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### Rhetorical Situation Analysis of Fashion Revolution

On April 24, 2013, the Rana Plaza in Bangladesh collapsed killing 1,134 people and injured 2,500 others, most of the victims were young women, making it the fourth largest industrial disaster in history that exposed the widespread labor exploitation in global supply chains.

Fashion Revolution is the world's largest fashion advocacy movement and social enterprise that formed as a result of this catastrophe. Now operating in over seventy countries, the movement promotes labor transparency, environmental responsibility, and corporate accountability throughout fashion production, the revolution is fighting for an industry that "values people and the planet over profit and growth." The Fashion Revolution website ([fashionrevolution.org](http://fashionrevolution.org)) functions as a rhetorical situation analysis responding to a global exigence created by institutional failures that permit corporations to distance themselves from labor violations occurring across fragmented regulatory systems. The artifact frames fashion consumption as a mechanism of public oversight, arguing that transparency and collective consumer engagement can expose ethical and legal deficiencies within corporate supply chains.

At the heart of Fashion Revolution's advocacy lies a deeper recognition of the central exigence. It is not merely the Rana Plaza collapse itself, but the systemic labor exploitation the disaster symbolized. The website explicitly rejects interpretations of the collapse as an isolated tragedy, asserting that Rana Plaza "was not an accident." This language reframes the disaster as evidence of structural negligence embedded within supply chain governance and international labor regulation. Fashion Revolution brings to light the fact that the fashion industry is one of the most "polluting industries in the world," and that garment workers are denied "safe working

conditions, fair wages, and basic human rights.” The Fashion Revolution was founded on one simple question: “Why and how was this allowed to happen?” this situation called forth rhetoric because the condition was urgent. This prompts a call to action that takes place among the community of the Fashion Revolution and all over the world. One that asks #WhoMadeMyClothes?

To translate this urgent concern into widespread awareness, Fashion Revolution relies heavily on strategic messaging that encourages public participation. The campaign slogan “#WhoMadeMyClothes?” encapsulates this framing by exposing the stark invisibility maintained by corporations. The exigence not only exposes the unethical behavior, but the institutional ability of brands operating without transparency or accountability. Fashion Revolution asserts that by asking questions, demanding disclosure, publicly exposing unethical practices, raising awareness, and fighting for reform, can prompt institutions to change their unjust practices. The artifact thus utilizes rhetoric as a tool for institutional disruption and transformation. While the slogan illustrates how the movement communicates its message, its effectiveness ultimately depends on the audience it mobilizes.

Understanding the success of this campaign requires examining the audiences that Fashion Revolution seeks to influence. The audience primarily consists of consumers who possess purchasing power. However, the artifact does not address the consumers as simply shoppers, it uses their consumerist power to hold institutions accountable. The Fashion Revolution explicitly invites consumers to ask brands “#WhoMadeMyClothes?” “#WhoMadeMyFabric,” and “#WhatsInMyClothes?” which transforms the act of consumption into a public demand for transparency. This audience is rhetorically significant because it operates as a force between activism and institutional power. While Fashion Revolution

mobilizes its audience to ask “why” to their shopping choices, secondary audiences including fashion brands, industry leaders, policymakers, lawmakers, shareholders, and investors are implicitly addressed through public scrutiny. As a result, Fashion Revolution expands traditional concepts of legal accountability by suggesting that public discourse can function as an informal regulatory mechanism when formal enforcement fails to adequately monitor multinational corporations.

However, even the most compelling rhetorical movements must navigate structural realities of the industries they seek to reform. The rhetorical situation shaping the Fashion Revolution is constrained by powerful institutional forces. Capitalism functions as a primary constraint, as the fashion industry’s profit model depends on low-cost labor, outsourcing, and rapid production cycles. Consumer culture further constrains the rhetoric by normalizing disposability and affordability over sustainability and quality. Additionally, Fashion Revolution operates without legal or institutional authority, which limits its capacity to mandate change. Recognizing these limitations, Fashion Revolution avoids complete consumer boycotting from fashion markets. According to the website, “we have heard first-hand from supply chain workers that boycotting can do them more harm than help.” Instead, it reframes consumption as an opportunity for ethical intervention, encouraging consumers to use their purchasing power as a form of corporate oversight. The movement’s lack of enforcement authority further constrains its ability to mandate change, yet it simultaneously strengthens the organization’s credibility as an independent driving force. By emphasizing its mission to “hold the fashion industry accountable,” the website reinforces its institutional critique while acknowledging the boundaries of its authority.

Fashion Revolution offers a fitting response that is effective for its rhetorical situation. The artifact aligns exigence, audience, and constraints by transforming a global crisis into a series of rhetorically actionable demands. It successfully modifies the exigence by making exploitation visible and contestable, even if it cannot entirely resolve it. By insisting that “transparency is the first step towards transformation,” the artifact identifies corporate secrecy as a principal mechanism enabling labor violations and encouraging audiences to view transparency as a necessary industry standard. According to the website, “a lack of transparency costs lives.” Although this strategy lacks direct enforcement power, it generates public pressure capable of influencing legislative initiatives, corporate compliance programs, and voluntary industry regulation. By framing clothing production as embedded within human rights, labor protection, and environmental sustainability concerns, the artifact broadens the scope of the exigence and encourages Western consumers to recognize fashion consumption as participation in global governance systems affecting vulnerable and exploited worker populations. This rhetorical shift challenges distinctions between private consumption and public political participation, showing how advocacy can influence corporate governance through shifting public expectations.

Overall, fashion can function as a powerful form of activism when it is mobilized through the use of rhetoric. Through Bitzer’s theory of rhetorical situation, Fashion Revolution is a movement that challenges institutional power by transforming everyday consumption into a form of public accountability. This rhetoric critiques the fashion industry, but also demonstrates how discourse can expose and pressure institutions that rely on invisibility. In this sense, the Fashion Revolution demonstrates how fashion can operate as a powerful vehicle for social justice advocacy and institutional reform.