



Behaviour of youth towards sustainable and fast fashion

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable fashion is producing clothes, shoes, and accessories in environmentally and socio-economically sustainable manners with more sustainable patterns of consumption and use, which necessitate shifts in individual attitudes and behaviour. Sustainable clothing refers to fabrics derived from eco-friendly resources, such as sustainably grown crops or recycled materials and how these fabrics are made. Fashion is the second most polluting industry globally. The apparel and footwear industries together account for more than 8% of global carbon emissions, greater than all international airline flights and maritime shipping routes combined. On average a person consumes 11.4kg of apparel each year (Quantis 2018). It takes about 2,720 litres of water to produce just one cotton shirt – a number equivalent to what an average person drinks over three years (EJF). Nearly three-fifths or 60% of all clothing produced ends up in incinerators or landfills within a year of being made (McKinsey 2016). The total level of fashion waste is expected to be 148 million tons by 2030—equivalent to annual waste of 17.5 kg per capita across the planet. Textile dyeing is the second largest polluter of clean water globally, after agriculture. In such severe conditions, unawareness among consumer about sustainable fashion costs the environment. The main objectives of this study is to analyse whether the trend towards buying sustainable fashion really helping with climate crisis, or should one simply be buying less clothing? For the conservation of the environment, the sustainability of fashion is the utmost need in the present fastest growing world. This research is based on empirical study done with literature review and other secondary data sources. A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodology approach has been adopted to understand ethical shopping.

Keywords: Eco-friendly, Environment conservation, Impact, Sustainable Fashion, Young Customer

1. INTRODUCTION

“The natural environment sustains the life of all beings universally.”

– Dalai Lama

A balance needs to be maintained between our competing needs - the need to move forward technologically and economically, and the need to protect the environment in which we live. The United Nations 1987 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future noted that sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the well being of future generations. Sustainable development requires a long-term structural change in our economic and social system, with the aim of reducing environmental and resource consumption to a sustainable level while maintaining economic performance and social cohesion.

A primary survey conducted at the Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce outlined how youth are aware of the term “sustainable fashion,” but whether they are consciously making sustainable purchasing decisions in relation to fashion remains to be seen.

Sustainable fashion can be defined as clothing, shoes and accessories that are manufactured, marketed and used in the most sustainable manner possible, considering both environmental and socio-economic aspects. In practice, this implies continuous work to improve all stages of the product’s life cycle, from design, raw material production, manufacturing, sale, use, reuse, repair, remake and recycling of the product and its components. From an environmental perspective, the ideal aim should be to minimize any undesirable environmental effect of the product’s life cycle by:

- Ensuring efficient and careful use of natural resources (water, energy, land, soil, animals, plants, biodiversity, ecosystems, etc);
- Selecting renewable energy sources (wind, solar, etc) at every stage, and
- Maximizing repair, remake, reuse, and recycling of the product and its components

Sustainable fashion is thus also about sustainable patterns of consumption and use, which necessitates shifts in individual attitude and behaviour.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM- SUSTAINABLE FASHION

2.1 Fast Fashion

“Eighty billion pieces of clothing are consumed globally every year.”

-1 Million Women.

“Global clothing production has doubled in the past 15 years, with garments on average being worn much less and discarded quicker than ever before.”

-(Ellen MacArthur) Foundation.

Fast fashion companies design clothes that fall apart quickly. They pursue a strategy called “Planned obsolescence” wherein they design garments to become unfashionable, wear out, lose shape, or fall apart easily to force consumers to keep buying new clothes (Be Global Fashion Network). Fast fashion garments, which are worn less than 5 times and kept for 35 days on average, produce over 400% more carbon emissions per item per year than garments worn 50 times and kept for a full year (Forbes). In the Instagram world, no one wants to be seen or photographed in the same outfit, and because a lot of these clothes are made so cheaply and cost so little, it's more convenient for consumers to dispose of their wardrobe and purchase an entirely new one regularly.

2.2 Pollution Through Fashion

“Nearly 70 million barrels of oil are used each year to make the world’s polyester fibre, which is now the most commonly used fibre in our clothing. But it takes more than 200 years to decompose.”

- (Forbes)

The widespread use of synthetic fibres and specifically polyester has the biggest impact on the environment. The production of polyester produces up to three times more carbon dioxide than other fibres such as cotton. More than 50 percent of clothes are made from this material. Due to increased consumption in the form of fast fashion, there has been a 157 percent increase in the amount of polyester used in clothing since 2000.

Approximately 2 billion pairs of jeans are produced each year and a pair takes up to 7,000 litres of water to produce which is equivalent to the amount of water one individual drinks in 5-6 years (Sustainable Fashion Matterz). It takes up to 2,700 litres of water to make a single shirt (EJF). Further, over 1.5 million tonnes of hazardous chemicals, which permanently impact the environment, are used in the production of these clothing. Chemicals such as ‘azo’ dyes, NPEs, and toxic per fluorinated substances are carcinogenic to animals and humans. In total, up to 20 percent of global water pollution can be attributed to the clothing industry.

First, 6 percent of textiles produced each year are floor waste and this ends in landfills in developing countries where our clothes are made. While 80 percent of the clothes discarded by consumers in major cities could be reused, these typically end up in landfills too.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Nazneen Zobaida and *Afroza Huq Daizy* have outlined how now fashion is becoming a concern for consumers who are searching for sweatshop free labour and energy efficient processes. Furthermore, consumers and producers are looking to improve the recyclability of fashion items, use less water and land, reduce the emission of toxic materials to the environment, and minimise the use of gases that produce greenhouse gases. They analysed various famous brands which are involved for the ethical product designed, production and marketing like Fat Face, People Tree, Polly Wales, Sea salt, Stella McCartney, H&M, Patagonia, ASOS Africa, Beyond Skin, Matt & Nut. Huit Minha makes wedding dresses, which describes it as “Eco Luxe” Brand. The veils and the bride made dresses are made from sustainable, organic and locally produced textiles.

In the research paper by professors of fashion design *Najmul Kadir Kaikobad, Md. Zafar Alam Bhuiyan*, analyses two questions- 1. How is sustainability measured and/or reported in the fashion business models? 2. What driver’s influence sustainability within fashion business models? To answer the first sub-question, the papers focused on CSR as a means to address transparency by using GRI standards as the reporting guidelines which are the first global standards for sustainability reporting they feature a modular, interrelated structure, and represent the global best practice for reporting on a range of economic, environmental and social impacts. While another paper focused on the triple bottom line (TBL) which is a framework or theory that recommends that Hucompanies commit to focus on social and environmental concerns just as they do on profits. The TBL posits that instead of one bottom line, there should be three: profit, people, and the planet. To answer the second sub-question, five drivers for sustainability within business models are identified: (1) governments and regulations pressure, (2) market pressure, (3) closed-loop/circulatory pressure, (4) organization innovations, (5) value creation for the company and/or its stakeholders.

In their article, *Debbie and Danielle Moorhouse* discuss how sustainability requires actions and behavioural changes from both businesses and consumers, showcasing practical tools that can be adopted by the industry which create solutions to the current challenges and have a genuine impact.

Sustainable Retailing in the Fashion Industry covers studies on the major fashion business models that are related to sustainable retailing, the popular business practices on sustainability in fashion retailing, and the trends and opportunities of sustainable retailing in the rapid growth of e-commerce in the fashion industry. This paper aims to evaluate the current state of the literature on sustainable retailing in the fashion industry and identify promising research directions for further advancement in the relevant areas.

4. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Effect of the Fashion Industry on the environment and; Consumer's preferential behaviour towards sustainable fashion and fast fashion.

5. OBJECTIVES

- To assess the knowledge amongst youth regarding sustainable fashion and the fashion industry's impact upon them.
- To explore preferences of youth towards sustainable fashion; assessing their clothing choices.

6. HYPOTHESIS

H1: To prove that youth would prefer using sustainable clothing more than reduce the amount of clothes they own.

7. RESEARCH DESIGN

This is an Empirical research design which considers the review of young consumer preferences and includes all stages of the research process starting from the selection of the research area to writing personal reflection. Important elements of dissertations such as research approach, methods of data collection, data analysis and sampling are explained in simple words.

8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study is based on primary data collected and is of exploratory nature. This quantitative study analyses the responses of 200 students of Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce, Pune. The information was collected through an online survey using a well-structured questionnaire and also non structured interviews. This questionnaire was designed to study awareness amongst youth (18-21) towards sustainable fashion, assessing their choices to buy and invest in eco-clothing.

8.1 Population of the study

The population of the study consisted of the senior college of the Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce, Pune.

8.2 Sampling unit

Random sampling is used in this research respondent being undergraduates of all specialisations. Age between 18-21.

1. **Sample size-** The sample size of the study was 200 student respondents.

2. **Sampling Technique-** Random sampling

3. **Method of Data Collection:**

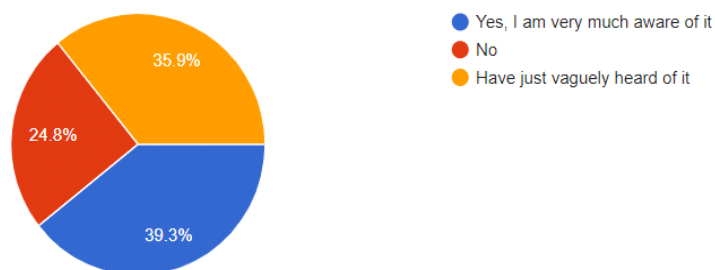
- Primary data: Data is collected through structured Google form.
- Secondary data: Data is collected through different research papers on sites like Academia, Google Scholar, and various articles.

4. **Data Collection Tools-** This research is based on primary data collected using a structured, close ended questionnaire and using Likert scale administered to the respondents. Secondary data collected from various sources were also used. Quantitative research methodology approach has been adopted to understand the buying behaviour and awareness amongst people about sustainable fashion industry.

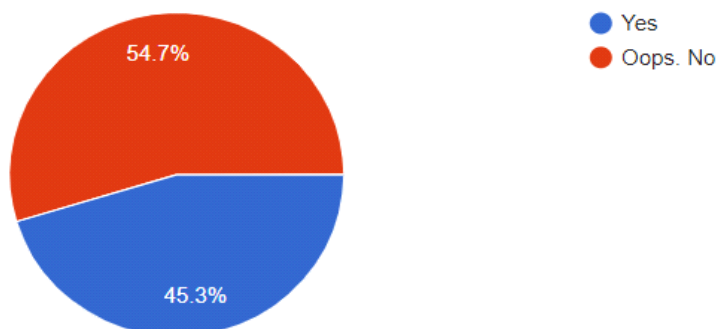
9. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Analysing the data collected by the means of questionnaire primarily revealed a number of things, which are very relevant in the study, and the five main questions and their interpretations are as follows.

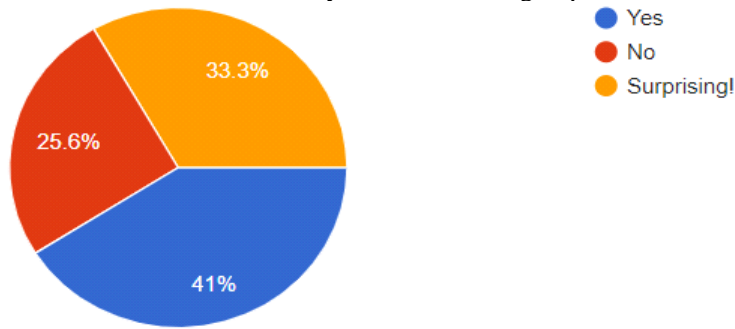
Only 39.3% of the sampled population is aware of the term "sustainable fashion" and a further 35.9% have only vaguely heard of it.



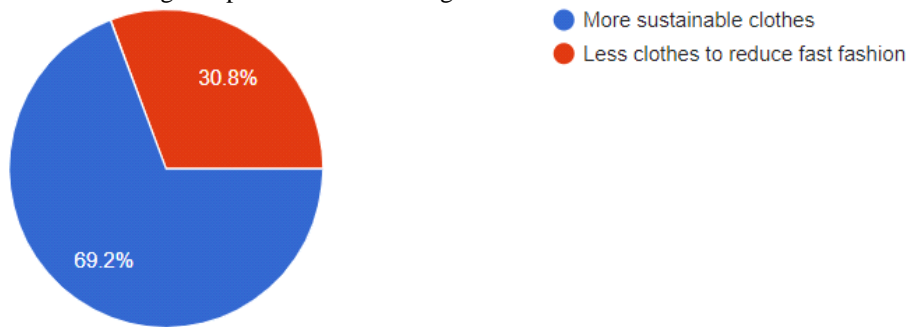
54.7% of the samples have many clothes in their wardrobe, which they don't use regularly which is evidentiary of the fast fashion problem.



Only 41% of the respondents knew that the fashion industry is the second largest polluter.



69.2% prefer to use sustainable clothing compared to less clothing overall to reduce fast fashion.



10. TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS

H1: was proved true on the grounds of the data collected.

11. SOLUTIONS

India is a young country today and youth form a major part of the population. Responsible actions by them can pave the way for a sustainable future to India as well as to the world. Being aware of sustainable fashion and making responsible choices can contribute in combating the problems of climate change and global warming.

Buy less, wear more. The youth of India needs to change their buying behaviour and re-discover long-term relationships with the products they purchase. As a consumer it is important to shop responsibly and break from the notion that one must own every one of the newest fads to remain popular and fashionable. Making more informed and considered purchasing decisions, preferably choosing sustainable products, will attach a deeper value to the product. Thus, the garment will be more appreciated and be worn more with better care. To intensify this feeling, product-related services directly by brands like repairing services, customization or exchange and returning offers, can help with this progress. Some examples of sustainable fashion projects are listed below:

Topshop, Reclaim to Wear, 2012 launched a collection made entirely from discarded materials, such as surplus stock and production off-cuts sourced from previous Topshop collections and their jersey factory. It aimed to create a solution to designing with waste.

The Adidas Grun collection incorporates a range of clothing aiming to minimise their environmental impact by using recycled fabrics and natural materials such as hemp, bamboo, and cork. Each shoe and garment have a clear labelling system explaining the materials used, their environmental credentials, and the processes used in production.

The shoes, apparel, and accessories of Puma's InCycle collection are completely biodegradable and recyclable. The biodegradable components of the InCycle line includes materials that microorganisms break down into biological nutrients.

Khadi is a hand-spun and hand-woven fabric that causes minimal damage to the environment. Khadi is a sustainable and eco-friendly fibre which does not use any electrical support while there's no toxins generated by its production.

Many Indian labels and independent designers are trying to reduce fashion's negative impact on the environment. The Pune-based brand Is Ka Sha's Heart to Haat initiative aims at zero waste generation, while also recycling and up-cycling materials to create practical products. All their pieces are created with natural fabric and dyes by skilled artisans.

"Runaway Bicycle," a Mumbai-based fashion house, specializes in clothing and home décor. The brand collaborates with weavers to make handloom pieces from scratch. Through the use of natural dyes, khadi, organic cotton, and other hand-woven fabric, the Runaway Bicycle exudes a minimalist yet sophisticated vibe in their cloth.

The American company NatureWorks produces a bio plastic called Ingeo. This 100% renewable resource is made out of plant sugar. Producing Ingeo produces 60% less greenhouse gasses than other similar materials. The multifunctional material can be turned into clothes, home textiles, bottles, food packaging, and personal care products.

Loomstate have launched their sustainable '321 Collection', which is produced in America and made of Tencel and Lycra. The cellulose of wood pulp used in Tencel is harvested from sustainably and organically farmed eucalyptus trees, making the material all-natural and 100% biodegradable.

Ploughboy Organics is a new technology, transforming the tobacco plant into a renewable source of dyes and fibres for apparel and home goods. This discovery allows non-toxic dyeing to be completed on a large-scale commercial level yielding beautiful and striking colours. The dye process requires less water and lower temperatures in comparison to other natural dye techniques.

Finally, Pepe Jeans London has developed a sustainable jeans collection called Tru-Blu®. The denim collection uses zero chemicals in the wash process by reducing water consumption across the range through the use of natural ozone gas treatments and the introduction of sophisticated new three-dimensional lasers, the combination of which can now create astonishing depths of indigo contrast on jeans.

12. LIMITATIONS

Collecting samples was a slight hindrance as not every respondent surveyed was willing to voice their opinion. To overcome this, questionnaires were administered online so that we could reach people without needing to personally interact with them, saving time. As a result, some respondents omitted some questions. The study is confined only to students of Symbiosis College, Pune.

13. CONCLUSION

The fashion industry today is a multibillion-dollar business, but its production processes are at the detriment of the natural environment. Fashion is the second dirtiest industry in the world after oil. Due to speedy production and over consumption, the fashion industry has landed itself on an environmentally damaging path, much different than 100 years ago.

Knowing what we know, the hard question then is to ask ourselves; how do we change as an industry and how can consumers take action?

To start, the facade of fashion fads and over consumption must be overcome. For brands, a shift towards high quality and sustainable methods could be a means to greater profitability. Western societies currently consume way beyond their means and have become more cognizant of its environmental impact. At the same time the fashion industry has listened and there are many brands around testing the limits of design and choosing to develop sustainable products and processes. From eco-friendly materials to new ideas in technology, sustainable fashion is beginning to be developed in a way that does not jeopardize the needs of future generations to come.

Although there is a long way to go, the industry is at least on the right path towards a common understanding and an honest reflection towards what needs to change. However, the power, as always, is in the hands of the consumer who have the option to make the right choice.

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