

## How are Shein hauls making our planet unlivable?

Shein (pronounced she-in, not shine, as it began as SheInside) launched in 2008, originally as a wedding dress retailer<sup>1</sup>. Since then the Chinese company has expanded rapidly, with particular success in social media marketing.

5 It is the most-mentioned brand on TikTok, far surpassing Netflix which came in second. Shein has been tagged more than three times as often as McDonald's or Starbucks - it has tapped into the Gen-Z market better than any other brand.

Shein now represents almost a third (28 per cent) of the fast-fashion market in the US alone, and the company is rumoured to be heading towards an IPO – aka listing the company on the stock market.

10 But as Shein takes social media by storm, with influencers all over the world sharing their '#SHEINHAUL' videos, activists and experts have been left despairing.

The fashion industry is the second biggest polluter in the world, and fast fashion brands - like Shein - are a key part of that pollution.

When you look at some of the numbers around the brand, it's quite astounding. According to CEO Molly Miao, the company releases between 700 and 1,000 new items a day.

15 Yes, you read that right: a day.

Shein says each product is only produced in small numbers (between 50-100 pieces), thereby minimising how many raw materials are wasted. When a product is popular, it's then mass-produced on a larger scale.

But even a product produced on a small scale is still contributing to carbon emissions and waste.

20 Based on the numbers above, and using the most conservative figures, that's still at least 35,000 items being produced every day - and at worst 100,000.

Sustainability<sup>2</sup> is ultimately about buying and consuming less. Shein's business model is set up to fuel demand, guaranteeing that there is almost always something new that a consumer will want to buy.

25 When experts examined the company's website, they found that 70 per cent of its products in stock are less than three months old. At other fast-fashion retailers, like Zara and H&M, this number is between 40-53 per cent.

In a world where the average consumer throws away 60 per cent of new clothes in the same year they were bought, Shein's approach to sales is a clear part of that pattern.

30 As well as contributing to the climate crisis, fast fashion also relies on exploiting people within the supply chain<sup>3</sup>. In order to mass-produce clothes and sell them at such a heavily discounted rate, costs have to be cut.

"The garment<sup>4</sup> industry, not only the fast fashion industry, is built on poverty wages and sweatshop conditions," explains a spokesperson for The Clean Clothes Campaign.

35 "These working conditions are no mere flaws<sup>5</sup> of individual factories, but they are driven by an industry practice of pushing for the lowest price and shortest lead times in an eternal race to the bottom."

Although Shein has a corporate social responsibility page that says the company "always practice[s] fair labour" and "never EVER engage[s] in child or forced labour", Reuters reported last month that Shein has failed to provide adequate transparency over its supply chain.

40 Shein specifically has also been called out<sup>6</sup> multiple times by independent designers, who accuse the fast-fashion giant of stealing their work.

In August of this year Bailey Prado, a crochet designer based in Los Angeles and London, accused Shein of stealing 45 of her designs.

45 "I convinced myself it wasn't a big deal," said Prado on Instagram, "but now my designs, what has been my whole life for the last 3 years, are now sold to millions of Shein consumers that will never know about me.

"It seems like fast fashion companies have no consequences."

50 Despite multiple designers like Prado highlighting Shein's intellectual property theft - along with a plethora of articles and videos decrying<sup>7</sup> the brand's poor quality - the company is going from strength to strength.

At the centre of their marketing strategy are #SHEINHAUL videos, where influencers and social media users share footage<sup>8</sup> of the swathes of items they've bought from or been gifted by Shein.

Influencer marketing isn't a new concept, nor one unique to Shein, but it's become a cornerstone of fast fashion advertising during the COVID-19 pandemic. As people are stuck at home, there's something almost therapeutic about watching other 'relatable'<sup>9</sup> figures also stuck in their homes trying on clothes.

55 Shein is also a rare brand (not just fast fashion, but all fashion) in catering to plus-size consumers. They have many products that go up to a 5XL (UK 26/US 22/EU 54), which is far beyond what high-street equivalents like H&M, Zara and New Look offer.

60 This has certainly helped with the brand's popularity, as it offers choices not often afforded to plus-size shoppers, who often end up paying the so-called 'fat tax' on clothes.

Euronews Green, Marthe de Ferrer

#### Notes

1. Retailer: person or store that sells goods to the public
2. Sustainability: ability to maintain something over time
3. Supply chain: network to produce and distribute a product to a buyer
4. Garment: clothes
5. Flaws: defects
5. To be called out: to be accused of
7. Decrying: criticising
8. Footage: video images
9. Relatable: someone who you can easily identify with