

**Genocide Dressed in Jeans: Does Sharing a Narrative About the Uyghur Population Alter
Opinions about Fast Fashion**

By

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Introduction

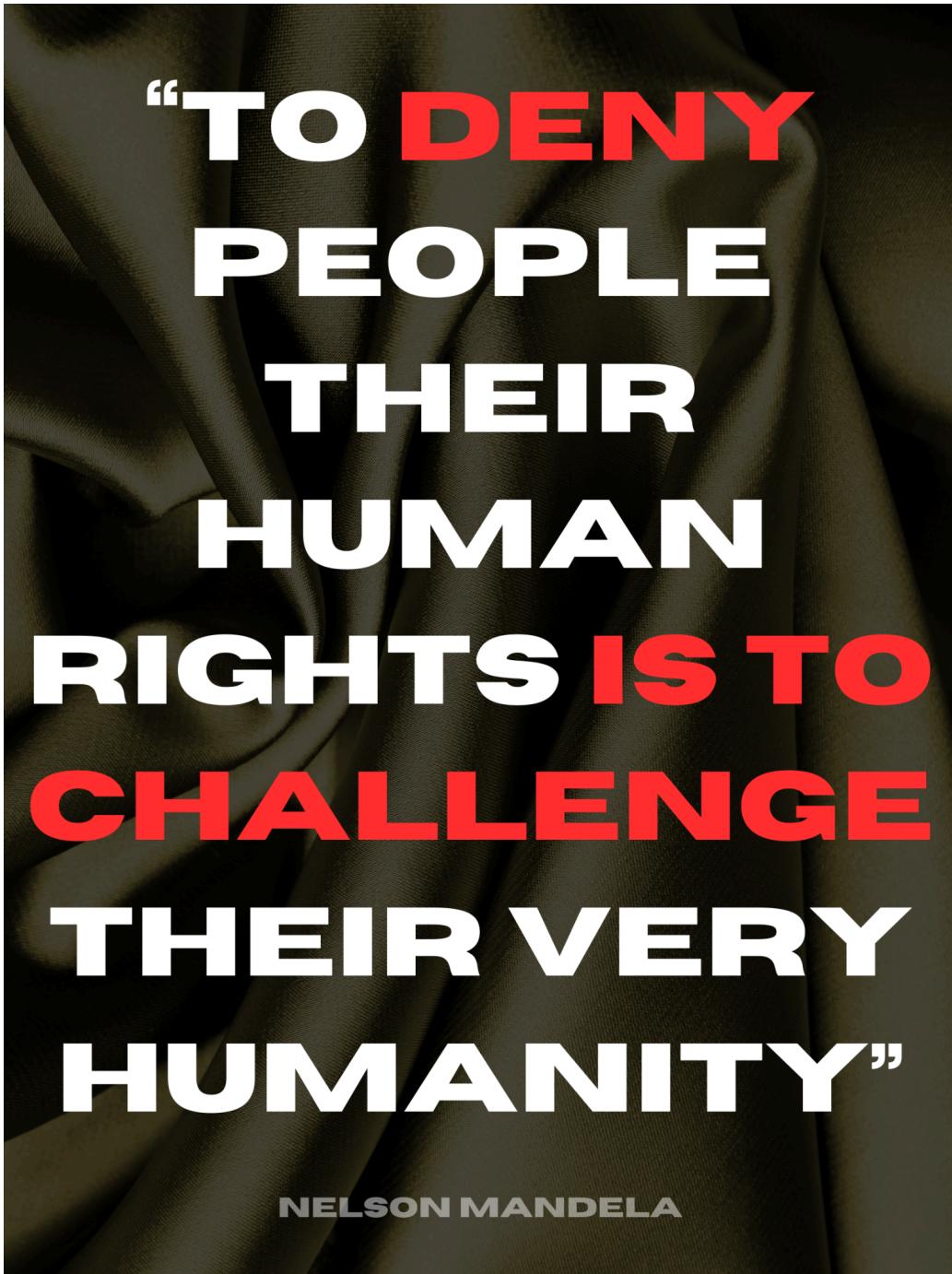
One of the most cherished traditions on our University of Arkansas campus is the etching of names onto Senior Walk each year. On any given day, thousands of students stroll across these beautiful sidewalks as they venture to and from class. Dressed in the latest fashions from iconic brands such as Zara, H&M, and Nike, these students are far removed from the tragedy that has befallen the Uyghur population living in the Xinjiang province, 6,914 miles away. Evidence has been mounting that the Uyghur population has been suffering through massive displacement, forced labor camps, and atrocities that we cannot even fathom – all while producing the fast fashion products we see every day on our campus (Thanhauser, 2021). In a seminar that I took two summers ago while studying abroad, I learned about the Uyghur population, the inhumane treatment of these individuals, and the complicit role that many well-known companies have taken in this exploitation (Daniaud & Alwani, 2022). Numerous crimes against humanity are reported to be taking place in the Xinjiang region against the Uyghurs, but the torment travels internationally as the ethnic group is placed at the forefront of labor fueling the rapid-growing world consumers recognize as the world of fast fashion (Gan, 2020). While many companies have press-released their concern, they continue to use the cotton as well as finished products that are produced in these labor camps (Gan, 2020).

A tale that is severely underreported yet extremely relevant. The alleged ethnic cleansing and forced labor of the Uyghur population has crossed my thoughts nearly daily since learning about the ongoing humanitarian crisis back in the summer of 2022. From social media video “hauls”, where people are sharing their mass purchases from the culprits of exploitation, to simple conversations with my fellow peers about their new pair of “sneakers I don’t care to wear out because they were so cheap.”. The lives behind the fabric consume my thoughts whilst being unbeknownst to others. For 675 days, since I first learned of this situation, this issue has stayed with me and has become the focal point for my research project, studying genocide dressed in jeans.

My intention concerning the organization of my findings was to commence with a broad scope and progressively transition towards the specific case of the Uyghur population, connecting all aspects of the story as my research advanced. I landed on four foundational areas that cohesively formed the basis for my exploration. First, what are our human rights and what classifies as a human rights violation in the rapidly developing world we find ourselves in today. What are examples of human rights violations around the world and what is being done in retaliation? Second, what does the history of human rights violations look like specific to China and how has history been able to repeat itself to the present day? Third, how and why are the Uyghur population being targeted? What is the role that they were given in the eyes of the Chinese government and as, if not more importantly, in the eyes of the biggest fashion brands our world sees today? Finally, how do the dots connect to fuel the colossal and rapidly developing fast fashion industry? What implications does the fast fashion industry pose on susceptible targets of cheap/forced labor and on our ability to foster a sustainable environment?

I have tackled numerous research papers in my time as both a high school and college student ensuring that in each one I remain as informative and objective as possible. This included leaving out personal emotions and opinions entirely. This topic, however, is different, as my intentions

behind selecting the story of the Uyghur population were strongly correlated to the emotions triggered in me upon first learning about it. That being said, there will be observable anecdotes of my thoughts and emotions sprinkled throughout my research. I find it vital to implement those emotions as they portray the natural human response of empathy in times of suffering.



Literature Review

Topic One: Human Rights Violations Around the World

Every human being is entitled to human rights regardless of their race, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, etc. Human rights are universal and inalienable meaning that there is equal application, to all people, everywhere, without distinction and in an interrelated fashion (WHO, 2023). The act of violating the most basic human rights is equivalent to denying individuals their fundamental moral entitlements. Essentially treating them as if they are less than human and undeserving of basic human principles including respect and dignity (Maiese, 2003). That being said, human rights crises do not arise from nowhere but rather stem when governments fall short of their legal obligations. This failure to show up arises feelings of discontent, instability and ultimately crisis (Hassan, 2023). Around the world, human rights have become far better protected than they were in centuries before (Herre, 2016). Protection of human rights has been said to have improved massively in the second half of the 20th century and although progress has not been linear, improvements have been said to be made (Herre, 2016).

Despite evidence showing improvements, human rights violations are still very much present in our society today. Many of these violations are overlooked and underreported, whilst maintaining their status of being highly unacceptable and far worse than imaginable. Human rights violations can take many forms and are being funded and supported in our own backyards, with little to no media coverage or point of discussion. From the nationwide movement driven by the demand for women's equality in Iran, where anyone who dares to challenge the government's authority is facing excessive force in the form of death sentences (Hassan, 2023). To the highly unethical and saddening ethnic cleansing campaign against the Tigrayan population in Ethiopia resulting in deaths, sexual violence and the forced displacement of thousands of people (Hassan, 2023). People will overlook the pain and suffering of an entire population to maintain their own quality of life and living standards, with the occasional Instagram post supporting a trending hashtag that generates a fraction of the awareness a simple google search, self-investigation or community discussion would. In circumstances such as those listed previously, the violation of the rights of community members are readily obvious and difficult to overlook if reported on correctly (Day, 2022). With the scope of empathy being utilized, many can determine right from wrong, and are quick to understand when there is an instance of unlawful persecution or selective targeting placed in front of them. Conversely, there are instances occurring in our developing society where human rights are being violated in ways that often go unnoticed to the common man. One example is the infringement of the right to privacy. With the rise of the internet, there is a great influx in the sequential violation of one's privacy experiences whilst online, whether it be through data collection, media censorship or even the placement of targeted advertisements and political campaigns (Day, 2022). The broad scope of human rights violations is extensive and continuously expanding as we further into the future. It is crucial that governing bodies are working intently on serving their citizens and utilizing their power for the betterment of society beyond their own borders.

75 years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted as the first 'worldwide' catalog of human rights, cultivating an international understanding regarding our

given rights as human beings (Day, 2022). This declaration, though not legally binding, infiltrated various treaties and agreements and ultimately created a universal standard to which governing bodies and their political figureheads can implement as a foundation for justice. Individual governments cannot tackle global crises alone as many of them stretch beyond their borders; therefore it is vital that the foundation established by the UDHR not be disregarded. Failure to adhere to these universally accepted principles comes at the cost of human life as we've seen in the example countries mentioned previously: Iran and Ethiopia. In all, highlighting the importance of strengthening the foundation now more than ever, to ensure that evidence of improvement continues to grow.



Topic Two: China's Human Rights Violations

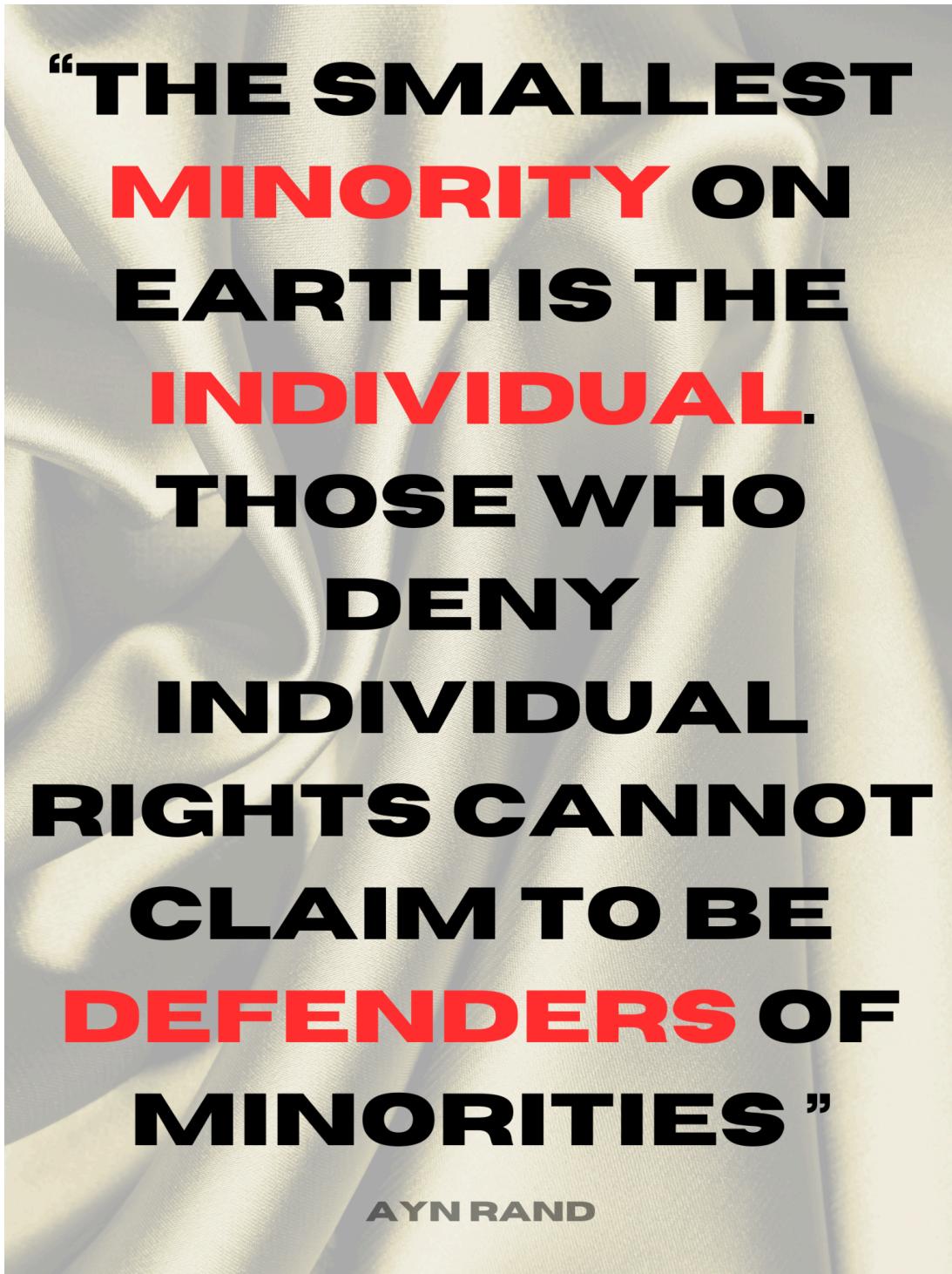
From the start, I have been hesitant to use China as the context for my thesis. I have traveled in China. I have friends from China. And I have learned first-hand, through my childhood and time at the UA, how quickly rumors can become the basis for allegations. The truth is that every government has its strengths and its weaknesses, its generosity and its atrocities. I am providing the results of my research on China's Human Rights Violations not as a declaration of "truth" but rather as an example of how photos and narratives can be used as an intervention to persuade people.

From extreme Covid-19 restrictions to the systematic oppression of entire ethnic groups and even to increasingly pervasive online censorship, China's human rights index is ranked 166th out of the 179 countries reported on by V-Dem (Herre, 2016). The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continues to tighten its grasp of control on nearly all aspects of life within China including media restrictions, surveillance of online speech, limitations regarding religious practices and increased influence within universities, businesses and civil society associations (Freedom House, 2023). Anyone voicing opinions or concerns against the government's actions whether it be human rights defenders, pro-democracy activists, religious leaders or simply government critics are subjected to detention and arrest (Amnesty, 2020). In response to the accusations being made against the country from numerous human rights organizations and even entire nations, China denies all allegations posed against them regarding their abuses towards the Uyghur population in Xinjiang (BBC, 2021).

The fear of arbitrary arrest lingers for anyone who may find themselves to be courageous enough to speak out against the CCP and refute the CCP ideologies (DOS, 2017). This coincides with the country's evident freedom abuses including restrictions on citizen's freedom of religion, freedom of expression and freedom of privacy. There is an observable open hostility within the country to members of a variety of religious faiths including the Uyghur Muslims, and the PRC is said to have adopted a five-year plan in an attempt to align all religious practices and sects in line with the CCP doctrine (DOS, 2017). Alongside restrictions on religious ideologies and practices, the government's strict regulations and censorships on information available to its citizens is another noticeable attempt for the CCP to further obtain control over the nation's people. The PRC is said to heavily influence the narratives of all domestic news reporting, using the CCP directives to infiltrate the media into reporting on specific issues and perspectives that directly mirror the government's desired narrative (DOS, 2017). Allegations of extensive human rights violations on the part of the CCP have been levied for innumerable years, covering a broad and deep scope of tragedies. While these are certainly worthy of our attention, in this thesis we will focus specifically on the allegations related to the Uyghur population in the Xinjiang province.

Just this past January at a United Nations five-yearly review meeting, China's human rights record was evaluated to determine where the country stood in comparison to their last evaluation back in 2018. The meeting saw a very evident split in regards with many Western countries condemning China for their mistreatment against domestic minority populations, as well as their restrictions in Hong Kong. Intriguingly enough though, many non-Western countries agreed with China's claims that the country has made progressive improvements in their highly targeted 'problem areas' (Al Jazeera). Although these kinds of splits are not necessarily uncommon when discussing human rights records, it can impose confusion and questioning among those who are

attempting to stay informed on the situation. I personally have questioned the legitimacy of some of the allegations against China, and go back and forth on whether geopolitical turmoil between the United States and China could be infiltrating the media I have consumed in my research. Although I whole-heartedly stand with the case of the Uyghur Muslims, I can't help but ponder if any other allegations could be propaganda, generated to manipulate public perception and convince Westerners to resent the rapidly growing and heavily relevant country.



Topic Three: The Uyghur Population

In 2013, China had launched what is known as the Belt and Road initiative, also referred to as the New Silk Road. This trillion dollar investment, in mainly physical infrastructure, was aimed at expanding the economic and political influence of China both westward, and southward, running directly through the province of Xinjiang, China (McBride, Berman & Chatzky). Lying in the north-western region of China, Xinjiang, officially the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), is home to nearly 12 million predominantly Turkic-speaking Uyghur Muslims and is the largest region in China, said to currently produce around a fifth of the world's cotton supply (BBC, 2022). This minority ethnic group is at the vanguard of the physical labor necessary to sustain the Belt and Road initiative China had set in motion 11 years ago to date. Today, China is being accused of committing serious human rights violations, including genocide, in this region against the Uyghur Muslim population and other mostly Muslim ethnic groups.

An abundance of human rights groups, including the UN Human Rights office, have raised concerns regarding forced labor taking place in the region and that the Uyghurs are at the forefront of the treacherous work, but it doesn't stop there. China is being accused of committing mass genocide alongside other crimes against the Uyghur population in what can be seen as an attempt to terminate an entire racial group (UN News, 2022). It is believed that an estimated one million Uyghurs have been detained against their will in what the Government of the People's Republic of China refers to as "re-education camps" or "political education camps," (BBC, 2022). It is stated that in these camps, beyond the detentions, Uyghurs are being subjected to invading surveillance, forced labor, involuntary sterilizations specifically seen to reduce the population, alongside other abuses (Maizland). Alongside this long list of unethical targeting methods is the offensive amount of religious persecution the Uyghur Muslims are being forced to endure. From being force fed pork, to the prohibition of fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, we see deliberate signs of religious cleansing being employed in the Xinjiang region (Farooq, 2014). Although the Chinese government refutes any evidence acknowledging the persecution of the minority Muslim population, instances from satellite images to seized cargo ships have suggested otherwise (Samuel, 2022). Numerous testimonies from former detainees highlight the intensely demanding nature of the internment camps, detailing the ethnic and religious cleansing they were subjected to as an attempt by the Chinese government to suppress the marginalized community.

China's borders are not the final destination capping off this crime against humanity. The exploitation of the Uyghur Muslim population is fueling the world of unethical fast fashion and can be seen in an abundance of the world's largest fashion brands (Gan, 2020). The colossal production of cotton taking place in the XUAR region is a hub for sourcing when it comes to brands such as Gap, Adidas, H&M, Nike, Zara and plenty more (Gan, 2020). A mind-blowing one in five cotton products that are sold globally are directly correlated with the unethical behaviors seen in Xinjiang, and these companies are sailing smoothly under the radar, avoiding any and all scrutiny or public backlash. Taking a look at the United States specifically, research shows that China was the largest exporter of garments to the US between the years 2002 and 2020 (Thanhauser, 2021). Additionally, the US surpassed every other nation as the largest consumer of Chinese garments and textiles every year since the year 2006 (Thanhauser, 2021). A society so infatuated by the idea of "cancel-culture," and advocating for those without a voice,

simultaneously reliant on the next best item to provide a quick fix of dopamine only for that item to be out of style the next week. Turning a blind eye to the issue as an individual may seem harmless, but harmless to some is the life of another.



Topic Four: Fast Fashion

Trends are changing by the minute, and it can feel nearly impossible to keep up. Fast fashion is on the rise and at extremely rapid rates, allowing consumers to have products delivered to their doorstep within just a few days and at a cost that is little to nothing (Lin, 2022). But this newfound efficiency comes at a grave cost to the lives of millions. Big name brands such as Zara, Shein and H&M are releasing thousands of new styles each day (Lin, 2022). Glitzy and bright, trending clothing items with a dark background that many either are unaware of or choose to ignore (Lin, 2022). In fact, 63% of young fast fashion shoppers claim that they do not feel guilty about shopping fast fashion and that the primary reason for doing so is because of the low costs (YPulse, 2022). Social media has played an enormous role in the growth of the industry. Trending posts and hashtags allow consumers to share trends amongst themselves ultimately inspiring one another to buy continually and maintain an up-to-date closet (YPulse, 2022). From micro influencers to major celebrities, partnerships with unethically sourced clothes brands are littering social media platforms and in turn, morphing the idea of what fashion really is to their select target audiences. Rather than clothes shopping being an occasional event, like we've seen in the past, fast fashion has curated a cycle of purchasing the new hot item with some loose change, wearing it once or a handful of times and then throwing it away only to repeat when the next trend reveals itself in the media (Rauturier, 2023).

Fast fashion is polluting the planet, exploiting workers and harming animals while simultaneously coercing consumers into believing that shopping more and staying on top of trends will provide that fix of satisfaction they've been looking for (Rauturier, 2023). With consumerism skyrocketing, brands now more than ever are working overtime to ensure that the latest fad is being produced faster than ever, to be delivered or put on sale faster than ever, only for the item to be in and out of the consumer eye faster than ever. This short-lived life cycle of clothing poses potential issues both present and future. Brands are exploiting communities in less-economically developed countries that have far too low labor standards to kickstart the cycle, and consumers are quick to discard items at a heavy environmental price to round it out (Crumbie, 2023). In the brand's perspective, the appeal comes from the system's ability to thrive on purchasing contents in bulk whilst paying little relative cost per singular item, allowing them to sell these items at a more "socially acceptable" low cost (Soetomo, 2023). Cheap materials go hand in hand with cheap labor to achieve this status, with most of these articles being produced with synthetic plastics and those behind the production making far short of a livable income (Soetomo, 2023). To the consumer, who only sees the price tag as opposed to the supply chain in its entirety, the choice is subconscious and heavily influenced by the words of others. Without externally educating oneself on the horrors that lie behind the products, consumers are only given what lies upon the surface: a trendy and budget friendly addition to their overflowing wardrobe.

At what cost? With human lives on the line and mother nature taking the blow, consumers must begin to reevaluate what makes a clothing item "worth it" in their eyes. There needs to be a reconstruct behind the idea of fashion, emphasizing timelessness, sustainability and longevity to both the producers and the consumers. An emphasis on adopting a more circular business model within the fashion industry can work to reduce the unethical practices present in the world today (Crumbie, 2023). Purchasing clothing second hand, opting for rental subscriptions or even

repairing damaged items are some of the various ways are all steps in the right direction towards a more low-impact runway (Crumbie, 2023).



Research Methodology

The story of the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, China is, unfortunately, not a frequently told tale. Many are unaware of the fact that the clothes that lie upon their backs as they commute to class, work, the gym, etc. have followed a dark path to get to their doorstep. Rather than fixating my survey solely on the narrative of the Uyghurs, I decided to curate a survey that, like my studies, commenced broadly and eased into the details. Similarly, I chose to survey broadly, holding no specific boundaries to the type of student respondents, and even allowing non-students to participate in the survey. The survey is intended to gauge respondents' feelings towards the fast fashion industry and their current purchasing behavior both before and after the survey introduces the story of the Uyghur population. This can work to measure just how informed students already are about the issue, as well as the difference being informed makes on their opinions and purchasing behaviors.

To create the survey, I developed questions through the Qualtrics program provided by the University of Arkansas. I completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol and received approval for the survey. Survey results are based on 70 respondents' answers with 96% being females and 4% being males. 4% of respondents were college freshmen, 33% of respondents were sophomores, 14% of respondents were juniors, and 30% of respondents were seniors and 19% of respondents are not currently enrolled as students. The majority of respondents are Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences students at 36% of total participants. 17% of respondents were Sam M. Walton College of Business students, 13% of respondents were College of Education and Health Professions students, 11% of respondents were Dale Bumpers College of Agriculture, Food and Life Science, 4% of respondents were Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design students and 19% are not currently enrolled as a student.

Findings and Analysis

Section #1 (pre-introduction to the Uyghur crisis): What defines fast fashion to the student consumer, opinions on the negative downsides to the fast fashion industry, and how satisfied are these consumers about their current purchasing habits?

In exploring section #1, I utilized 5 key questions to set a foundation for understanding fast fashion and what current role fast fashion played in the lives of respondents:

“If you were to describe ‘fast fashion’ to someone else, what is one sentence you would use to describe this concept?”

The words fast fashion can hold widespread meaning and value in the eyes of consumers. Dependent factors include how aware respondents are about the industry, how much prior education regarding the industry they may have and how much thought and care they give to the story behind their clothing. Asking respondents to capture this idea of a broad entity in an open-ended, singular sentence manner allows me to see where they lie in relation to these factors and how they go about putting their words to paper.

“FASHION THAT IS OVER PRODUCED IN UNETHICAL WAYS USUALLY HARMFUL TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND EXPLOITATIVE TO LABORERS”

“TRENDY AND CHEAP CLOTHING THAT MOVES IN AND OUT OF STYLE QUICKLY AND IS MADE USING ENVIRONMENTALLY UNFRIENDLY METHODS AS WELL AS CHEAP LABOR.”

“PRODUCTION OF CLOTHING AS A FAST PACE SOLD AT EXTREMELY LOW PRICES THAT CAUSES FOR TERRIBLE WORK CONDITIONS FOR THE EMPLOYEES”

Respondents were asked open-endedly to insert a one sentence description of fast fashion as a whole, as if they were explaining the concept to someone else. The interpretation of fast fashion was overall very consistent amongst the respondents. Those who gave more detailed answers highlighted the clear juxtaposition between the fact that the low-cost items produced through the industry come at a high cost to those behind the scenes including labor workers and the environment. This demonstrates a basis of understanding among respondents and speaks to the validity of other survey questions.

In preparation for question 2, a two part question where respondents were given a scale to gauge their satisfaction levels towards the industry and their current shopping habits, respondents were provided with the formal definition of “fast fashion” as stated below with question 2 following.

“Low-priced but stylish clothing that moves quickly from design to retail stores to meet trends, with new collections being introduced continuously”

“Given this definition, what are your feelings towards the fast fashion industry? & “In general, how satisfied are you with your shopping habits: where you choose to shop, which brands you are loyal to, etc.”

Purchasing from the fast fashion industry and having negative feelings about the industry are not mutually exclusive. Consumers can find themselves at a crossroads for many reasons, causing them to opt for the unethical consumption of fast fashion clothing. Some of these factors include the higher price tag on sustainable fashion pieces, the lack of size accessibility or the scarcity of marketing and visibility targeting them (Sustainable Fashion Forum, n.d.). Nearly 2 out of 3 young consumers who shop fast fashion say that they do not feel guilty about their purchasing decisions using budgeting and encouragement from social media as the reasons why (YPulse, 2022).

In this question, participants were asked to rate on a scale from extremely dissatisfied to extremely satisfied (extremely dissatisfied being 1, and extremely satisfied being 5) their feelings towards the fast fashion industry and then their feelings about their current shopping patterns. The response generated from this survey provides evidence that respondents are less critical of their personal shopping habits than they are of the fast fashion industry. This may be for a number of reasons.

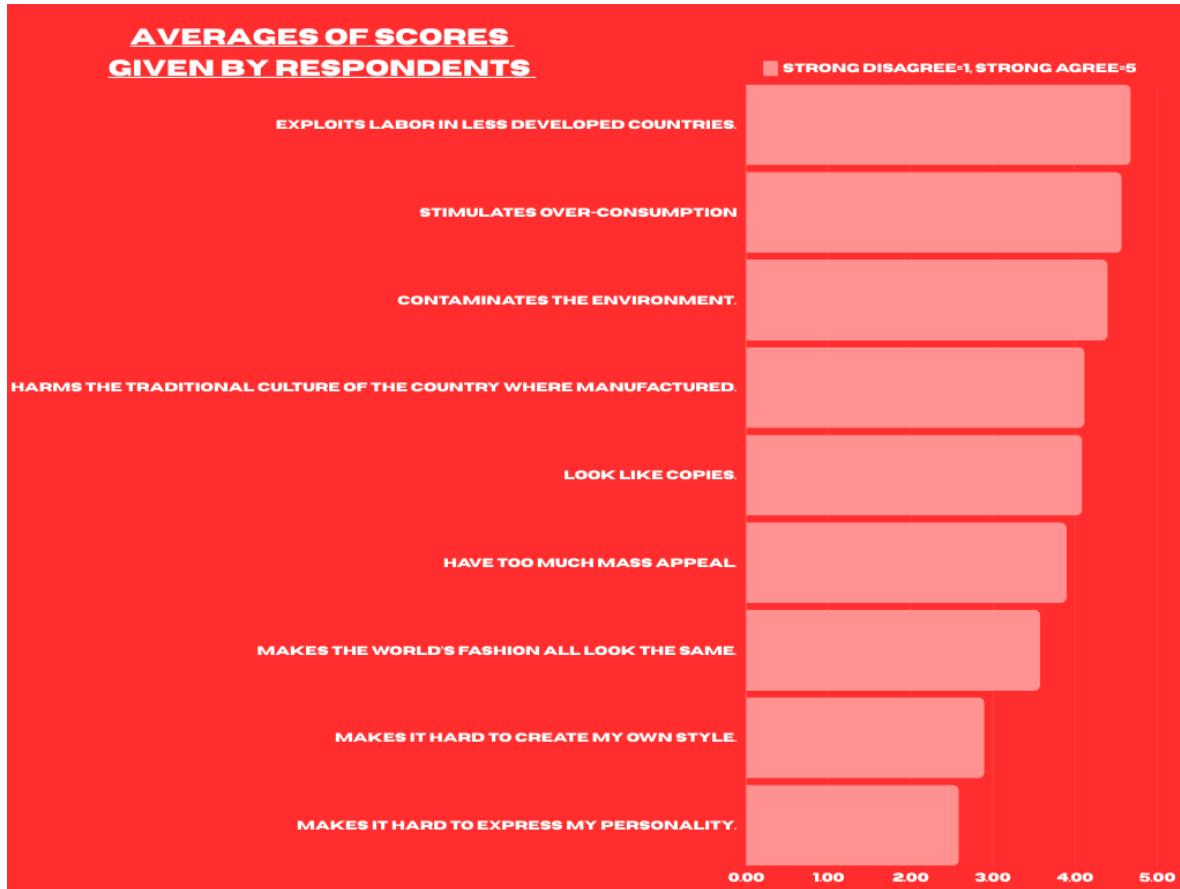
Respondents may truly not be shopping at brands that fall under the umbrella of 'fast

fashion' or are in any way harmful to labor workers, the environment, etc. On the contrary, respondents may be intimidated to give themselves and their shopping tendencies a poor review because of feelings such as guilt, avoidance and so on. Whatever the reasoning may be, there is observable difference (1.03) between the two viewpoints.

"There is a lot of variation in how people think about fast fashion. We'd love to know YOUR opinion about 9 criticisms that have been associated with some fast fashion providers. Please note there are no right or wrong answers."

- "Fast fashion makes it hard to express my personality."
- "Fast fashion makes it hard to create my own style."
- "Fast fashion styles have too much mass appeal."
- "Fast fashion styles look like copies."
- "Fast fashion stimulates over-consumption"
- "Fast fashion contaminates the environment."
- "Fast fashion exploits labor in less developed countries."
- "Fast fashion harms the traditional culture of the country where it is manufactured."
- "Fast fashion makes the world's fashion all look the same."



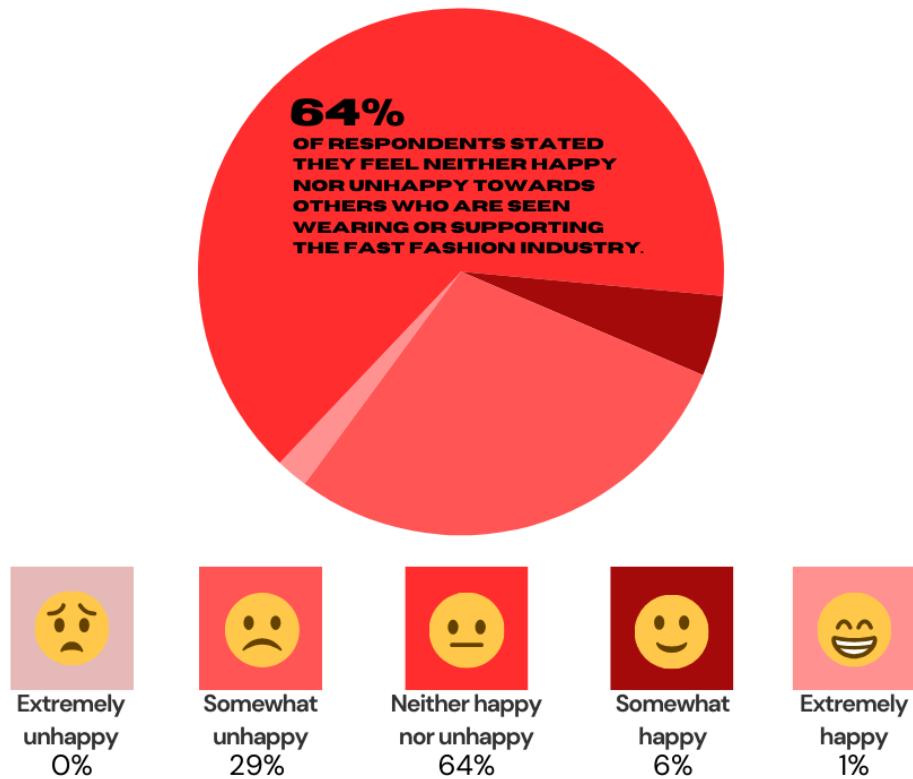
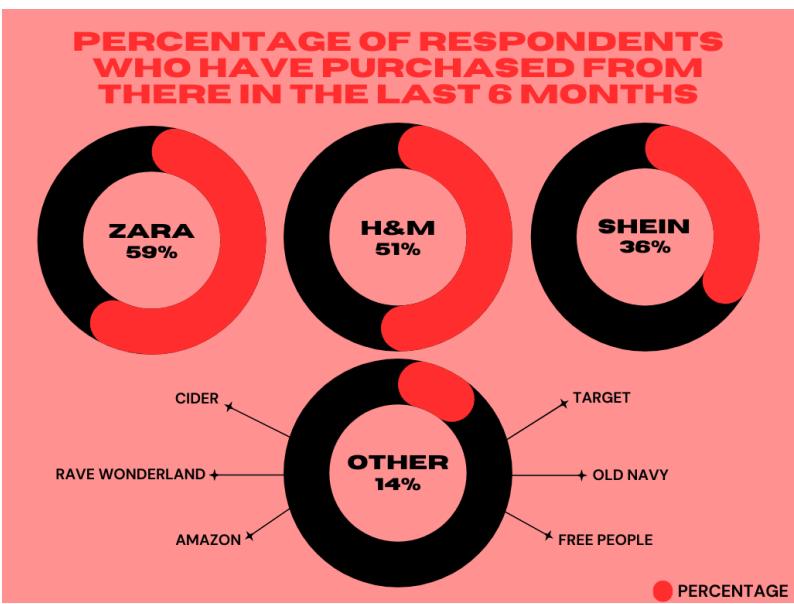


Respondents' answers to how they would score these 9 common criticisms of the fast fashion industry help give context to the multifaceted viewpoints that surround the fast fashion industry and its impact on things such as cultural preservation, style autonomy, labor exploitation and environmental ramifications. The criticisms presented to respondents were ranked by highest average score to lowest average score in the graph seen above, revealing a trend that any concerns about individuality were overshadowed by those that pertain to any unethical conduct. An interesting perspective and one that I had not anticipated to be present this early in the survey, these results highlight the ability for respondents to empathize for others prior to pitying themselves.

“Within the last six months, have you engaged with or shopped at any of the following stores, or any other stores that may fall under the umbrella of the fast fashion industry?”

A quick Google search can prove to anyone that Zara, H&M and Shein are three of the top contenders in the world of fast fashion, and that their ability to rapidly produce trends at an affordable cost to consumers is what is consistently keeping them in the public eye. Survey respondents were asked to share if they have purchased from any of these three brands within the last six months, or if they have purchased from any other brands that may be associated with similar tendencies. Zara takes the cake, as over half of the respondents admitted to shopping there within the set time frame. In the span of the last few years, Zara has faced numerous accusations and a substantial amount of backlash for their use of unethical labor practices and their contributions to the ongoing environmental crisis (impACT). That being said, as we can see by the responses, this does not vilanize them in the consumer eye and shoppers continue to be either unaware or unfazed enough to boycott the brand.

“What are your feelings towards others when you see them wearing or supporting the fast fashion industry?”

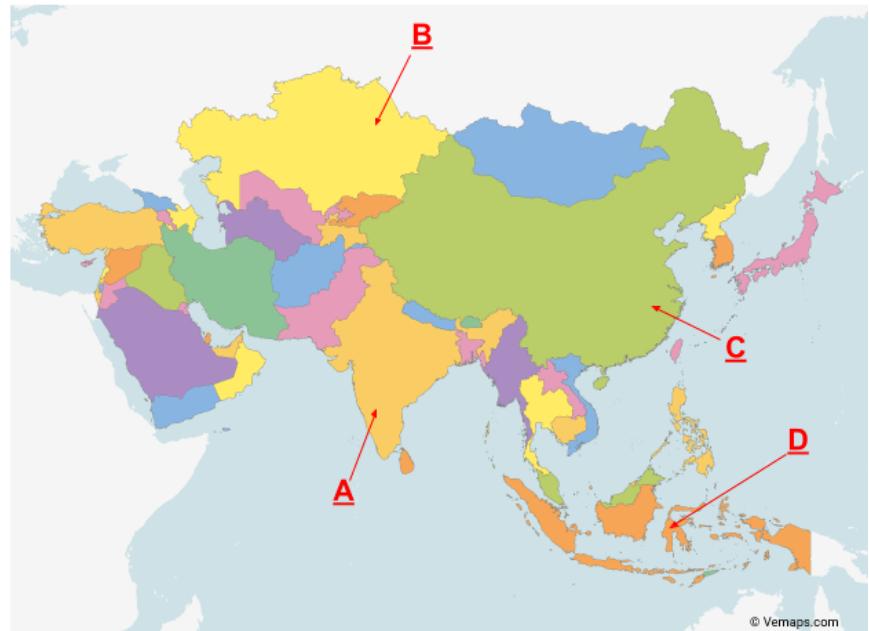


It is one thing to criticize ourselves on our consciously made decisions, but what do respondents think about the decisions of others? For this survey question, participants were asked to highlight how they feel towards others when they observe them to be wearing or supporting commonly known fast fashion brands on a scale of extremely unhappy to extremely happy. The results show that the majority of respondents felt neither happy nor unhappy, alluding to the fact that many most likely don't think twice about where others devote their purchases. The second highest response, though, was feeling somewhat unhappy. This shows that, at times, a negative emotional response can be triggered towards the choices others make and that there is a level of awareness present in these exchanges to the point where a negative response is generated.

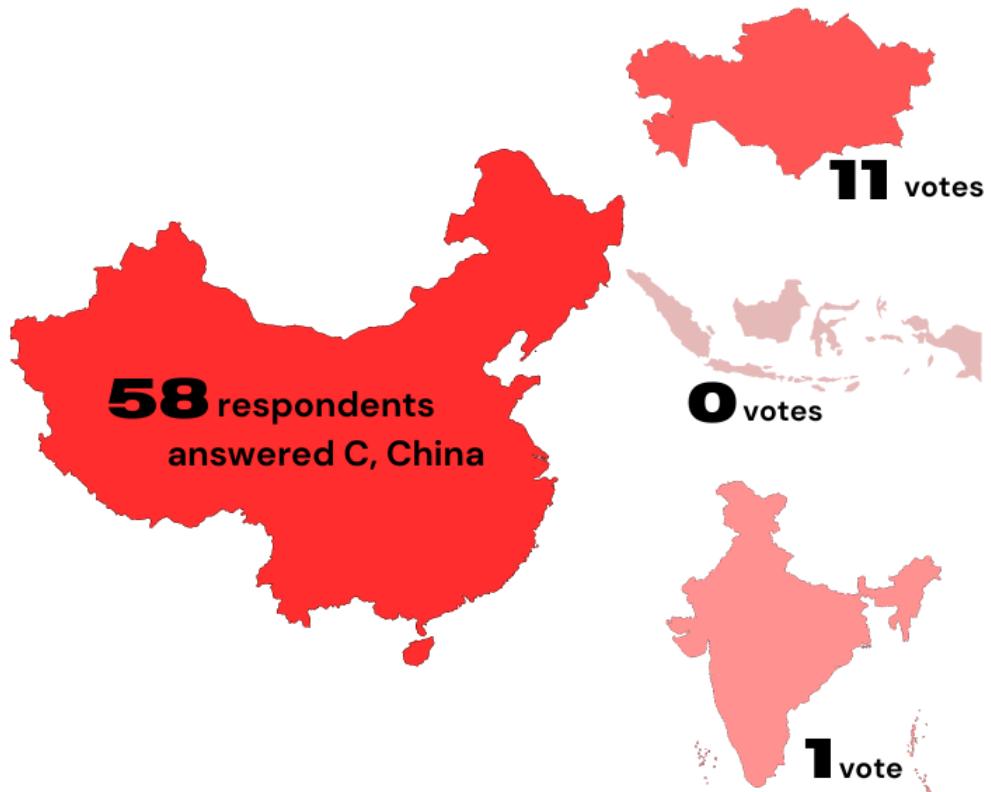
Section #2 (introduction to the Uyghur crisis): How aware are respondents of the ongoing genocide against the Uyghurs and how do they feel seeing examples of and learning about the situation?

In exploring section #2, I utilized 3 key questions to understand how knowledgeable respondents are about China, the country's human rights violations in general and the Uyghur crisis specifically.

I wanted to begin this section by asking a geographical question to assess how well participants could actually identify China on a map. People can be quick to speak on global topics and issues, but how many can really pinpoint the location of the country itself? To test this, prior to the first question in this section, I provided a map of Asia clean of name labels to respondents, as seen to the right. I chose 3 random countries alongside China to label as countries A,B,C and D, and asked respondents to select which lettered country on the map was China.



“Select the letter below that corresponds to the letter associated with China on the map (please answer without the help of outside resources)”



As mentioned previously, this question provided participants with a map of Asia that did not have any country names visible to them. Four countries selected at random were labeled country A, B, C and D, and survey respondents were asked to select which country accurately depicted China without the use of any outside resources. An overwhelming number of participants selected the correct answer, but to my surprise, a sizable handful of them did not. Kazakhstan was the country most confused to be China, most likely due to the fact that it is closest in size and shape to that of China. Nonetheless, as someone who is infatuated by the idea of geography and being able to accurately locate countries on a map, the responses to this question took me by surprise. Upon further research, though, I found that these results are not as surprising as one would think. In a similar study done by National Geographic, only 17% of young adults in the United States could accurately select the country of Afghanistan on a map (Trivedi). It is actually a commonality amongst young adults worldwide to struggle with geography, with one reason behind this being the withering amount of geography courses taken in upper-level education (Trivedi). This provides evidence of the vital need for external effort be put forth in hopes of reducing confusion and keeping informed.

Survey question 7 contains 8 sub-questions that are all relevant to the topics covered in section 2 of my survey. These sub-questions are posed more as statements, and respondents are to select from a scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, how true in their eyes these statements really are.

“I’m going to ask you a series of questions related to China and alleged human rights violations. It is likely that many of the issues are not ones you are familiar with - so as a reminder, there are no right or wrong answers, we are simply trying to have a sense of perception. For context, please use the time frame of the last three years when answering.”

- *“China has been accused of alleged human rights violations.”*
- *“The Uyghur population in China is a victim of human rights violations in China.”*
- *“The Uyghur population in China has been subjected to forced sterilization.”*
- *“The Uyghur population in China has been subjected to living and working in forced labor camps”.*
- *“At least one million Uyghur’s have been detained in internment camps.”*
- *“One in five cotton products sold around the world are related in some way to the Uyghur labor camps.”*
- *“The forced labor camps, which include women and children, have been associated specifically with clothing sold in the fast fashion industry.”*
- *“Some evidence indicates that the Uyghur population has been denied their religious rights.”*

STATEMENT	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS THAT SELECTED ‘STRONGLY AGREE’ OR ‘SOMEWHAT AGREE’
<i>CHINA HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF ALLEGED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS.</i>	87.1%
<i>THE FORCED LABOR CAMPS, WHICH INCLUDE WOMEN AND CHILDREN, HAVE BEEN ASSOCIATED SPECIFICALLY WITH CLOTHING SOLD IN THE FAST FASHION INDUSTRY.</i>	82.9%
<i>THE UYGHUR POPULATION IN CHINA IS A VICTIM OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN CHINA.</i>	65.7%
<i>THE UYGHUR POPULATION IN CHINA HAS BEEN SUBJECT TO LIVING AND WORKING IN FORCED LABOR CAMPS.</i>	65.7%
<i>SOME EVIDENCE INDICATES THAT THE UYGHUR POPULATION HAS BEEN DENIED THEIR RELIGIOUS RIGHTS.</i>	57.1%
<i>AT LEAST ONE MILLION UYGHURS HAVE BEEN DETAINED IN INTERNMENT CAMPS.</i>	55.7%
<i>ONE IN FIVE COTTON PRODUCTS SOLD AROUND THE WORLD ARE RELATED IN SOME WAY TO THE UYGHUR LABOR CAMPS.</i>	55.7%
<i>THE UYGHUR POPULATION IN CHINA HAS BEEN SUBJECT TO FORCED STERILIZATION.</i>	52.9%

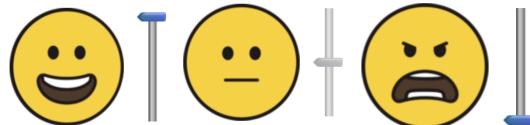
More than half of respondents either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with each of the eight statements provided. Though for some of them this may be the first time they are made aware of China’s previous human rights violations and more specifically, the ongoing violation against the Uyghur population, many were in agreement with the statements and did not second guess that these events are taking place in society today. Because the story of the Uyghur population is arguably extremely underreported on, it is no surprise that the broader statements, such as

“China has been accused of alleged human rights violations” received higher overall percentages of agreement.

Prior to posing question 8 to survey respondents, I provided various images that allegedly showed one of the Uyghur forced labor camps. I explained how the allegation in place is that these individuals are forced to work in supply chain and manufacturing facilities whose products, in turn, end up in fast fashion retailers. I then asked respondents to move a dial, changing the emotion on a face, to match that of the emotion they felt. To the right, I have included the four images used in my survey prior to asking my follow up question (question 8), as well as the question format used.



“How do these images make you feel?”



99%

**OF RESPONDENTS
SELECTED FEELING
EMOTIONS 1 & 2**



A picture is said to be worth a thousand words. When brainstorming survey questions, I knew there would be a significant benefit to adding accurate visuals for respondents to aid them in understanding the full picture. Our brains are wired to process images in the blink of an eye, and when people are given an image in place of words, the brain region for emotional processing is activated (Alpuim & Ehrenberg). We can see this happening first hand with the data collected from this survey question as nearly all respondents, 99% of them, stated that they felt emotions one and two (as seen above) when observing the images of the internment camps. Images provide reassurance to words (Alpuim & Ehrenberg). When respondents read the claims shared previously, they may have second guessed the accuracy of the statements. By adding concrete evidence via real life photos, respondents were more likely to have an enhanced emotional response to the story of the Uyghur population.

Section #3 (post-introduction to the Uyghur crisis): How has learning more about the story of the Uyghurs changed students' opinions on the fast fashion industry and their current purchasing habits?

In exploring section #3, I utilized 3 key questions to round out my survey. The questions were intended to create a full circle moment for respondents, tying it all together by now reflecting on how their learnings may have changed their perspective on the industry and their purchasing behaviors. In this section, I reintroduced a previous question from section 1, question 3. Question 3 was used to examine respondent's feelings towards the fast fashion industry and the implications fast fashion introduces to our society. After devoting section 2 to educating respondents on the horrible scenes behind the trendy clothing, I was eager to see if their opinions had shifted.

“Assuming the information and photos you have seen in this survey are accurate depictions of human rights violations, forced labor camps that are used to make the clothing in the fast fashion industry, please answer the following questions.”

- *“Seeing this information makes me feel more negative about the fast fashion industry.”*
- *“Seeing this information makes me feel more negative about the potential use of forced labor camps to produce clothing.”*
- *“I am less likely to purchase as much fast fashion clothing as I did before now.”*

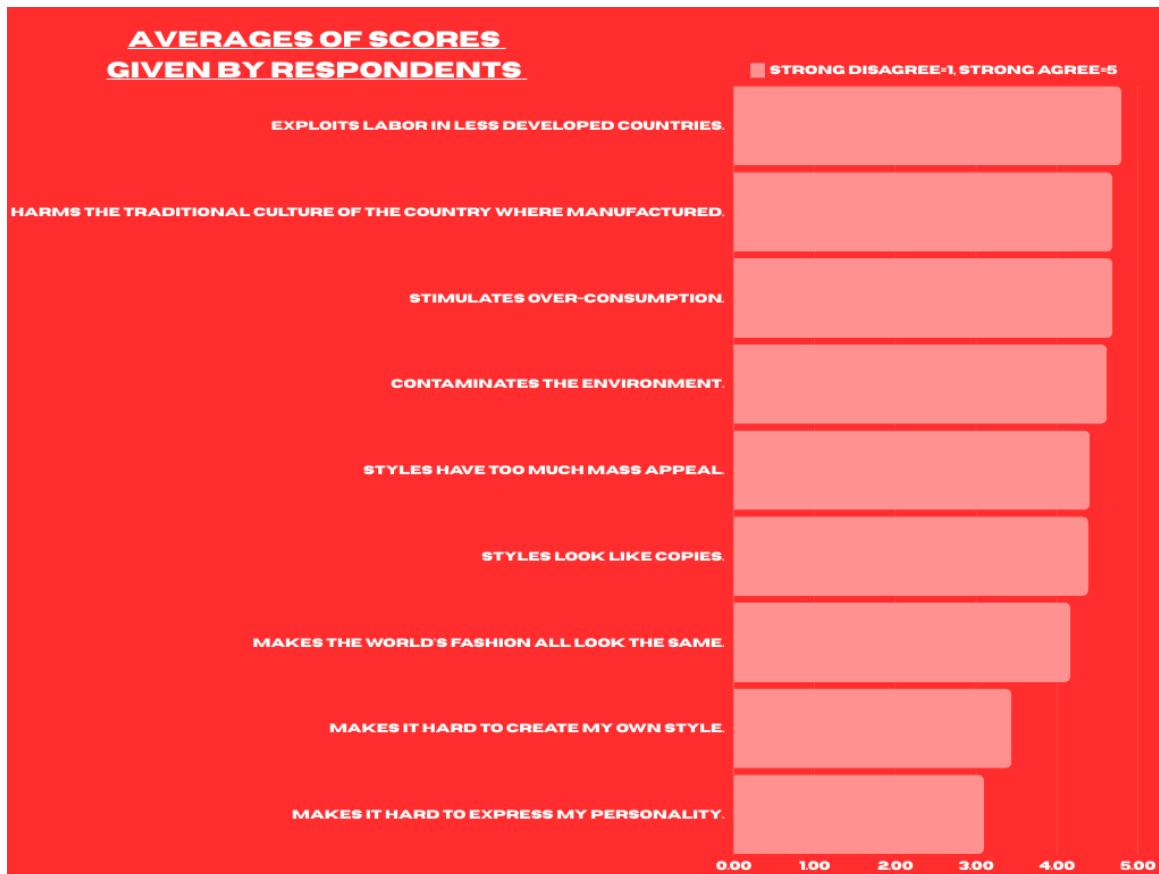
STATEMENT	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS THAT SELECTED “STRONGLY AGREE” OR “SOMEWHAT AGREE”
SEEING THIS INFORMATION MAKES ME FEEL MORE NEGATIVE ABOUT THE FAST FASHION INDUSTRY.	91.4%
SEEING THIS INFORMATION MAKES ME FEEL MORE NEGATIVE ABOUT THE POTENTIAL USE OF FORCED LABOR CAMPS TO PRODUCE CLOTHING.	90.0%
I AM LESS LIKELY TO PURCHASE AS MUCH FAST FASHION CLOTHING AS I DID BEFORE NOW.	81.4%

The data received from this question provides substantial evidence that section two of the survey fulfilled the intention of informing respondents on the dark side of fast fashion. Over 80% of respondents stated that they strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that they had negative feelings towards the use of the forced labor camps that are fueling the fast fashion industry and are now less likely to purchase from brands that utilize these unethical tactics. Consumers overall are willing to alter their spending habits in lieu of learning the weight that their decisions truly hold. With consumers playing an extremely pivotal role in the marketplace, this question shows the importance of being educated prior to making purchasing decisions and supporting brands alike.

“Now that you have seen this information about how fast fashion may be produced, please answer the following questions. Please note there are no right or wrong answers.”

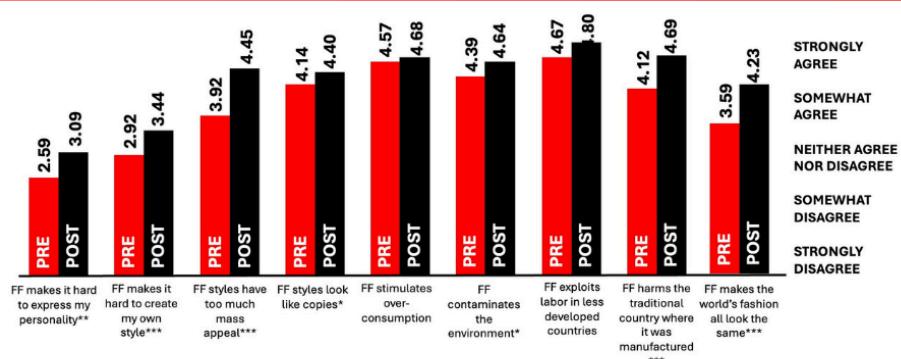
- *“Fast fashion makes it hard to express my personality.”*
- *“Fast fashion makes it hard to create my own style.”*

- “Fast fashion styles have too much mass appeal.”
- “Fast fashion styles look like copies.”
- “Fast fashion stimulates over-consumption”
- “Fast fashion contaminates the environment.”
- “Fast fashion exploits labor in less developed countries.”
- “Fast fashion harms the traditional culture of the country where it is manufactured.”
- “Fast fashion makes the world’s fashion all look the same.”



The final question asked in the survey is the same question used in section one in hopes of observing a shift in responses post learning about the forced labor and genocidal force being used behind the scenes of the fast fashion industry against the Uyghur population. Though the change in response may not seem like much, a pre-post sample T-test I conducted proved otherwise. The test results revealed the P-value (a common concept used in data analysis to determine statistical significance) for each of the nine statements. All nine of the statements generated a more negative response from respondents upon being asked a second time and out of those, seven of them changed in a statistically significant manner. I have included the details of the test below.

COMPARISON OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS FAST FASHION BEFORE AND AFTER THE INTERVENTION OF PHOTOS AND DESCRIPTIONS OF THE UYGHUR SITUATION



Paired samples pre-post test significant at p<.01 (**), p<.05 (**), p<.10 (*)

The data collected from this test gives clear evidence of the value held within educating oneself and others. We see how influential sharing a narrative can be in affecting certain behaviors, and how opinions can be altered after being informed. Although these responses are merely words, I have hope that the actions behind the opinions will reflect the changes seen through the test. I believe that informing respondents on the narrative of the Uyghur population is the first step in seeing real change, assuming that respondents begin to put their money where their mouths are, and that the awareness aspect of it all will help deter participants from supporting the brands partaking in the unethical practices and behaviors.



Limitations

The overarching subject of fast fashion, and the human rights violations that take place behind the scenes of the industry are extremely relevant but very complex issues for someone to completely wrap their head around. Asking people to engage in discussions about such complex issues can cause them to feel overwhelmed and intimidated. Moreover, many people may find themselves as contributors to the problematic industry, which may amount to them feeling targeted and defensive when asked to share their thoughts and experiences with the topic. Additionally, as mentioned previously, the story of the Uyghur population is one that is unfolding in real-time and in result, heavily underreported on. As a result of this, many are unaware or misinformed about the topic and therefore are less likely to provide accurate input on their feelings towards the situation.

An immense amount of effort was put in to obtain respondents for my survey, however I struggled to reach the numbers I so desired. I found that much of this was attributed to the fact that those who I approached had little emotional connection to the situation, and seemingly had very little to say about the topic. I feel, at times, people only devote their efforts to things that directly affect them and their lives. Although I know this topic does in fact affect people all over the world, it can seem irrelevant or ‘too far’ to get people to be as passionate as I find myself being about it. As a result of all this, my survey demographics represent a skewed representation of various attributes, the most obvious of them being gender. Many of the extracurricular and social activities I contribute my time to are those where I am surrounded by other females in my age range. This led me to obtain more respondents that fit these criterias over others.

A person’s heart can only hold so much at one time and humanitarian crises such as the one discussed in my thesis are, unfortunately, not irregular instances to hear and learn about. It may feel exhausting at times to be informed and passionate about each and every human rights issue, and some may find themselves being spread thin attempting to do so. For example, I personally am very connected to the Palestinian conflict that has been ongoing for the past 75 years. The topic is one that has been discussed in my household for as long as I can remember and with recent events bringing the spotlight to the issue, I have found myself devoting my time to the relevance of that rather than maybe other crises I deemed of utmost importance. This example may vary for others, but the point to get across is that due to the sheer amount of unrest we see infiltrating the human rights world today, it is not uncommon for some issues to outshadow others in the eyes of individuals.

Implications and Further Research

The overarching lesson that I observed through my research is one that can be utilized by many brands, and even individuals, who seek to change the behaviors of others. I observed the effects that sharing narrative and photographic evidence can have on the perception of community members, and how this tactic can be used to ultimately persuade consumers to alter their purchasing behaviors. This intervention style attempt at further educating correspondents on the impacts that their decisions hold can morph the way brands target their consumer base and leave a lasting imprint on the apparel industry specifically. This, however, must be used ethically and morally, ensuring that nobody is misled or taken advantage of. We live in a society where we can

never be too sure of the information we are being fed, what is true and what is fabricated. It is important for the motivation behind the sharing of a new narrative or of photos to give context always be used in respect, paying great attention to detail to the “truth” behind the stories and photos.

The second implication that I’d like to focus on is the value held in expanding our horizons and learning about different instances happening in our world today. I found through my research and survey that very few people were truly aware or properly educated on the situation in the Xinjiang province. This cannot be attributed to a single factor, however I think it can partially be associated with the fact that we live in a bubble tailored to our lives and our specific communities. Tragedies, such as the tale of the Uyghur population, can merely be soundbites in this bubble, often causing them to be touched on for a short period of time or completely overlooked. There can be so much knowledge gained and power held when that barrier is broken and we begin to look outside our surrounding walls. Taking a look beyond our borders and employing our natural human instinct to be empathetic can be the first start to a chain reaction both internally and externally.

Finally, the role that fast fashion and slow fashion brands play in the advertising space is crucial when targeting consumers. It is of utmost importance that brands research and analyze their target audiences to determine where their priorities lie. Some consumers may simply value the convenience and quick fix that fast fashion trends and products offer them, not caring about the treacherous and unethical supply chains that hide behind the scenes. Others may admire the transparency and attention to detail, investing money in more expensive yet timeless and ethically made pieces. Thinking ahead and doing prior research on a brand’s target audience will not only save the brand money on advertising, but it will also speak volumes to the consumers that look to them when deciding to treat themselves to a new addition to their closet space.

Personal Conclusion

Learning about the Uyghur population has affected me in more ways than I can even begin to express. I pride myself in being an extremely empathetic person, but at times I start to feel as though my empathy can hold boundaries when put into the direct scope of my personal life and experiences. Learning so intently about a situation occurring 6,914 miles away has made me realize that empathy truly holds no boundaries. It has taught me that my actions provide a reaction and that if that reaction is not affecting my well being directly, it is affecting someone, somewhere. I have learned to be more conscious when making the decisions I have made so effortlessly up until this point, and that there is so much more value in researching now more than ever.

I can’t help but think back to the person I was prior to embarking on my month-long study abroad journey just a few short years ago. Excited but anxious, Curious but skeptical, Open-minded but cautious, not knowing at all what to expect. I was eager to jump into, what I thought would be, the Italian vacation of my dreams. But from the minute I stepped into the Montini classroom, sat down at my desk and began listening to the infamous and highly respected Dr. Molly Rapert lecture, I realized my journey was embarking on its path to exceeding my expectations. They say knowledge is power, and the knowledge that flourished in

that boarding school classroom overlooking the Italian Alps was what really tied together my entire experience. Learning about the Uyghurs changed my outlook on life itself. On how things so minimal to some are consuming the lives of others thousands of miles away. Realizing that the picture is always bigger than what meets the eye, like in the case of studying abroad, is what inspired me to want to share their story.

I want to give my sincerest thank you to those that pushed me to be the person I am today. Those that aided me these past four years in my path to success, prosperity and growth as an individual. I want to specifically thank the Honors College for its guidance and support as I have navigated what has been one of the most enlightening and important periods of my life. I want to specifically thank the University of Arkansas staff for the effort and care they put into the classroom. For I look back to each of the courses I have taken with great appreciation, even if at the time I was dreading an upcoming exam or the treacherous walk to a rainy day lecture. Last, but certainly far from least, I want to thank my wonderful thesis advisor, Dr. Molly Rapert. There are no amount of words I can use to express how grateful I am for the consistent aid and support Molly has given me. I feel eternally lucky to have had her be such a large part of my journey in my desire to tell the tale of the Uyghur population, and for her guidance to go beyond that, into all aspects of my life. Now and always I will be forever thankful to have Molly in my corner!

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