

Sustainable Fashion in Indian Context: An Analysis

Anjali Awasthi¹, Charu Swami²

¹Research scholar, Department of Home Science, Dayalbagh Educational Institute Deemed University

²Assistant Professor, Department of Home Science, Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Deemed University

Abstract

This research paper examines the changing perceptions of sustainable fashion among Indian consumers, driven by a heightened awareness of fashion's environmental and social impacts. Sustainable fashion, characterized by eco-conscious practices, is gaining significance. The paper explores key factors influencing consumer views on sustainable fashion: environmental consciousness, social responsibility, media influence, information accessibility, and a desire for unique products. It also discusses the implications for the fashion industry and highlights the potential for transformation in the Indian fashion industry, emphasizing the role of informed consumers, influencers, and responsible brands, while acknowledging the need for collaborative efforts to address challenges and promote sustainability.

Keywords: Sustainable, Fashion Industry, and Consumers

Introduction

Sustainable fashion, an emerging and dynamic trend within the global fashion arena, has garnered substantial momentum. This momentum can be attributed primarily to the growing consciousness among consumers regarding the extensive environmental and social repercussions intertwined with their choices in the terrain of fashion. This paradigmatic shift reflects a response to the established and traditional practices prevalent in the fashion industry, practices that have, for too long, been entangled with detrimental outcomes. These outcomes include the depletion of valuable resources, the exploitation of laborers, and the prolific generation of excessive waste (Smith, 2020). [1]

As consumers increasingly awaken to the consequences of these entrenched conventional practices, their perception of sustainable fashion is undergoing a profound and transformative evolution. This evolution is not merely superficial but is, in fact, a potent force reshaping their entire approach to fashion-related decision-making. Sustainable fashion, once a niche concept, is now asserting its influence on consumers' attitudes, behaviours, and, by extension, catalyzing fundamental changes within the fashion industry. With heightened awareness of environmental and social concerns related to the fashion industry, the Indian consumers' perception of sustainable fashion is undergoing a notable transformation. They are increasingly prioritizing eco-friendly and ethically produced clothing. Factors such as environmental consciousness, social responsibility, and the influence of media and influencers are shaping their positive attitudes towards sustainable fashion. This evolving perception holds the potential to revolutionize the Indian fashion landscape, fostering a more responsible and eco-conscious industry. (Fletcher, 2010). [2]

1.0 Comprehending the Notion of Sustainable Fashion

Sustainable fashion, also referred to as ethical or eco-fashion, represents a multifaceted approach within the fashion industry that encompasses a diverse array of practices and principles. The primary goal of sustainable fashion is to diminish the extensive ecological and social footprint typically associated with traditional fashion practices. This transformative approach places a strong emphasis on several key facets:

1.1 Responsible Material Procurement: Sustainable fashion prioritizes the sourcing of materials that have a reduced environmental impact. This often involves selecting materials that are organic, recycled, or sustainably harvested. By making conscious choices in material procurement, sustainable fashion seeks to minimize resource depletion and environmental degradation.

1.2 Ethical Manufacturing Processes: Ethical considerations are integral to sustainable fashion. This entails ensuring that the manufacturing processes adhere to fair labor practices, safe working conditions, and equitable treatment of workers throughout the supply chain. Ethical manufacturing practices aim to eliminate exploitation and improve the livelihoods of those involved in fashion production.

1.3 Equitable Labour Practices: Sustainable fashion promotes equitable treatment of laborers, encompassing aspects like fair wages, safe working conditions, and opportunities for personal and professional growth. This ensures that the human element within the fashion supply chain is respected and empowered, aligning with the principles of social responsibility.

1.4 Waste Reduction: One of the core tenets of sustainable fashion is minimizing waste generation. This involves strategies like reducing fabric waste during production, repurposing materials, and designing products with longevity in mind. By curbing waste, sustainable fashion mitigates its environmental impact and contributes to a more circular and sustainable economy.

1.5 Circular Economy Promotion: Sustainable fashion actively supports the concept of a circular economy, wherein products are designed to have extended lifespans and are easily recyclable or repurposable. This shift from a linear, 'take-make-dispose' model to a circular one aims to reduce resource consumption and waste generation in the fashion industry.

1.6 Lifecycle Consideration: Sustainable fashion extends its focus beyond just the aesthetics of garments. It emphasizes considering a garment's entire lifecycle, from its production, through its use, to its eventual disposal or recycling. This holistic approach ensures that environmental and ethical considerations are woven into every stage of a garment's existence (Gwilt & Rissanen, 2011). [3]

In summary, sustainable fashion is a comprehensive approach that addresses the environmental and social challenges associated with the fashion industry. It advocates responsible material choices, ethical manufacturing, equitable labour practices, waste reduction, circular economy principles, and a deep consideration of a product's lifecycle. By integrating these principles, sustainable fashion strives to make fashion not only aesthetically appealing but also environmentally and socially responsible.

2.0 Factors Shaping Consumer Views on Sustainable Fashion

In the contemporary landscape of fashion consumption, consumer perspectives on sustainable fashion are undergoing a profound transformation. As the fashion industry grapples with mounting environmental and social challenges, consumers are emerging as key drivers of change. Their views on sustainable fashion are shaped by a dynamic interplay of factors that extend far beyond aesthetics. This section investigates into the multifaceted influences that mould consumer attitudes towards sustainable fashion, examining how environmental consciousness, social responsibility, media impact, information

accessibility, and a desire for unique products collectively steer the course of sustainable fashion's evolution. Understanding these factors is not only instrumental in deciphering the evolving consumer mindset but also in charting a sustainable path forward for the fashion industry.

2.1 Environmental Consciousness: Increasing concerns about climate change, pollution, and resource depletion have led consumers to pursue more sustainable alternatives in various aspects of their lives, including fashion. They recognize that their decisions can help preserve natural resources and mitigate environmental damage. Environmental considerations are at the vanguard of India's transition towards sustainable fashion. The fashion industry is one of the most polluting industries in the world due to its reliance on water-intensive dyeing procedures and high carbon emissions from transportation. Indian consumers are now more aware of the environmental impact of their garment purchases, and they are opting for brands that prioritize eco-friendly materials, sustainable procurement, and transparent supply chains (Niinimäki et al., 2012). [4]

2.2 Social Responsibility: Modern consumers are more aware of working conditions and human rights issues in the fashion supply chain. They prefer ethical and fair-trade practices as a result of their demand for increased brand transparency and accountability. Consumers in India are increasingly concerned with the ethical and social aspects of fashion production, in addition to environmental concerns. They demand that employees be treated fairly, that working conditions be improved, and that marginalized communities be empowered. Conscious consumers who want their purchases to have a positive impact on society are increasingly drawn to brands that demonstrate a commitment to ethical practices and social responsibility (Foster & Humphreys, 2017). [5]

2.3 Influence of Media and Celebrities: The rise of social media and the endorsement of sustainable fashion by influential personalities have played a pivotal role in molding consumers' perceptions. Endorsements from notable figures can generate extensive awareness and motivate individuals to adopt more environmentally conscious lifestyles. India's perception of sustainable fashion is significantly shaped by social media influencers and sustainable fashion advocates. These influencers utilize their platforms to inform their audiences about sustainable brands, eco-friendly fabrics, and responsible consumption. By sharing their personal experiences and paths towards a more sustainable lifestyle, they inspire and persuade a larger audience to adopt conscientious fashion choices (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2020). [6]

2.4 Availability of Information: The availability of information through the Internet and other media channels has enabled consumers to investigate and learn about the environmental and social effects of fashion. This information influences their purchasing decisions and encourages them to choose sustainable options. To satisfy the evolving demands of consumers, Indian fashion firms are progressively incorporating sustainability into their business strategies. Established companies are reassessing their supply chains, investigating eco-friendly materials, and adopting ethical practices. In addition, new sustainable fashion firms have emerged, ministering exclusively to the conscious consumer segment with innovative and eco-friendly products. The absence of standardized definitions and certifications for sustainable fashion has raised consumer concerns regarding greenwashing. Indian consumers prioritize credibility and trustworthiness when selecting sustainable fashion brands. Consumers are more likely to be loyal to brands that can provide clear and credible information about their sustainability efforts and certifications (D'Souza & Taghian, 2005). [7]

2.5 Desire for Unique Products: Consumers frequently pursue products that distinguish themselves and reflect their individuality. This desire for exclusivity is catered to by sustainable fashion, which is frequently produced in fewer quantities and with unique designs (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007). [8]

Several studies have been concerned with how consumers perceive the value of sustainable fashion products. Agarwal and Garg (2020) [9] discovered that Indian consumers are willing to pay a premium for sustainable products due to their perceived superior quality and ethical characteristics. Nevertheless, price sensitivity remains a significant barrier to the widespread adoption of environmentally friendly fashion. Although consumers exhibit an interest in sustainable fashion, they are often hesitant to make purchases due to the belief that sustainable products are more expensive than rapid fashion alternatives Gupta and Varma (2018). [10]

3.0 Implications for the Fashion Industry

The fashion industry, standing at the crossroads of evolving consumer preferences and escalating environmental and ethical imperatives, finds itself on a transformative journey towards sustainability. In response to shifting consumer demands, the industry is compelled to undergo a profound metamorphosis that extends to various critical dimensions. This section explores into the multifaceted implications of sustainable fashion for the fashion industry, each facet signifying a pivotal juncture in the industry's evolution.

3.1 Shift in Production Practices: As consumers demand more sustainable fashion, the industry is embracing eco-friendly materials such as organic cotton, recycled fibers, and innovative bio-fabrics. This transformation necessitates that fashion brands invest in research and development in order to implement sustainable production practices (Seebaluck & Kumar, 2020). [11]

3.2 Enhanced Transparency: Consumers now expect brands to be transparent regarding their supply chain, procurement, and manufacturing processes. Market advantage accrues to businesses that can provide verifiable information about their sustainability efforts (Muthu et al., 2019). [12]

3.3 Circular Economy Approach: The concept of a circular economy, where products are designed for longevity and recyclability, obtains traction in the sustainable fashion movement. To extend the lifespan of their products, brands are urged to create take-back programs and recycling initiatives (Perry et al., 2019). [13]

3.4 Brand Loyalty: Adopting sustainable practices can strengthen consumer connections, resulting in increased brand loyalty. Values-aligned brands are more likely to receive consumer support, resulting in long-term customer relationships (Nyberg & Leth, 2018). [14]

4.0 Opportunities and Difficulties

As the transition towards sustainable fashion gains momentum in India, it offers a promising pathway towards a more responsible and eco-conscious fashion industry. However, this transformation is not without its share of challenges and opportunities that warrant careful consideration.

4.1 Challenges and Obstacles:

One of the significant obstacles to the widespread adoption of sustainable fashion is price sensitivity. Price Sensitivity, a significant hurdle, looms large in the path to widespread adoption of sustainable fashion in India. Sustainable products, characterized by their ethical and eco-friendly attributes, often come with a higher price tag. This pricing disparity can limit accessibility, rendering sustainable fashion less attainable for the majority of consumers (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). [15]

4.2 Opportunities for Collaboration:

Due to their ethical and eco-friendly qualities, sustainable products are frequently more expensive, making them less accessible to the overwhelming majority of consumers. To address this affordability challenge, there is an imperative for collaborative efforts between brands and policymakers. By working together, they can explore innovative solutions to bridge the gap between sustainable and conventional fashion, making eco-friendly choices more accessible to a broader audience. Brands and policymakers must collaborate to discover solutions to this affordability issue (Niinimäki et al., 2012). [16]

4.3 Deficiency in Standardization:

India's dearth of standardized definitions and certifications for sustainable fashion is another obstacle (Chen et al., 2020). [17] This deficiency has given rise to a phenomenon known as green-washing, wherein brands falsely claim eco-friendliness. Green-washing, the practice of fraudulently asserting eco-friendliness, makes it difficult for consumers to distinguish genuine sustainable products (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). [18]

4.4 Enhancing Consumer Confidence:

To surmount this obstacle, there is a pressing need to implement transparent and credible certification systems. Implementing transparent and credible certification systems can aid in fostering consumer confidence and trust (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2020). [19] Such systems can play a pivotal role in fostering consumer confidence and trust in the authenticity of sustainable fashion products, ultimately providing a clear and reliable guide for consumers navigating the sustainable fashion landscape.

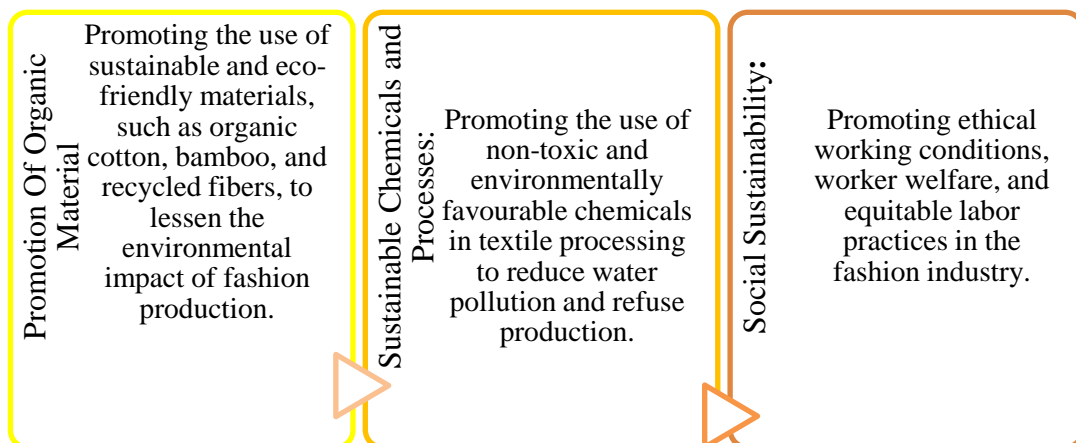
5.0 Solutions proposed

There is a growing movement towards conscious consumerism and eco-friendly fashion practices in the country, which is exemplified by sustainable fashion brands. As they acquire prominence and recognition, they encourage other fashion companies to implement sustainable practices, thereby contributing to a more ethical and environmentally responsible Indian fashion industry. In an effort to create a greener and more ethical fashion landscape in India, these brands are generating positive change and inspiring others to follow in their footsteps.

SU.RE stands for 'Sustainable Resolution,' and it is an initiative by the Indian fashion industry to promote eco-friendly and sustainable practices. The Clothing Manufacturers Association of India (CMAI) launched SU.RE in January 2018 to encourage Indian fashion brands and retailers to employ more sustainable and responsible supply chain practices.

The SU.RE initiative is centered on three pillars (Figure:1) :-

Figure: 1



5.1 Prospects for SU.RE

Current Status and Future Prospects for SU.RE in the Indian Textile Industry (Table:1) :-

Table.1:

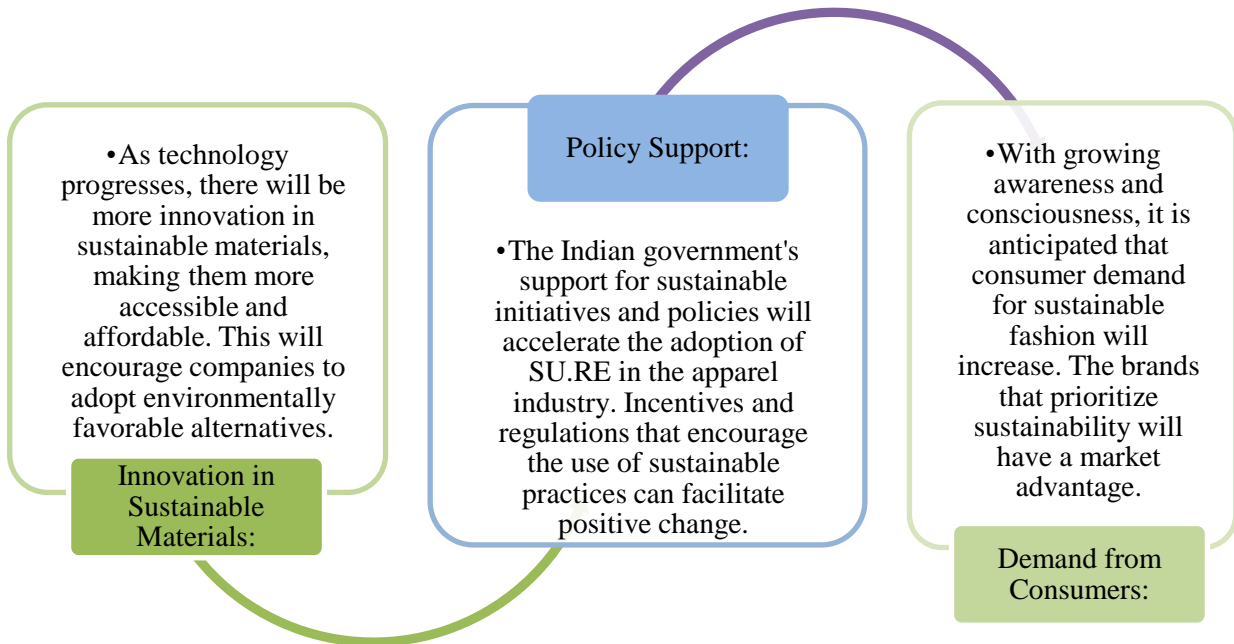
1.	SU.RE:	SU.RE is an initiative initiated by the Government of India's Ministry of Textiles in collaboration with the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC) to promote sustainable textile and apparel practices.
2.	Adoption by Brands:	Numerous prominent Indian apparel brands and manufacturers have joined SU.RE and committed to adopting sustainable practices. These companies have pledged to reduce their environmental impact and adopt more sustainable production methods.
3.	The Surge in Sustainable Material Adoption:	The use of sustainable materials, such as organic cotton, recycled polyester, Tencel, and other eco-friendly fibers, is increasing among businesses. The adoption of these materials is intended to reduce the apparel industry's environmental impact.
4.	Fostering Ethical Labor Practices:	Additionally, SU.RE highlights the significance of ethical labor practices. Brands are endeavoring to provide their employees with fair wages, secure working conditions, and improved social standards.
5.	Consumer Awareness:	The SU.RE initiative has increased consumer awareness of the significance of sustainable fashion in India. Now, conscientious consumers are more likely to choose brands with eco-friendly practices.
6.	Transparency:	Brands are becoming increasingly transparent regarding their supply chains, manufacturing processes, and sustainability initiatives. This transparency fosters consumer confidence and an industry-wide sense of accountability.

5.2 Future Prospects:

The Indian apparel industry is anticipated to continue expanding its sustainability initiatives. More brands are likely to adopt sustainable practices and join the SU.RE initiative in order to meet the evolving demands of conscientious consumers.

The concept of circular fashion, which emphasizes recycling, upcycling, and extended product life cycles, is acquiring popularity. More brands will likely adopt circularity in the future to reduce waste and resource consumption (Figure:2).

Figure:2



5.3 SU.RE (Sustainable Resolution):

Several Indian apparel companies joined the SU.RE (Sustainable Resolution) initiative, pledging to employ sustainable business practices. Here are some well-known brands associated with SU.RE (Table: 3):-

Table: 3

<p>ABFRL is one of the largest fashion companies in India and has devoted to sustainable practices by joining the SU.RE initiative. Among its many well-known brands are Allen Solly, Van Heusen, and Peter England.</p>	
<p>Arvind Lifestyle Brands is a subsidiary of Arvind Limited, India's largest textile and apparel manufacturer. The company is affiliated with SU.RE and has implemented sustainability initiatives across its brand portfolio.</p>	
<p>Raymond Limited is a prominent Indian fashion and lifestyle brand known for producing high-quality menswear. To reinforce its commitment to sustainability in the apparel industry, the company has joined SU.RE.</p>	
<p>Welspun India Limited is a prominent textile manufacturer and provider of household textiles. The enterprise is affiliated with SU.RE and has been actively involved in sustainability efforts.</p>	
<p>Westside, a retail brand owned by Trent Ltd. of the Tata Group, has also pledged support for the SU.RE initiative. The brand provides a selection of contemporary apparel and accessories.</p>	

Manyavar, a well-known Indian brand of ethnic wear, has also partnered with SU.RE to promote sustainable practices in the apparel industry.



The SU.RE initiative seeks to encourage more brands to implement sustainable practices in the Indian apparel industry, and more businesses may join this movement over time.

6.0 Conclusion

Consumers' perception of sustainable fashion is perpetually evolving, influenced by environmental awareness, social consciousness, and access to information. As consumers prioritize ethical and environmentally favourable options, the fashion industry must adapt to these shifting demands. Incorporating sustainable practices into a brand's fundamental values has the potential to increase brand loyalty and market share. In the long run, the prevalent adoption of sustainable fashion can result in a more responsible and environmentally conscious fashion industry, positively impacting the planet and society as a whole (Niinimäki, 2018). [20]

References

1. Agarwal, S., & Garg, M. (2020). Sustainable fashion: Consumer willingness to pay a premium for eco-friendly apparel in India. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 53, 101744. [9]
2. Birtwistle, G., & Moore, C. M. (2007). Fashion clothing—where does it all end up? *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 35(3), 210-216. [8]
3. Chen, S. C., Chen, H. H., & Cheng, S. Y. (2020). Investigating the antecedents and consequences of greenwash in fast fashion. *Sustainability*, 12(2), 482. [17]
4. D'Souza, C., & Taghian, M. (2005). Green advertising effects on attitude and choice of advertising themes. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 17(3), 51-66. [7]
5. Fletcher, K. (2010). Slow fashion: An invitation for systems change. *Fashion Practice*, 2(2), 259-266. [2]
6. Foster, C., & Humphreys, M. (2017). Discursive perspectives on ethical consumer behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, 74, 106-117. [5]
7. Gupta, S., & Varma, A. (2018). Understanding sustainable fashion consumption: Consumer perception of organic cotton products in India. In *Marketing in the Cyber Era* (pp. 29-38). Springer. [10]
8. Gwilt, A., & Rissanen, T. (2011). Shaping sustainable fashion: Changing the way we make and use clothes. Earthscan. [3]
9. Niinimäki, K. (2018). Sustainable fashion in a circular economy. *Sustainability*, 10(9), 1-14. [20]
10. Niinimäki, K., Peters, G., Dahlbo, H., Perry, P., Rissanen, T., Gwilt, A., & Hildén, M. (2012). Design for sustainability: A case study of the fashion industry's supply chain. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 20(1), 8-19. [16], [4]
11. Nyberg, D., & Leth, J. D. (2018). Revisiting brand loyalty: A network perspective. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 34(9-10), 800-820. [14]
12. Perry, P., Niinimäki, K., & Rissanen, T. (2019). Fashion cycling: A conceptual framework for sustainable design. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 222, 355-365. [13]
13. Pookulangara, S., & Shephard, A. (2013). Slow fashion movement: Understanding consumer perceptions. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 17(2), 170-188. [18], [15]

14. Seebaluck, A., & Kumar, V. (2020). Sustainable fashion: Key challenges, consumer attitudes and behavioral change. *Sustainability*, 12(6), 2406. [11]
15. Sheth, J. N., & Parvatiyar, A. (2020). The antecedents and consequences of ethical fashion consumption. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 24(1), 37-56. [19], [6]
16. Smith, A. N. (2020). *Sustainable fashion: From niche to norm*. Routledge. [1]



Licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)