



Editorial

Sustainable Fashion in India: An Overview

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Lately, a greater number of industries are moving towards sustainability, sustainable products and process. Sustainable fashion is a term that is quite a in vogue lately. Study reveals that the fashion industry is the second largest industry polluting the environment. It is now driving several eco-conscious brands and individuals to opt-out of fast fashion and adopt more planet-friendly strategies. Sustainable fashion is catching up like fire in India. Sustainable, eco-conscious brands from across the country are organizing online as well as offline sales of their goods. India has witnessed many homegrown fashion and accessory brands that are moving towards sustainable clothing and fashion. The fashion industry has joined the bandwagon in the last few years to remain in the good books of their customers and to resonate with the sustainability revolution. Fashion goods like bags, belts, swimsuits, watches, footwear, and wedding dresses are now promoted as carbon-positive, green, organic, etc. The fashion industry has adopted innovative business models including reduce, reuse, recycle, resale, rental and repair to save the environment. The fashion sector needs to take voluntary actions and create policies that can positively address environmental issues like global warming, climate change and other key issues facing human civilization. This study aims to study sustainable fashion consumption with respect to the Indian market. The study used secondary data on fashion brands to study their sustainable products and approach. The study provides information on the fashion industry in India and its environmental impact.

The Fashion Industry - and Why its Sustainability is so Important

While consumers have greater power of choice when it comes to lifestyle goods, sustainability challenges surrounding the 'bottom of the pyramid' needs - food, shelter, and clothing - are much harder to tackle. This is because lifestyle products can be done away with if they are absolutely not required, or replaced with competitively priced sustainable alternatives, as is the case with sustainable beauty products, accessories, personal care and pet care items and the like. But products that are fundamental to our lives - such as food and clothes - often require years, sometimes generations, to make a switch from. Shifting to vegetarianism or veganism is no mean feat for someone who has grown up eating meat. It requires many resolutions, the right resources to learn from, a support system, and the availability of alternatives that do not lead to a nutritional compromise - and all this at affordable prices.

Similarly, for someone who has worn inorganically grown cotton all their life, it is hard to digest the fact that their choice is having a massive negative impact on the environment and for them to build a wardrobe with sustainable fibres (hemp, jute, recycled polyester, organic cotton, etc.) will take a great deal of motivation, resources, conviction, and most importantly, awareness. With respect to this study, this is where the fashion industry comes into the picture, and it will remain the sole focus of discussion for the length of this document.

For the longest time, the fashion industry has been a major concern for sustainability champions. The industry has a long-standing history of human rights violations (the likes as child labour and exploitation, particularly in countries like India, Bangladesh, China and Indonesia), inadequate pay, poor working conditions, water and soil pollution, and heavy use of chemicals which are harmful to the environment, the farmers and workers exposed to them, and consumers alike.

Additionally, a report by sustainability consulting firm Quantis states that the fashion industry is responsible for 8% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. The discourse above begs several questions. Are consumers aware of how they can demand more

sustainable products and, in turn, force the industry to be more sustainable? Are consumers aware of the sustainable brand choices available to them? And how do consumers perceive such sustainable options? This study thus seeks to answer the fundamental questions raised above from the specific point of view of sustainable fashion consumption with respect to the Indian market.

What is Sustainable Fashion?

Sustainable fashion constitutes garments, accessories and home-use fabrics designed, created, manufactured, distributed and used in an environmentally friendly and ethical manner. The above definition can be broken down into five simple parts - sustainable fashion constitutes clothing and fabrics which are

- 1) *Designed* in a manner that helps with minimizing wastage and maximizing finished product output given a quantum of resources;
- 2) *Created* by people under humane working conditions and in a resource-efficient manner. This involves using materials that consume fewer resources to grow or manufacture and growing or producing the raw material and/or the finished product in a manner that results in the smallest possible carbon footprint while ensuring there is no violation of human and animal rights.
- 3) *Manufactured* by energy-efficient machines, with inputs and outputs that are either non-polluting altogether or less harmful than those of traditional, unsustainable textiles.
- 4) *Distributed* through a sustainable supply chain, streamlined to ensure maximum efficiency and minimal wastage, using sustainable packaging, having logistics partners who follow sustainable practices, and moving inventory using modes of transport powered by alternate sources of energy.
- 5) *Used* by consumers, whether they be end users or intermediate users in the supply chain, in a sustainable manner- such as by practising minimal consumption, garment care, and sustainable disposal through selling goods second-hand or donations for people to wear or upcycle.

Typically, it may not be possible for an organisation to adhere to all of the above criteria due to various reasons, from budget constraints to lack of access to sustainable logistics services in a given local market where the company operates. However, the whole point of practising sustainability is not for one person or firm to do it perfectly but for more and more firms and people to do it imperfectly. While organisations attempt to meet all these criteria, any organisation practicing one or more of the above can be considered to contribute to sustainability in the fashion industry.

Review of Literature

(Khandual & Pradhan, 2019) Sustainability in the fashion industry is a movement gaining momentum rapidly, with modern-day consumers characterized by heightened awareness and influencers advocating ethical and environment-friendly apparel worldwide. How major fashion brands and up-and-coming labels are innovating and making waves in the industry is also noteworthy.

The article provides a global perspective on the sustainability segment of the fashion industry. The data, obtained from secondary sources, explain what sustainable fashion means, its various forms, major brands and their unique modes of employing the concept of sustainable fashion, and what consumers and prominent media personalities say and feel about the concept of sustainable fashion.

The article further explains the concept of a circular economy with respect to fashion and the gradual global shift from fast to slow fashion and provides an insight into the marketing strategies that such fashion brands have employed or could employ to magnify the cause while being economically viable.

(Henninger, Alevizou, & Oates) Understanding the multidimensional nature of the movement toward sustainability in the fashion industry is integral for marketers, designers, and consumers alike, in order to make joint and meaningful efforts for the cause. To that avail, sustainable fashion in the present day holds different meanings for the different stakeholders involved in the process.

The main objective of this research paper was to understand the meaning of the term 'sustainable fashion' from the perspectives of micro-organizations, experts, and consumers. Judgment and convenience sampling led to four micro-organizations fulfilling three criteria: 1) UK based, 2) local production, and 3) self-proclaimed sustainable fashion manufacturers.

Consumers were accessed through these micro-organizations, and a total of 300 questionnaire responses were obtained. Sustainable fashion experts were carefully selected following the same sampling approach. Being a qualitative study, the researchers utilized a multi-method case-study approach with the help of semi-structured interviews, semiotics, and questionnaires. Grounding analysis was further used to analyze the data.

The findings that the analysis yielded were that sustainable fashion holds different meanings for the various stakeholders involved in the study and that said meanings were dependent on the person as well as the context. By organizing the same into a matrix, certain key criteria come to light, and commonalities among the meanings also surface. The findings help the stakeholders involved understand and avoid greenwashing and help consumers comprehend the sustainability of their fashion choices in a holistic manner and the social implications thereof.

(Lundblad & Davies) Sustainable fashion is often considered an oxymoron with the idea of sustainability, which involves efficient and ethical use of resources and environmental preservation, clashing with the ideology of fashion, an industry that generates a massive number of products with a typically adverse environmental impact. However, the environment is being touted as a new trend in fashion, with sustainable fashion becoming more of an industry norm than a mere fashion concept.

This research article revolves around the values and motivations that drive consumers towards sustainable fashion choices and guide their buying behaviour. Contrary to existing literature, the present study focuses on a backward approach. That is, tracing the purchase decision back toward consumer values and not vice-versa. The study involved 39 in-depth interviews with consumers who frequently purchased and used environmental-friendly

apparel. A set of summary codes was produced, and the analysis was conducted by constructing an Implications Matrix and a Hierarchical Value Map (HVM).

Patterns identified included less buying, a sense of self-esteem and satisfaction derived from the usage of eco-clothing, health benefits of eco-clothing, environmental impact, and social justice came to light as key factors to which the motivation to buy eco-friendly clothing could be attributed. The findings indicate a conscious presence of values in the minds of environmentally conscious, sustainable consumers. This implies that sustainable fashion consumption is a conscious choice, with much effort into the buying decision.

(Harris, Roby, & Dibb, 2016) A multiplicity of challenges must be dealt with in the arena of sustainable fashion consumption. The article discusses the primary reasons why consumers cannot make sustainable fashion choices. Semi-structured informant interviews were conducted for ten individuals with sustainable fashion expertise. Said sample of individuals was obtained using a purposive sampling method, and a flexible exploratory research method was employed. The findings indicate that consumers often miss out on engaging in sustainable consumption of fashion owing to three primary reasons: first, that fashion sustainability as a concept is too complex, with several variables at play; second, consumers' ethical concerns differ greatly; and third, that clothing is not considered an altruistic purchase. Increasing upcycling and repair, better norms for garment washing, and responsible disposal are among the interventions that can make consumer behaviour towards fashion more sustainable.

(Goworek, Fisher, Cooper, Woodward, & Hiller, 2012) The research paper aims to understand the perception of fashion sustainability among consumers and its potential impact on the policies of retailers in the United Kingdom. The methodology followed for research was qualitative in nature, with a focus-group-based approach involving 99 participants. The sample was representative of a variety of consumers in relation to their behaviour towards fashion sustainability.

The findings indicated that the participants' behaviour towards fashion sustainability was largely influenced by external factors and was often inadvertent. Per se, they had limited understanding of the concept of sustainable fashion and often resorted to unsustainable behaviour in this regard owing to their long-time habits of garment care and disposal. Furthermore, it was also observed that the participants could be convinced to change their behaviour and act in a more sustainable manner when it came to fashion purchase, maintenance and disposal.

(Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2012) Over the last few decades, fast fashion has made clothing disposal a major environmental concern. This study sought to find the antecedents of sustainable fashion consumption and disposal in two countries, Australia and Chile, and to draw comparisons between them same. The Australian data set (n=239) and the Chilean data set (n=249), comprising entirely of women, were used for the study. Snowball sampling was employed, and analysis was affected by computing descriptive statistics and employing confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

The findings indicated that the recycling-oriented behaviour of consumers in both countries plays a significant role in donations of old clothes to charitable organisations. Furthermore, donating behaviour is also affected by the consumer's age and their level of awareness of environment-related issues. Such findings hold weight for a variety of stakeholders, such as environmental activists, researchers, policymakers, fashion retailers and manufacturers, marketers, and charitable organisations.

The Dimensions of Sustainable Fashion

A product could be considered sustainable by being any one or more of the following:

- 1) ***Fair-trade:*** Fairtrade products are those which are produced in a manner that ensures there are no human rights violations along the length of the supply chain. This would involve providing fair remuneration to all persons involved in the supply chain, ensuring healthy working conditions, and fair treatment of workers in the production units.
- 2) ***Second-hand:*** Second-hand clothes include pre-owned and used garments, accessories, and bed and bath products, which an

end consumer purchases for further use from another end-user of said products. Buying second-hand is considered highly sustainable since it cuts down demand for fresh production of clothing. Purchasing from thrift stores, online second-hand retail websites and even garage sales constitute second-hand purchases concerning sustainable fashion.

- 3) **Recycled:** recycled, sustainable fashion refers to garments, accessories, and bed and bath products which are made of waste or scrap fabric, or out of used garments which are being disposed of, thereby bringing the material that would otherwise have gone into a landfill, back into the retail chain. Recycling helps in the construction of a circular fashion economy, that is, an economy which requires minimal to no fresh production and yields minimal to no waste in the process of meeting demand. An example of recycling would be that of polyester garments; recycled polyester clothing cuts down resource usage in the production process by 70%.
- 4) **Upcycled:** upcycling refers to the process of using scraps or used products and combining them into a new product of superior value to its constituents. An example of upcycling would be the creation of shoes, bags, clothing and decorative items out of plastic bottles or packaging.
- 5) **Organic:** Organic clothing refers to apparel, accessories, and bed and bath products that are produced with minimum to no usage of chemicals in the production process and minimal to no environmental impact (little or no soil and water pollution, minimum usage of water in the production process, etc.). It is pertinent to note that a product may be entirely organic (eg. A plain organic cotton t-shirt) or partly organic (eg. An organic cotton shirt with buttons that are made of unsustainable materials).
- 6) **Vegan:** Vegan fashion includes apparel and accessories made in a cruelty-free manner, without the use of animal products like angora, fur, wool, pearls, down, leather etc. Any fashion item containing the above-mentioned substances cannot be called sustainable. An offshoot of vegan fashion is animal considerate fashion, wherein the above-mentioned materials in clothes are replaced with sustainable natural and/or artificial alternatives based on appearance and/or the specific properties of the

material. Examples of this concept are artificial pearls, faux leather and faux fur. However, there is a large possibility of greenwashing when it comes to animal considerate fashion.

- 7) **Vintage:** Vintage fashion refers to pieces of clothing that are considered to be in style consistently for a long period of time. Advocates of sustainable fashion recommend buying and wearing fewer items, but items that are timeless pieces and will always stay in trend, irrespective of the fads that come and go. Examples of such classic pieces of clothing are blue jeans, plain white t-shirts, little black dresses, etc.
- 8) **Custom:** Custom clothes are made to order. This cuts down the wastage that is normally incurred in the process of mass-producing garments since several mass-produced items may not sell out entirely, and the remaining unsold stocks lie dead in store and need to be disposed of, repurposed, or sold at heavy discounts. Custom clothing does away with this kind of wastage to a great extent. It also reduces the footprint that goes into the shipping of goods and return-shipping in case an item is returned to origin (generally in the case of e-commerce).
- 9) **Locally-sourced:** Locally-sourced fashion constitutes items that are produced by artisans or producers of a given geographical area. Buying locally-sourced fashion products from artists and small producers from where one lives has a two-fold benefit. Firstly, it reduces the carbon emissions that would have arisen in the process of bringing the product to the consumer (shipping, supply-chain emissions, etc.). Secondly, it helps patronize dying arts and provides livelihood to local artisans and small producers.
- 10) **Slow fashion:** also known as “lowsumerism”, slow fashion seeks to slow down the production and consumption process so that working conditions and the needs of the environment are not compromised in an attempt to meet every new fashion fad.
- 11) **Ethically-sourced:** Ethically sourced garments are made of materials sourced, keeping in mind the safety, well-being and rights of the humans and animals involved in the process. Examples of ethically sourced fibres are ahimsa silk, spider silk, organic cotton, etc.

Sustainable Fashion Disruptors in India

Hoomanwear

Hoomanwear is one of India's first cause wear brands that gives away more than 30% of its profits to organisations engaged in sustainability and social work initiatives. Harshil Vora, the founder of Hoomanwear, is a vegan. The t-shirts, crop tops and hoodies made by the brand are plant-based (containing under 5% synthetic fibres). They are also customizable. The products are custom and made to order, thus ensuring zero waste. The brand uses certified sustainable inks, the products contain no animal-based ingredients, and the packaging comprises recycled cloth bags and, in some cases, even pizza boxes.

Pomogrenade

The founders of Pomogrenade, Madhulika Umapathy and Aiswarya Kutty, have made it their mission to cut down the amount of fabric that ends up in the landfills of India every year. The product line of their brand is made out of surplus cotton fabric and natural dyes. Their production happens at a fair-trade production house, employing economically disadvantaged communities in Bangalore. Pomogrenade further takes back any of its pre-owned pieces of clothing and provides the donor with a discount coupon for future purchases on their website.

Maati

Neha Kabra founded Maati to work with indigenous communities of Rajasthan, manufacturing clothes with traditional Indian methods. The fabrics used are partly upcycled, the dyes used are entirely plant-derived, and the products are packaged in plastic-free packaging.

PANI Swimwear

PANI Swimwear, founded by Leila, makes body-positive swimsuits out of recycled fishing nets in order to combat microfibre leaching from swimsuits into water bodies. While it does not entirely do away with leaching, the brand does contribute positively to the cause and makes the best out of waste in the form

of the fishing nets it uses, which would otherwise have polluted oceans or ended up in landfills.

No Nasties

Goa-based brand No Nasties, founded by Apurva Kothari, is one of the pioneers of sustainable fashion in the country. The brand runs fair trade farms and grows cotton produce with organic cotton seeds. There is absolutely zero usage of Synthetic pesticides and GMOs. The whole process of production and array of inputs, right from seeds to vegan inks to the final product, are ethical and eco-friendly.

Conclusion

It has now been proven, without the shadow of a doubt, that sustainable production and consumption must be the new order of the world if at all, the human race still wants a shot at survival. A vast majority of people still remain in the dark about how their choices add up to have massive repercussions for the environment, but awareness is on the rise, albeit a little slowly. Sustainability is now a buzzword in business circles and social media, but much remains to be done in this domain.

Sustainability in fashion, as in any other industry, is not something that can be achieved overnight. However, efforts towards sustainability need to be scaled up urgently, given the level of environmental degradation that the planet is already at. This sense of urgency is what governments and corporations have been hiding from consumers for the longest time, which consumers are now catching onto. While it is a change for the better, there remains much to be done in order to make far-reaching, substantial and meaningful changes.

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