NEWS LESSON

# Why Your Donated Clothes May Be Hard to Sell



## BEFORE YOU READ

### 1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What makes you stop wearing something that still fits?
2. Would you buy fewer clothes if each one cost more?
3. What do you imagine happens after you donate clothes?

### 2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **overproduction** | ☐ | A | made by people from chemicals, not from natural materials |
| 2 | **algorithmic** | ☐ | B | large in amount |
| 3 | **durable** | ☐ | C | shoes, boots and similar things |
| 4 | **disposal** | ☐ | D | the act of getting rid of something |
| 5 | **footwear** | ☐ | E | able to last a long time without being damaged |
| 6 | **synthetic** | ☐ | F | chosen by computer rules that learn what a person likes |
| 7 | **complicate** | ☐ | G | to make something harder to deal with |
| 8 | **substantial** | ☐ | H | making more of something than people need |

## 3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

### Charities are inheriting the disposal costs of an industry built on constant replacement.

1 The donation bag provides a reassuring ending to the story of an unwanted garment. The wardrobe is clearer, the clothes avoid the bin and a charity may earn money. In the sorting room, that neat narrative can collapse. British charity shops report being inundated with clothing that is too damaged or too poor in quality to sell. The consumer has passed the garment on, but the social and environmental cost has not disappeared; it has simply arrived at somebody else's door.

2 The pressure is visible at St Raphael's Hospice in south London, where reporting in October 2026 described as many as 100 bags arriving each day and only a minority of their contents being fit for sale. Disposal costs eat into charitable income. At the same time, resale platforms encourage people to sell desirable pieces themselves, leaving shops to inherit more of the garments with little value. The charity sector is absorbing part of the cost of fast fashion's constant replacement cycle. Charities, in effect, are picking up the bill for decisions taken long before the bag reached their door.

3 Oxfam's 2026 State of Style report illustrates how consumption has become entwined with digital influence. Nearly two-thirds of people surveyed had purchased clothing they had not intended to buy after encountering it online, and 32% of items in British wardrobes were reportedly never worn. Among younger adults, algorithmic recommendations exerted an especially strong influence. Clothing is increasingly marketed not as a durable possession but as a quick response to a passing mood, event or online trend. Durability, on that model, is close to irrelevant.

4 The environmental consequences extend well beyond household clutter. Textile production consumes substantial water, energy and raw materials, while synthetic fibres and complex fabric blends complicate recycling. A garment may move from retailer to wardrobe to donation bag within months, despite having required extensive resources to manufacture and transport. Resale and donation can prolong the useful life of clothing, but they cannot make excessive production environmentally harmless. Every additional garment carries a cost that no amount of reselling can write off.

5 European policymakers have begun to intervene. Since July 2026, large companies have faced a prohibition on destroying most unsold apparel and footwear, with defined exceptions. The measure is intended to encourage resale, repair and reuse rather than disposal of perfectly serviceable goods. It marks a shift towards holding businesses responsible for what happens after products fail to sell, although it does not directly challenge the relentless pace at which new collections are launched.

6 Cheap clothes meet a real need, and buying fewer, more expensive items is not an option for every household. Shoppers also have limited control over how well clothes are made. Manufacturers choose materials, shops encourage purchases and governments decide which disposal costs businesses bear. Charity shops are dealing with the result. They cannot solve overproduction on their own.

Sources: The Guardian. Picture: AI illustration.

## 4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The text suggests that selling clothes on resale platforms leaves charity shops worse off. T F NG
2. The EU rule on unsold stock leaves the speed at which new clothes appear largely unchallenged. T F NG
3. Britain plans to copy the EU rules on unsold clothing. T F NG
4. The writer blames individual shoppers alone for the problem. T F NG
5. Oxfam's figures suggest that fewer than one in five items in British wardrobes goes unworn. T F NG

## 5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

| apparel | entwined | exemption | exerted | intervene | prohibition | prolong | refrain |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

1. Years of shared investment had left the two families so _____ that separating their businesses took lawyers months.
2. Retailers of sportswear and other _____ often slash prices sharply when a season ends.
3. Regular repairs can _____ the life of a coat by several winters.
4. Regulators were reluctant to _____ in the market until the damage became obvious.
5. Campaigners are calling for a total _____ on single-use plastic bags.
6. Online reviews have _____ considerable sway over how people shop.

## 6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The company's _____ to admit the fault damaged its reputation. (RELUCTANT)
2. Buying a third identical coat just in case is an _____ rather than a need. (EXTRAVAGANT)
3. Campaigners want companies to be held _____ for the waste they create. (ACCOUNT)
4. The _____ of a brand's promises is hard for shoppers to judge. (SINCERE)
5. Replacing a coat every winter is environmentally _____ . (SUSTAINABLE)

## 7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. These are fixed, formal pairings. Learn the whole phrase, and expect a noun or an -ing form after the preposition, not a clause.

| at | for | in | of | on | to | with |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

1. Dumping unsold stock is tantamount _____ admitting that the business model has failed.
2. Any attempt to regulate fashion is fraught _____ difficulty because supply chains cross dozens of borders.
3. The success of such schemes is contingent _____ shoppers changing their habits.
4. Brands that ignore the waste are arguably complicit _____ the problem they claim to deplore.
5. Cheap production often comes at the expense _____ workers' safety.

SPEAK

## 8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What should someone check before putting clothes in a donation bag?
2. Would you rather own ten reliable outfits or lots of cheap choices?
3. Who could make the biggest difference to clothing waste?

## 9 Role-play: what to do with the old clothes

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

**Student A · the housemate who wants to donate**

You and your housemate have six bags of old clothes. You want to give everything to a charity shop this weekend. Explain why, and listen to your housemate's idea.

**Student B · the housemate who wants to sell**

You want to sell the best clothes online and give the rest to charity. Explain why, and ask what the charity shop will do with damaged items. Try to agree on a plan.

**Useful phrases**

I'd like to give everything to the charity shop.
That's a fair point, but it'll take a lot of time.
What if we sell the best pieces online?
I'm not keen on that, because it's a lot of work.
How about we split the bags in two?
Let's check every item before we decide.

**Afterwards, tell the class: what did you decide to do with the clothes, and why?**

ANSWER KEY

**2 Key words**

1 H · 2 F · 3 E · 4 D · 5 C · 6 A · 7 G · 8 B

**4 True, false or not given**

1 T · 2 T · 3 NG · 4 F · 5 F

**5 Vocabulary**

1 entwined · 2 apparel · 3 prolong · 4 intervene · 5 prohibition · 6 exerted

**6 Word forms**

1 reluctance · 2 extravagance · 3 accountable · 4 sincerity · 5 unsustainable

**7 Language focus**

1 to · 2 with · 3 on · 4 in · 5 of

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