

Leveraging Sustainability As A Marketing Strategy in the Fashion Industry: Techniques for Successful Implementation

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Abstract

Sustainability has become an important issue in the fashion industry, as the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion are a cause for concern. Consumers are increasingly seeking sustainable fashion options, and brands are realizing the potential benefits of incorporating sustainable practices into their operations. This study will explore how sustainability can be used as a marketing strategy in the fashion industry and what techniques can be used to effectively communicate a brand's commitment to sustainability to consumers.

Through an extensive review of relevant literature and case studies, the study will identify key sustainability issues in the fashion industry and the marketing strategies that can be implemented to address them. The study will also explore the challenges that fashion brands may face in implementing sustainability marketing strategies, such as the complexity of sustainability issues and the difficulty of measuring sustainability performance.

The study will provide practical recommendations for fashion brands looking to implement sustainability marketing strategies, including the use of storytelling and visual communications to convey sustainability messages, engaging with stakeholders, and applying circular economy principles. The study will also explore the role of digital technology in sustainability marketing, including the use of social media and online platforms to engage with consumers and communicate sustainability messages.

The results of this study will be valuable to fashion brands looking to improve their sustainability credentials and appeal to environmentally and socially conscious consumers. In addition, the study will contribute to the existing literature on sustainability marketing in the fashion industry and provide insights into best practices for implementing effective sustainability marketing campaigns in the sector.

Keywords: Sustainability, Fashion marketing, Environmental and social factors, Visual communications, Circular economy, greenwashing, sustainable fashion brands.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is becoming increasingly important to consumers, and the fashion industry is no exception. In fact, a recent study by Bain & Company found that 60% of consumers are willing to pay a premium for sustainable fashion products. This presents a significant opportunity for fashion brands to leverage sustainability as a marketing strategy.

However, it is important to note that sustainable marketing is not simply about slapping a green label on a product. Consumers are becoming more sophisticated and savvy, and they can spot greenwashing from a mile away. To be successful, fashion brands need to adopt a holistic approach to sustainability that encompasses their entire supply chain, from the sourcing of raw materials to the production and disposal of their products.

In this paper, we will discuss the key techniques for successful implementation of sustainability as a marketing strategy in the fashion industry. We will begin by defining sustainability and discussing its importance to consumers. We will then review the key elements of a successful sustainability strategy by analyzing data collected from the survey conducted on the topic. Finally, we will discuss some specific marketing strategies that fashion brands can use to communicate their sustainability commitments to consumers.

2. Methodology

2.1 Population of the research

The sample taken into consideration for participating in this study consists of respondents between 15-43 years of age where in the samples are selected on the basis of convenience. The geographic boundary of the study covers only customers of fashion industry from Bangalore.

2.2 Sampling considerations

Convenience sample was collected for the survey

1. An infinite population was considered
2. The sample size, however, was 100
3. There are though no specific gender specifications
4. The age group of 15-43 was taken into consideration, to showcase of the trend in the future generations.

cross-sectional refers to a type of research that is taken at a particular point of time

Convenience sample refers to a sample or research data which isn't subject to rigid standards

2.3 Variables

The variables can be classified as:

Independent variable

This is the variable that has a direct effect on the dependent variable. For the purpose of the study the independent variables are consumer sentiments such as

- Preferences of individual customers.
- Popularity of sustainable fashion among individual customers.
- Investment made in sustainable fashion.
- Willingness to make a change by the individual customers.

Dependent variable

This is the variable that is related completely on the independent variable, for the purpose of the research. The study has the following dependent variables:

- Social and environmental consciousness of the individual customers.
- Marketing Strategies of the Fashion Brands.

2.4 Scales used

A scale is used in research to measure the data collected in the form of measurement is referred to as the scale.

The scales used are:

Ordinal scale

Ordinal scale is used to understand their views and attitudes towards the fashion industry and in the self-reflective part of the survey.

Example: How important is it for fashion companies to communicate their sustainability efforts to their customers?

- Extremely important
- Important
- Somewhat important
- Not very important
- Not important at all

It focused or relied more on the nominal scale over other forms.

3. Techniques for Data Analysis

Type of research analysis

‘Exploratory research’ is done in order to investigate problems identified which were not clearly defined in the past, as sustainable fashion from the customer perspective which is not clearly studied. Thus, those type of research doesn’t usually lead to a conclusive result.

Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis with chi-square test was used for research purpose:

3.1. Qualitative data analysis

Research required data from various articles, research papers to understand buying behavior, pricing concerns and willingness to buy and invest in sustainable fashion.

3.2. Quantitative data analysis

Data was collected in the form of a questionnaire/survey and analysis to state and draw a numeric and statistical relationship between the factors of customer sentiment towards sustainable fashion with the help of pie charts.

4 Hypothesis testing and Methods

Research Hypothesis

The hypothesis refers to a specific statement that the research intends to answer from the research, for this research focuses on the customer’s Perception regarding sustainable fashion, the derived research problem is ‘In spite of sustainability being a trend attracting young consumers, does the customers of fashion industry have clear idea of sustainable fashion and do they act in sustainable manner while shopping fashion.

Formulation of Hypothesis

H0- There is no significant relationship between leveraging sustainability as a marketing strategy and the success of its implementation in the fashion industry.

H1- There is a significant relationship between leveraging sustainability as a marketing strategy and the success of its implementation in the fashion industry.

5.Data Interpretation

Results and Analysis

A total of 100 responses were evaluated and analyzed for the purpose of this research

Table1: Gender Data of the Respondents

| Gender | Number of Respondents |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| Male | 73 |
| Female | 26 |
| Prefer not say | 1 |
| Total | 100 |

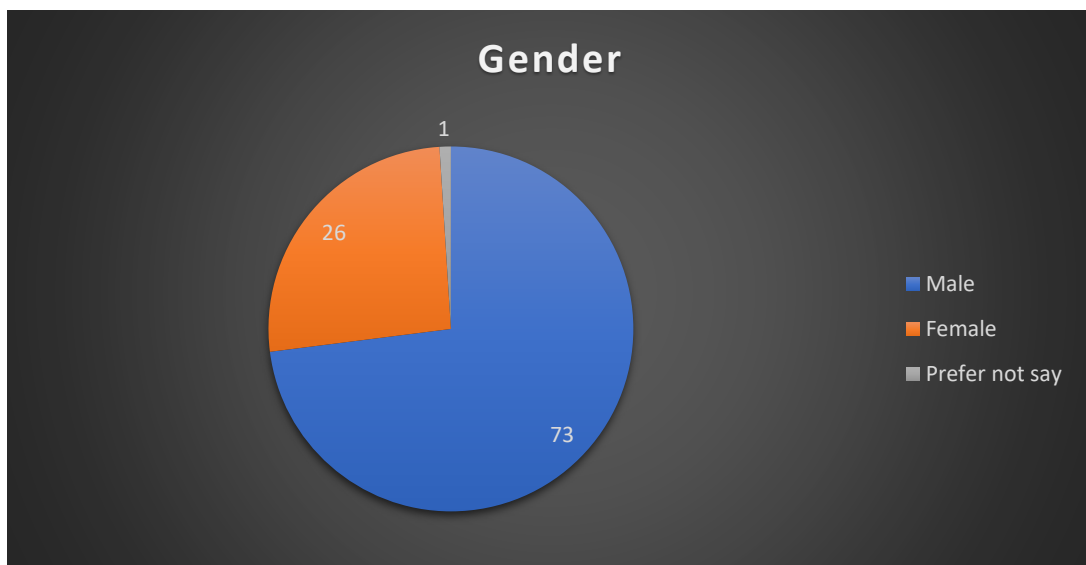


Fig 1 Data of Gender who took the survey

The diagram illustrates the gender of the population who have responded to the survey. 73% Percentage of Male and 26% of female have responded to survey. From the data it can be seen that majority of the male are also attracted to fashion industry and have more knowledge about sustainable fashion, therefore the fashion brands should concentrate on attracting both male and female customers towards their products

Table2: Age Data of the Respondents

| Age Group | Number of Respondents |
|-----------|-----------------------|
| 15-20 | 23 |
| 21-25 | 38 |
| 26-30 | 25 |
| 31-35 | 10 |
| 36-40 | 4 |

| | |
|---------------------|------------|
| 40 and above | 0 |
| Total | 100 |

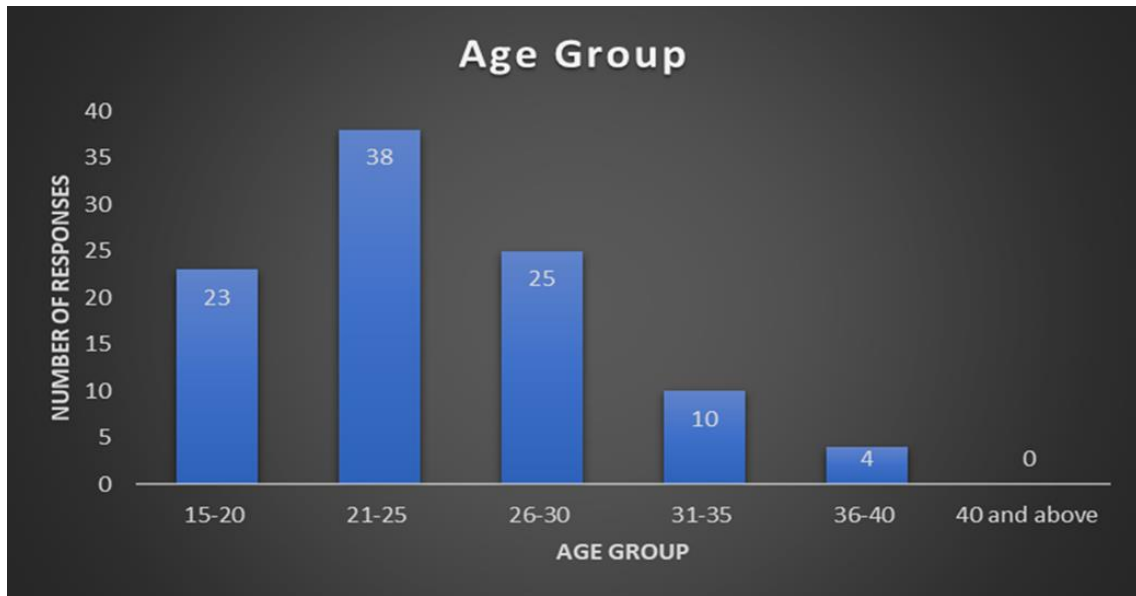


Fig-2 Age Group Data

From the above table and graph, it can be interpreted that youths are more attracted towards sustainable fashion, so fashion brands should concentrate on attracting youths more towards them and focus on marketing channels where youths are active and from which companies can reach young people very easily.

Independent Chi-square test

Table3: Total Responses

| Questions | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|--|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 1. To what extent do you believe that sustainability practices in the fashion industry can improve a company's reputation? | 83 | 10 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 100 |
| 2. Do you agree that it is important for fashion companies to communicate their sustainability efforts to their customers? | 73 | 21 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 100 |
| 3. Do you agree to purchase clothing from a fashion brand that prioritizes sustainability? | 94 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| 4. To what extent do you think that incorporating sustainable practices in the fashion industry can positively | 90 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 100 |

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----|----|---|---|---|-----|
| impact the environment? | | | | | | |
| Total | 340 | 41 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 400 |

Expected Value

Table 4: Expected Value Table

| Questions | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| 1. To what extent do you believe that sustainability practices in the fashion industry can improve a company's reputation? | 85 | 10.25 | 1.75 | 1.75 | 1.25 |
| 2. Do you agree that it is important for fashion companies to communicate their sustainability efforts to their customers? | 85 | 10.25 | 1.75 | 1.75 | 1.25 |
| 3. Do you agree to purchase clothing from a fashion brand that prioritizes sustainability? | 85 | 10.25 | 1.75 | 1.75 | 1.25 |
| 4. To what extent do you think that incorporating sustainable practices in the fashion industry | 85 | 10.25 | 1.75 | 1.75 | 1.25 |

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| can positively impact the environment? | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|

Expected frequency(E) = (row total * column total) / grand total

Example- for Question 1 for strongly agree expected value is

$$E = (340 * 100) / 100 = 85$$

Table 5: Frequency Table

| Question | Response Category | Observed Frequency | Expected Frequency |
|----------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Strongly Agree | 83 | 85 |
| 1 | Agree | 10 | 10.25 |
| 1 | Neutral | 2 | 1.75 |
| 1 | Disagree | 2 | 1.75 |
| 1 | Strongly Disagree | 3 | 1.25 |
| 2 | Strongly Agree | 73 | 85 |
| 2 | Agree | 21 | 10.25 |
| 2 | Neutral | 3 | 1.75 |
| 2 | Disagree | 3 | 1.75 |
| 2 | Strongly Disagree | 0 | 1.25 |
| 3 | Strongly Agree | 94 | 85 |
| 3 | Agree | 3 | 10.25 |
| 3 | Neutral | 1 | 1.75 |
| 3 | Disagree | 1 | 1.75 |
| 3 | Strongly Disagree | 1 | 1.25 |
| 4 | Strongly Agree | 90 | 85 |
| 4 | Agree | 7 | 10.25 |
| 4 | Neutral | 1 | 1.75 |
| 4 | Disagree | 1 | 1.75 |

| Question | Response Category | Observed Frequency | Expected Frequency |
|----------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 4 | Strongly Disagree | 1 | 1.25 |

Table 6: Chi-square Calculation Table

| Observed Frequency (O) | Expected Frequency (E) | (O-E) | (O-E) ² | (O-E) ² E |
|------------------------|------------------------|-------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 83 | 85 | -2 | 4 | 0.047 |
| 10 | 10.25 | -0.25 | 0.06 | 0.005 |
| 2 | 1.75 | 0.25 | 0.06 | 0.034 |
| 2 | 1.75 | 0.25 | 0.06 | 0.034 |
| 3 | 1.25 | 1.75 | 3.06 | 2.44 |
| 73 | 85 | -12 | 144 | 1.69 |
| 21 | 10.25 | 10.75 | 115.56 | 11.27 |
| 3 | 1.75 | 1.25 | 1.56 | 0.891 |
| 3 | 1.75 | 1.25 | 1.56 | 0.891 |
| 0 | 1.25 | -1.25 | 1.56 | 1.24 |
| 94 | 85 | 9 | 81 | 0.952 |
| 3 | 10.25 | -7.25 | 52.56 | 5.12 |
| 1 | 1.75 | -0.75 | 0.56 | 0.32 |
| 1 | 1.75 | -0.75 | 0.56 | 0.32 |
| 1 | 1.25 | -0.25 | 0.06 | 0.048 |
| 90 | 85 | 5 | 25 | 0.29 |
| 7 | 10.25 | 3.25 | 10.56 | 1.03 |
| 1 | 1.75 | -0.75 | 0.56 | 0.32 |
| 1 | 1.75 | -0.75 | 0.56 | 0.32 |
| 1 | 1.25 | -0.5 | 0.25 | 0.2 |

$$X_{Calc} = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$$

$$\chi^2_{Calc} = 27.50171$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Degree of Freedom (DOF)} &= (\text{Rows}-1) * (\text{Column}-1) \\ &= (4-1) * (5-1) \\ &= (3*4) \\ \text{DOF} &= 12 \end{aligned}$$

Considering significance level $\alpha=0.05$

$$\chi^2_{Tabular} = 21.026$$

Conclusion- Since $\chi^2_{Calc} > \chi^2_{Tabular}$ it is recommended to reject null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis.

From the above results it is seen that There is a significant relationship between leveraging sustainability as a marketing strategy and the success of its implementation in the fashion industry.

From the above analysis it is clear that if a fashion brand implements sustainability as marketing strategy it can get success in the market, But the brands should also take into consideration of marketing channels which customers prefers the most.

The Below data spreads light on the marketing channels which customers prefer.

Table 6: Response Table Representing social Media Contribution

| To what extent do you think that social media is an effective tool for promoting sustainability in the fashion industry? | |
|--|------------|
| Very Effective | 80 |
| Effective | 15 |
| Neutral | 1 |
| Somewhat ineffective | 4 |
| Very ineffective | 0 |
| Total | 100 |

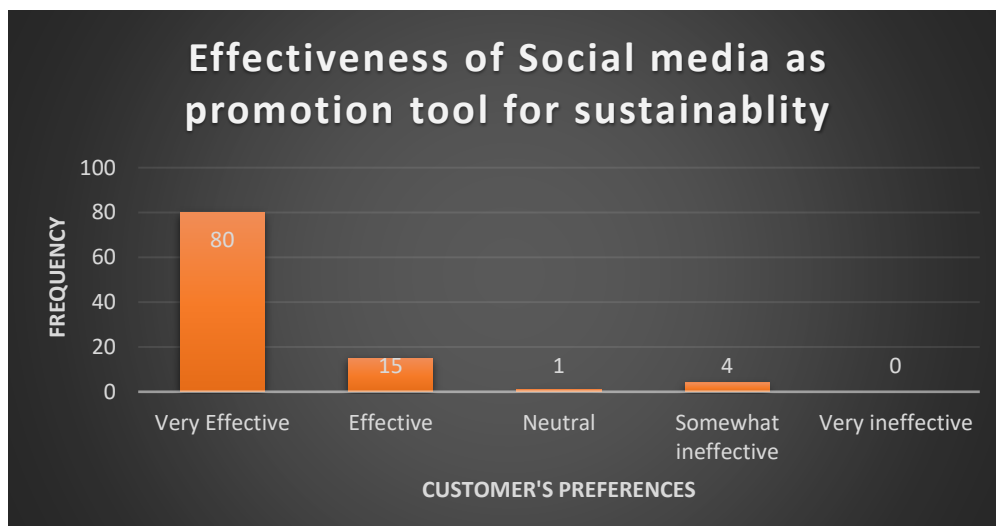


Fig-3 Data for effectiveness of social media as marketing channel

sustainable fashion

From the above table and graph it can be seen that majority of the population prefers the option that the social media can be great platform to communicate sustainable fashion because majority of people are on social media like Facebook, Instagram etc. So, when the company advertises its sustainable line in social media the company can reach majority of customers.

Table 7: Response Table Representing effectiveness of Collaboration of influencers

| To what extent do you think that collaborations between fashion companies and sustainability-focused influencers can influence consumers to prioritize sustainability in their fashion choices | |
|---|------------|
| Very Effective | 87 |
| Effective | 7 |
| Neutral | 5 |
| Somewhat ineffective | 1 |
| Very ineffective | 0 |
| Total | 100 |

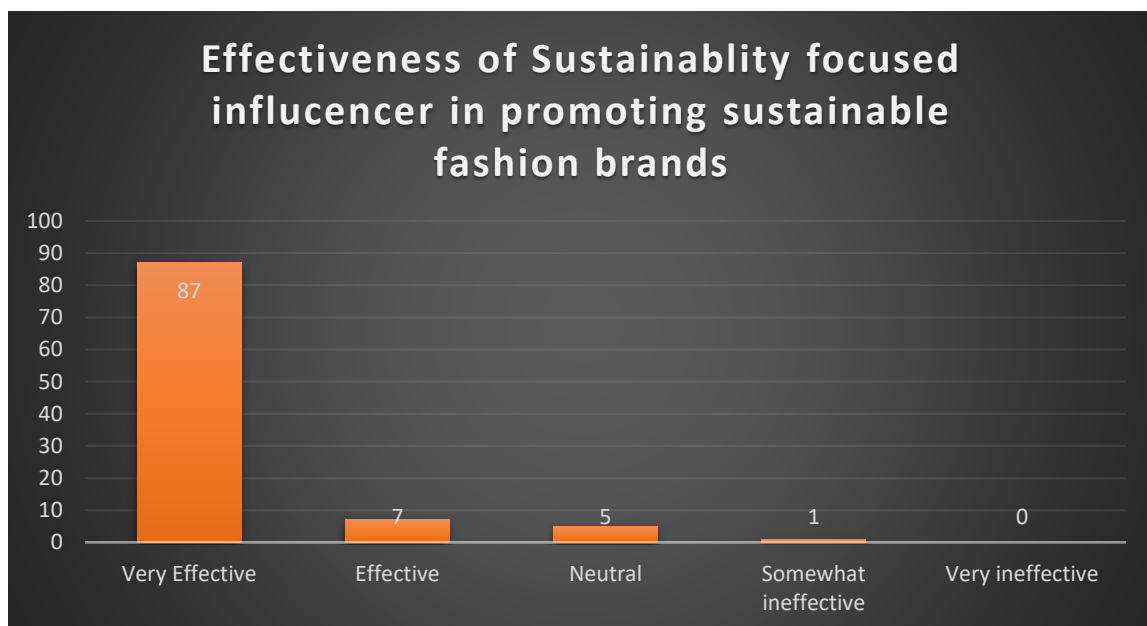


Figure 4 Effectiveness of influencers in promoting sustainable brands

From the above table and graph, it can be seen that majority of youth populations have attracted towards people who promotes sustainability and talks about protecting our environment, therefore collaborations between fashion companies and sustainability-focused influencers can be a powerful tool to raise awareness and promote sustainable fashion. Still, they need to be backed up with real commitments to sustainability from fashion companies to have a genuine and lasting impact.

Table 8: Response Table Representing Responses to price related questions

| How important is it for fashion companies to offer sustainable clothing options at a similar price point as non-sustainable options? | |
|---|------------|
| Very Important | 84 |
| Important | 14 |
| Neutral | 2 |
| Not Important | 0 |
| Not Important at all | 0 |
| Total | 100 |

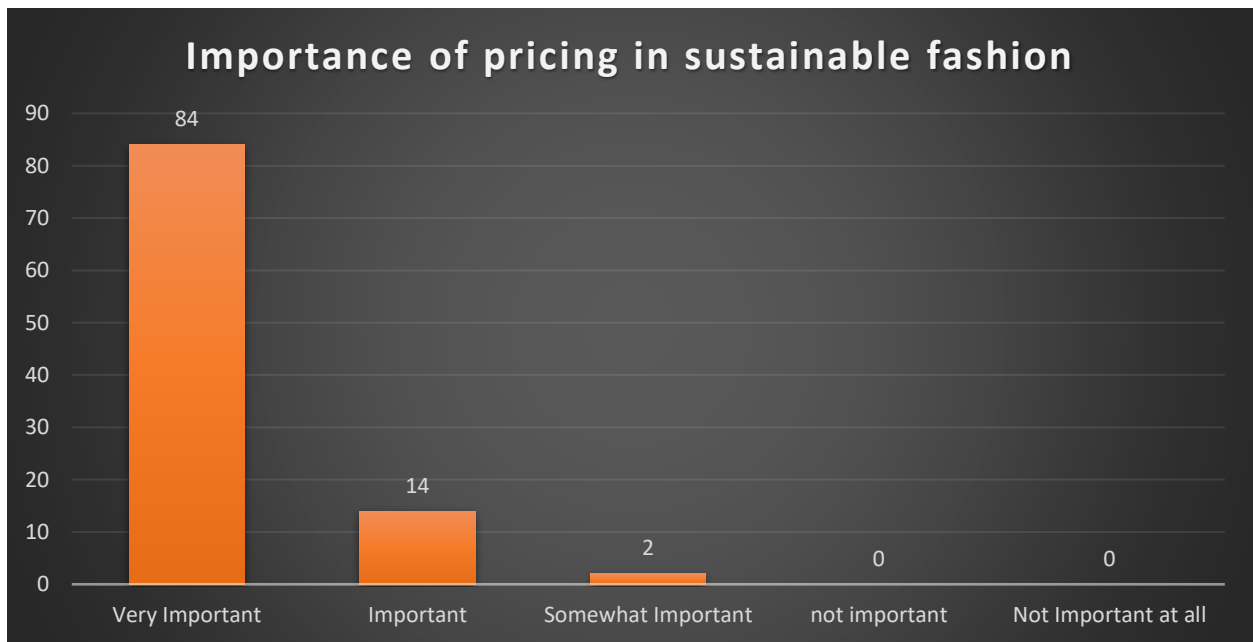


Figure 5 Importance of pricing in sustainable fashion brands

From the Above table it can be seen that majority of the population prefers to buy sustainable clothes for same price as of normal clothes so companies should offer sustainable clothing options at a similar price point as non-sustainable options is critical to making sustainable fashion accessible to a broader audience and driving positive change in consumer behavior and the fashion industry.

Table 9: Response Table Frequency of response regarding innovative designs in sustainable clothing

| How important is it for fashion companies to create innovative designs using sustainable materials and production processes? | |
|---|----|
| Very Important | 91 |
| Important | 7 |
| Neutral | 0 |

| | |
|----------------------|------------|
| Not Important | 1 |
| Not Important at all | 1 |
| Total | 100 |

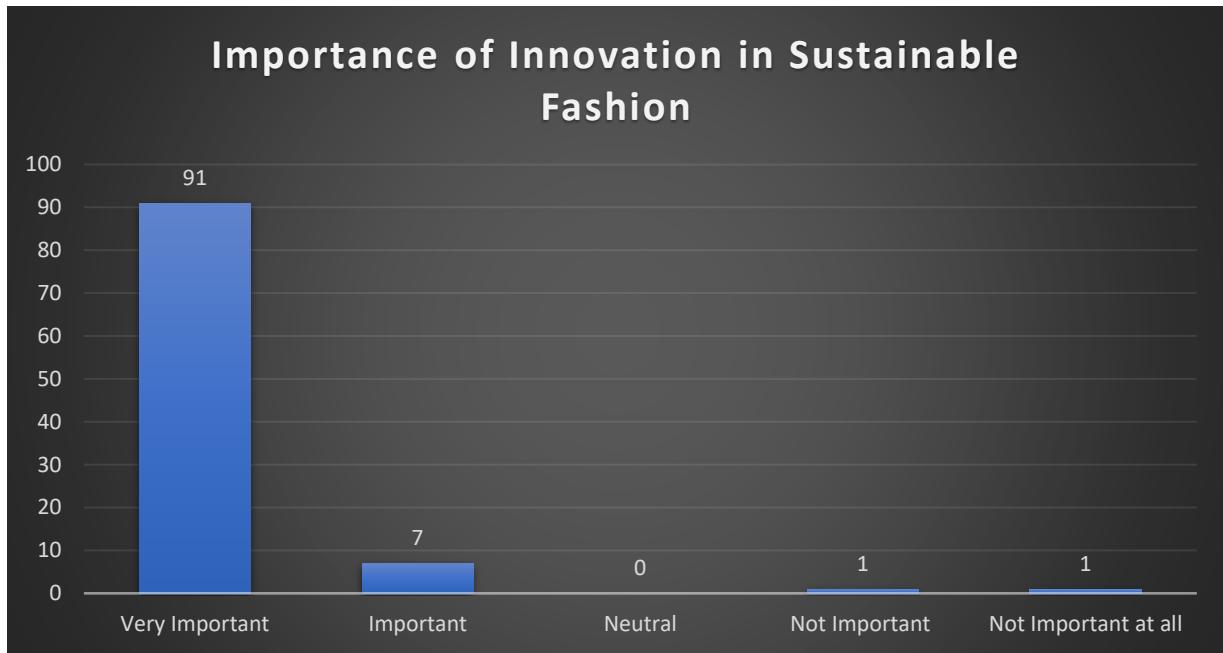


Fig 6 Importance of Innovation in Luxury Industry

As we can see from the above table and figure majority of population prefers to buy sustainable clothing which more of innovative in design. So, companies should focus on creating innovative designs using sustainable materials and production processes is crucial for driving the fashion industry's transition towards sustainability. It can help create new markets, address challenges, and change consumer perceptions about sustainable fashion.

6. Findings and Recommendations

6.1 Research Outcome and Findings

From the above research it can be seen that sustainability is the emerging trends in Indian fashion market as customers are becoming aware of the ill effects caused by fashion industry on the factors of sustainability such as effects on environment in terms of carbon foot prints, non-recyclable products and with harmful chemical released into nature, to reduce harmful effects the customers are turning towards the sustainable brands. The growing sense of 'responsible fashion' or 'ethical fashion' has opened new avenues and competitive advantage in the Indian markets so fashion brands should focus on attracting these customers towards them and focus on market channels to reach these customers.

6.2 Recommendations

From the data analysis it can be seen that sustainable fashion has vast market in fashion segment in our country so it is recommended that

- Since there is a significant relationship between leveraging sustainability as a marketing strategy and the success of its implementation in the fashion industry. The fashion industries should focus on becoming sustainable.
- With growing presence of customers on social media the companies should on focus advertising their sustainable line of products in social media to reach more customers.
- It is recommended to collaborate with sustainability focused influencers to reach more appropriate customers.
- It is recommended that companies should offer sustainable clothing options at a similar price point as non-sustainable options to attract more customers towards them.
- It is recommended that companies should focus on creating innovative designs using sustainable materials and production processes is crucial for driving the fashion industry's transition towards sustainability.
- It is recommended that companies should also focus on circular economy approach to minimize the waste and maximize the profit to become sustainable

7 Conclusion

sustainable fashion still has a long road ahead in India but the industry is starting to make progress as more brands and consumers adopt environmentally friendly products and shopping habits. From small fair-trade companies to major fashion industry leaders, there are many new approaches being introduced and help being provided for sustainable fashion. As per the studies carried out, an optimistic direction has clearly emerged for the future; the data collected reflect hope for a rise in ethical approaches to business and the adoption of sustainable strategies and practices in the industry. Thus, this paper contains thorough analysis on the model of the fashion industry from the perspective of all its essential stakeholders i.e., the consumers, while questioning the sustainability of the industry and also focusing on the profitability of it. It has an aspect of customer motivation and how retailers use them to attract these consumers, also an emphasis on actual steps taken by customers. Future research could deepen the understanding and provide a more comprehensive view of what motivates sustainability within the industry, the actions taken and the benefits of society and the environment.

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