

This thesis will be written using a qualitative approach that is based on a literature review. The analysis will focus on the comparison of existing research. The main focus will be on how ultra-fast fashion is harmful to Finland and Finland's progress towards the set environmental sustainability goals.

This thesis applies a qualitative research approach. This is suitable for studying a complex sustainability issue that cannot be looked at only with numerical data. Qualitative research makes the understanding better for structures, such as supply chains, environmental impacts, and regulatory challenges (Creswell and Poth 2018)

A literature-based approach is suitable as ultra-fast fashion has been widely discussed in academic studies and institutional reports. This thesis aims to provide an overall understanding of how ultra-fast fashion affects sustainability, particularly in Finland, by comparing existing research.

3.2 Data Sources

Academic journals, reports, and publications in this field will be used to look into sustainable practices and the environmental impact. The focus is on recent publications in Finland. Media sources such as Yle, Finnish Customs (Tulli), and Kaupan liitto will also be used to understand the current national situation.

The data for this thesis are sourced from secondary sources. Meaning peer-reviewed academic articles, reposts published by the European Union institution, Finnish authorities, and non-government organizations.

Finnish media sources are looked into for describing recent developments and public discussions about the situation of ultra-fast fashion in Finland. Media sources are used to identify relevant events and discussions, but original reports and primary publications are consulted whenever possible to improve data reliability (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill 2019).

3.3 Analytical Method

The literature used will be analysed by looking at patterns and themes that occur when comparing ultra-fast fashion and slow fashion. The most important topics are Finland, emissions, working conditions, and transparency. This thematic approach is used to answer the research questions and show the differences between the two fashion models.

The sourced material is looked at by using thematic analysis. The method focuses on identifying recurring themes and patterns in all the different sources. (Braun and Clarke 2006)

This thesis and the analysis are structured around three sustainability dimensions: economic impacts, social impacts, and environmental impacts. The themes are used to organize the analysis chapter and to look into how global ultra-fast fashion practices harm Finland.

3.4 Limitations

This thesis does not include interviews or new data, meaning that the findings depend on the availability and accuracy of the sources used. There may also be limitations due to possible bias in media reporting and differences in the depth and quality of available research. The results reflect the current state of publicly available information.

Because this thesis is based on secondary data, it has some limitations. The lack of primary data means that the analyst relies on existing interpretations and reported findings. When using media articles, it has been considered that they can reflect a specific perspective.

The limitations are addressed by using different types of sources and critically examining their credibility. Even with the limitations, a qualitative literature-based approach is suitable for an overview of the impact that ultra-fast fashion has on Finland.

4 Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Environmental impacts

The ultra-fast fashion industry has huge negative impacts on the sustainability aspect when looking at supply chains. Because supply chains are global, it is difficult to completely monitor the environmental and social impact and

responsibility. Overproduction is also a key issue; a maximum of 60% of clothing is sold at full price, and the rest is waste. The use of synthetic fibre, as an example, polyester, causes huge emissions. (Chen, Y., Chen, Z., Tang, R. & Yu, S. 2022)

In addition to the overproduction that ultra-fast fashion makes, the clothes that are produced are often made from less sustainable alternatives like polyester. Polyester is made from fossil fuels and therefore contributes to carbon emissions. This, combined with companies using air freight to deliver the products in the fastest possibly makes the CO2 emissions even higher.

Shein's logistics model is focused on air freight. This leads to high emissions. In 2024, the transport-related CO2 emissions increased by 13,7% from the year before. This means that the CO2 emissions caused by Shein in transportation only were 8.52 million metric tons. (Reuters, 2025)

The environmental impact and harm are not limited to the country that produces the products. As the products are consumed in Finland, the emissions belong to Finland and the consumption-based carbon footprint. (Ivanova et al., 2015) The increased imports of ultra-fast fashion increase Finland's climate impact, even when it does not appear in domestic emission statistics.

The huge number of packages and short-lived products generates a lot of waste. The waste stays within the EU, making a burden for the member countries.

Finland has set environmental sustainability and climate targets. One of the targets is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. (Finnish Environment Institute, 2023) These goals aim to limit consumption-based emissions and therefore also reduce waste. However, the growing consumption of ultra-fast fashion creates challenges for achieving these targets. The statistics may show that the emissions are reduced, due to the territorial measurements, while the total emissions that are caused by consumption increase at the same time. The environmental impact is outsourced, not reduced.

From an environmental perspective, ultra-fast fashion is harmful as it encourages consumers to make frequent low-cost purchases with a short lifespan. This leads to high levels of textile waste, as most ultra-fast fashion items are produced outside Finland, and outside the EU, the environmental impact related to overconsumption, disposal, and waste management is still on Finland. This puts pressure on Finnish waste management, both on packing and textile waste. (Zero Waste Europe 2022) When looking from the perspective of the circular economy, the problem is structural. Circular economy requires long product lifetimes, but the ultra-fast fashion business model is a hinder for this. When products are discarded quickly, the materials leave the economic cycle and become waste instead of a resource. This is weakening the effectiveness of Finland's circular economy transition (European Environmental Agency 2020)

The environmental impact increases with the model used by ultra-fast fashion platforms in logistics. The products are sent to the consumer as individual parcels rather than in bulk transportation. This model creates higher transport-related emissions compared to traditional retail supply chains. This, combined with the fast increase of parcels coming to Finland outside the EU, undermines efforts to reduce the carbon footprint of consumption. (Kumar et al., 2023, Yle 2024) The growth of small parcel imports is making the reliability of national emissions accounting weaker. The emissions occur outside national borders; this makes policy evaluation difficult as the environmental impact and policy responsibility are located in different countries.

Ultra-fast fashion promotes a consumption model that produces a lot of waste and increases emissions related to transportation. This conflicts with the environmental sustainability goals that Finland has. The fact that ultra-fast fashion creates high levels of waste and emissions makes it a lot more difficult for Finland to achieve the climate goals, and especially the targets of a circular economy. (Chen et al., 2022. Zero Waste Europe 2022)

4.2 Economic impacts

The products are made outside the EU, and taxes are not paid to the EU or Finland. It is harder for Finnish companies to compete with the ultra-fast fashion companies, as they are making products so much cheaper.

Kaupan liitto, the Finnish commerce federation, has made a calculation on the loss of tax revenue that Finland has made because of the cheap imported goods. Finland got only 29.4 million euros in taxes from small online orders. Orders under 150 that came outside the EU in 2024. If just 30% of the same orders had been made from Finnish shops, the tax revenue would have been 97.2 million euros. If all the orders had been made from Finnish stores, the tax income would have been 11 times higher. (Kaupan liitto 2024)

This makes a clear competitive disadvantage for sustainable brands in the market in Finland. This is the reason the competition for sustainable brands in Finland is almost impossible. They cannot match the speed and price, which makes the consumer's choice for ultra-fast fashion easier.

Ultra-fast fashion has a big economic impact on Finland. A big issue is the consumption of products from outside Finland and the EU. The low price that ultra-fast fashion platforms sell products for makes it very difficult for Finnish retailers to compete. The economic benefit of ultra-fast fashion is distributed. The consumers benefit from the low prices, but the costs related to waste management, recycling, and emissions remain in Finland. At the same time, the tax revenue is nil for low-value imports, which reduces the financial capacity of public authorities to invest the money back into a circular economy. (Kaupan liitto 2025)

The cost of waste management, emissions, and regulations remains in Finland, but the economic value is abroad, in the production country. The result is that the public systems handle the consequences of consumption without any corresponding economic benefit.

4.3 Social impacts

The way ultra-fast fashion companies operate is concerning when looking at the social impacts of the global supply chains used. The textile industry, and especially the ultra-fast fashion industry, works with long international production networks, and manufacturing is moved to countries where the production costs, therefore the labour costs, are very low. (Niinimäki 2020) The lowering in production expenses often directly reflects weaker worker protection. (Miernicka 2024)

The textile industry has been connected to issues in labour rights for longer than the ultra-fast fashion industry has existed. The issue has been present in the fast fashion industry for longer, but ultra-fast fashion has made the labour issues worse. Low wages, long working days, and small compensations occur because of strong competition between manufacturers. (Miernicka 2024) The factories can lack safety measures. This can harm the workers' health and well-being. The companies often employ women and children; this increases the risk of explosion. (Miernicka 2024)

The fashion industry depends on frequent production cycles, low manufacturing costs, and high sales volumes. (Niinimäki 2020) Consumer behaviour also strengthens these impacts. Low prices and rapidly changing collections encourage people to buy clothes more often and use them for a shorter time (Niinimäki et al., 2020). This demand increases production pressure in supply chains and increases the need for low-cost labour (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Miernicka, 2024).

4.4 Synthesis: interaction of impacts

The impact that ultra-fast fashion has on Finland does not appear as separate problems. The problems are connected and make each other worse; very large quantities of low-value items are being shipped directly to consumers via platforms like Temu and Shein that produce outside the EU. Normal oversight and control are difficult as the scale of parcels arriving is enormous. In 2024, the amount was 28.2 million, and in 2025, the number is estimated to be over 50 million. (Yle 2024)

This leads to an environmental burden for Finland. Because parcels arrive in large quantities, millions of small separate shipments, the end-of-life problem is left at the end-of-life destination country, Finland. This means that Finland is responsible for dealing with the waste that the short-lived products and their packaging create, even when the production is not in Finland.

The large amount of imported goods also impacts the economy in Finland. Because the consumption is on these low-value imports, Finland's domestic retail and, therefore, also the circular economy gets harmed. It gets harder for the local operators to compete with the low costs. The end result of this is that the circular consumption patterns are harmed.

The Finnish Commerce Federation, Kaupan liitto, says that when looking at customs statistics and tax calculations, the Finnish tax revenue from low-value items arriving from outside the EU is small when compared to what it would be if part of the same spending were made in domestic stores. (Kaupan liitto 2024) This matters harm the tax resources available for public systems that must react to the consequences of the large amounts of imports. As an example, handling waste, oversight, and consumer protection. The consumption of low-value goods outside the EU increases the pressure on public systems while weakening the local economic base that funds them.

The social impacts in Finland are safety, trust, and regulations. It is not possible to monitor the number of shipments arriving, according to the Finnish customs,

Tulli. (Yle 2024) This results in a higher risk that the consumer receives an unsafe product.

The issues are recognized at the EU. The European Commission's Safety Gate systems show that dangerous non-food products are circulating on the international market, highlighting the importance of monitoring and enforcement to protect consumers. (European Commission 2024) Because unsafe products are on the market, the controls are weak the result is that safety and health risks exist.

Looking at the platform level, the European Commission has preliminarily found that Temu may be in breach of its obligations under the Digital Service Act, particularly regarding the sale of illegal products. This shows that the EU considers the platform responsibility and even the risk management to be a central issue, as well as consumer protection. (European Commission 2025)

These combined impacts show why the challenges related to ultra-fast fashion in Finland become an EU-level policy issue. Finland can’t alone make a change in the cross-border ecommerce model that has made the fast growth possible for these low-value imports. EU institutions have begun to use different regulatory tools to address risks related to these platforms. Reuters claims that the EU has increased inspection of Chinese e-commerce platforms and is looking into the rules that are in association with low-value imports under 150€. (Reuters 2025)

To conclude, ultra-fast fashion is creating chains of effects in Finland. The impact can be seen as a mismatch between control and responsibility. The environmental impact occurs globally, but the economic benefits do as well. The policy and responsibility remain national for Finland to handle. Consumption-based emissions are increasing while territorial emissions decrease. The circular economy polices lose effectiveness as the product lifecycle shortens. The sustainability issue is there for structural instead of only behavioural. The high parcel volumes limit the capacity of oversight, which increases the

pressure on environmental issues due to waste. Weakens the economic fairness because of the lost tax revenue, and in the end increases the social concern of consumer safety. These issues are deeply connected and strengthen each other. The problem is not only the consumer choices or the company's unethical behaviour, but a system where low process, fast delivery, and fragmented logistics cause environmental, economic, and social instability.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Main findings

This study shows that ultra-fast fashion has significant negative environmental and social impacts due to its speed, low cost, and lack of transparency. The contrast in slow fashion is expected to demonstrate more sustainable and a lot more ethical ways of operating. Slow fashion will face limitations because the price is higher, and everything is made on a smaller scale.

5.2 Implications

Ultra-fast fashion has an impact on Finland. It becomes especially clear when looking at the fact that ultra-fast fashion items are produced outside Finland. One of the biggest issues is the textile waste. Low-quality items mostly get used a few times and then get thrown away. A big portion of the clothing cannot be reused or even recycled. This increases the textile waste in Finland.

The recycling systems in Finland are limited. There is a separate collection for textile waste, but partly the textile ends up in the mixed waste or incineration. The goal is for the waste to be recycled in the right way. This is harming the circular economy goals in Finland. The amount of waste is growing faster than the solutions for handling it are being developed.

A big environmental harm that is caused by ultra-fast fashion is the logistics and packaging. The Finnish customs, Tulli, has reported that the number of small parcels that arrive from outside the EU, mostly from China, has increased a lot. This increases the transport-related and material emissions for Finland. The production emissions occur abroad, but Finland is still responsible for handling the waste and environmental impacts that are caused by the end consumer in Finland. This consumption is often overconsumption. The impact that ultra-fast fashion has on Finland create long term environmental issues.

5.3 Recommendations

Stronger regulations are needed to hold Temu and Shein accountable. The analysis suggests that the Chinese platforms should be obligated to register within the EU to ensure that the taxes are paid correctly.

The analysis suggests that returning to a more traditional import model could improve oversight and regulatory control. The traditional model means that goods are imported in larger batches to then be stored in warehouses, instead of the way things are done with the big Chinese platforms, which ship individual items to consumers. That kind of model is giving authorities the ability to do proper safety and tax inspections before the product reaches the consumer. Political proposals such as a potential environmental tax on low-value imports reflects on the growing concern about ultra-fast fashion in Finland.

5.4 Future research

Sustainable supply chain management has been brought up in the fashion industry a lot, but the current sustainable practices are not effective enough to cut down on the environmental harm that it is causing. Most of the fast fashion companies have a sustainability strategy, but these have limitations and do not cover the supply chain from beginning to end. The main issues are the cooperation and coordination with different supply chain actors, meaning suppliers, manufacturers, and, in the end, retailers.

Based on this, future research should look at how to fix the cooperation between the different actors in the supply chain.

A lot of the sustainability strategies exist on a reporting level, and the actual environmental impact is partly unclear. Future research could look into how sustainable supply chain practices are used in the daily operations and investigate the actual reduction of environmental harm.

In addition, a systematic literature review on sustainability in the fashion industry tells that the research that has been done looks at separate issues, but not the lifecycle of fashion as a whole. Because of this, it is hard to get a picture of what practices are the most effective ones. More practical research needs to be done. A lot of the existing research looks at the sustainability aspect in a theoretical way, but does not look into the practices that are actually applied in operations. A clarification between sustainability goals and what is actually done would help to see what actually needs to be done.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Data sources and search process

This appendix summarises how the literature-based material was identified and selected for this thesis. The purpose is to increase transparency and replicability of the study.

A literature-based qualitative approach was applied. The data consists of peer-reviewed academic publications, institutional and governmental reports, and Finnish media publications used to describe the Finnish-specific context. Whenever possible, the analysis prioritised original reports and official publications over secondary media reporting.

Search keywords

ultra-fast fashion
fast fashion
Temu
Shein
e-commerce clothing environmental impact
parcel imports Finland
textile waste in Finland
Circular Economy Textiles Finland
synthetic fibres microplastics
consumption-based emissions

Inclusion criteria

Sources published mainly between 2015 and 2025
Sources relevant to ultra-fast fashion, consumption patterns, environmental impacts, logistics, and the circular economy

Peer-reviewed research and official institutional sources prioritised
Finland and the EU context are prioritised when available

Exclusion criteria

Sources focusing only on fashion design or trends without sustainability relevance
Non-evidence-based blog content and unverified opinion pieces
Sources that could not be accessed in full text, when the key claims could not be verified

Main types of sources used

Peer-reviewed academic research on the environmental impacts of fashion and supply chains
Finnish institutional sources, such as Finnish Customs and Finnish Commerce Federation
European Union publications related to consumer safety and platform regulation
Finnish media sources describing the rapid growth of low-value parcels and public discussion

Appendix 2. Thematic analysis framework

This appendix presents the thematic structure used to organise the analysis and discussion chapter. Themes were identified by reviewing the sourced material and grouping recurring issues that directly relate to the research questions.

Theme 1. Overconsumption and short product lifecycles

Low prices enable frequent purchasing and impulse buying
Short durability leading to rapid disposal
Consumption-based environmental pressure within Finland

Theme 2. Waste generation and circular economy challenges

Textile waste accumulation and limited reuse potential
Packaging waste is linked to small parcel delivery.
Pressure on national waste management and circular economy targets

Theme 3. Logistics and transport-related emissions

Parcel-based delivery model compared to bulk importing
Increased transport activity due to large volumes of shipments
Potential role of air freight in higher emissions

Theme 4. Regulatory and enforcement challenges

Limited capacity to monitor and inspect large parcel volumes
Platform responsibility and product safety risks
Need for EU-level measures for cross-border e-commerce models

Theme 5. Economic and social issues linked to environmental outcomes

Appendix 2

Tax revenue loss reducing capacity for sustainability investments

Competitive disadvantage for regulated Finnish and EU retailers

Consumer safety concerns related to product compliance