

## To Buy or Not to Buy?

### Fast Fashion as a Human Rights Dilemma

Mr Smith (55) works for a famous American clothes company, which has sent him to Bangladesh to inspect some foreign subcontractors there. Smith, who has been with the same company for many years, is very proud of the high quality standards that his company has in the USA. After increasing protests by US customers and the press the management now has decided to control the working conditions and social standards of their partners abroad. As most customers are high school teenagers and college students Smith's company is in fact very worried about its public image and does not want to lose its main target group of young people with a very strong sense of global responsibility. At the same time, however, Smith understands that the company has to produce and sell clothes at cheap prices, especially while America is still suffering from the consequences of the global financial crisis.



**Assignment 1:** Work on your own. Read the text below and tick the answers you agree with most.

In Bangladesh Smith realizes that the local factory owners are trying to fool him. His visit has been announced weeks before and on his inspection tours he only meets the happiest workers at the most modern working stations. Smith of course knows that the real situation in many factories in Bangladesh is different. Nevertheless most of the workers seem to be really happy to have a job in the factory. Smith further doubts that his American costumers want to hear about the real conditions in which the clothes they are wearing are produced. Aren't cheap prices what the costumers expect of him and his company after all? In fact, he had read his colleague's inspection report about the working conditions in the factory from three years ago, which was really shocking. During his inspection he has been able to find first examples that the situation has already improved.

In the end Smith does not write anything about the children working in the factory. Neither does he mention the low security standards or the terrible living conditions of many workers in the factory dormitories. There is nothing in his report about the low wages, long working hours, loan-cuts and unpaid overtime hours. But let's be honest: None of it is new to his company's managers in America, who don't want to hear about these things, because then they would have to react. What would they do then? Probably they would look for new partners and relocate the production to an even cheaper Third World country with even less media attention and less laws.

Besides, Smith is worried about his job. Nowadays after the last financial crisis there is no such thing as job security in America anymore. At his age the chances of finding a new job are not very promising and there is his family and the three children that all go to college. Thus Smith keeps his eyes shut and writes what he thinks that the people expect of him and flies back home to America the next day.

What do you think about his decision? Tick the right answer.

**QUESTION 1:** From a moral point of view Mr Smith's behaviour is ...

completely wrong      -3      -2      -1      0      +1      +2      +3      completely right

**QUESTION 2:** How difficult was it for you to take a decision and to tick an answer ...

rather easy      -3      -2      -1      0      +1      +2      +3      rather hard



**Assignment 2:** Work in groups with other Erasmus students that had the same opinion as you did in question 1. Exchange your views on Mr Smith's behavior. Then agree on at least three arguments to support your position and write down your arguments.

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**Assignment 3:** Act out a ping-pong-discussion in your class in which you discuss in which way you consider Mr Smith's behavior appropriate/not appropriate in moral terms. Use idioms from the word bank below to express your arguments.

**Word bank: Useful words and phrases for the ping-pong discussion**

In my opinion/view...	I am sorry, but I totally disagree with you.
I am totally convinced that ...	You may be right to a point, but ...
I am sure/convinced that ...	I think you are wrong here.
Yet another reason is that ...	I see your point, but ...
Let me give you an example: ...	I strongly/completely disagree with you because ...
Take for example the following example	I strongly criticise
For instance, look at ...	That's probably true, but
To illustrate my point ...	Possibly, but...
We should also discuss/consider ...	I would indeed question that argument...
What I am trying to say is ...	I would like to raise another point
I would like to draw your attention to ...	What is also important is ...
To be quite frank/ honest/	We should also discuss what this means for ...

**Assignment 4:** Collect both positive and negative characteristics of fast fashion in a mind map.

**Assignment 5:** Work in groups. Collect ideas on a poster on what actually can be done to fight the negative consequences of fast fashion and to implement human rights in the global fashion industry. Do not only focus on the producers but also on the consumers and think of possible solutions how you personally can make a difference.