

# **Sustainable Clothing: Redefining Fashion for Greener Future**

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## **Abstract**

The fashion industry has shown exponential growth over the last few decades, which has led to the rise of 'fast fashion.' The primary purpose of fast fashion is to manufacture and provide trendy and affordable clothing at a rapid pace. However, it has a significant impact on our environment and society. Fast fashion encourages people to overconsume, which leads to pollution, high water consumption, waste generation, usage of resources unsustainably, greenhouse gas emissions and many more. The present paper discusses the concept of sustainable fashion as a critical alternative. The paper highlights some practical ways of adopting sustainable practices while building your wardrobe. For example choosing durable clothes, supporting local brands, reusing and upcycling your old garments, etc. It also discusses some case studies of real-life success stories leading to the change in fashion by adopting some sustainable practices.

**Keywords:** Sustainable fashion, Eco-friendly clothing, Sustainable practices

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **For a Better Future, Think Sustainably!**

Today we are living in a fast-paced society where all are connected through digitalization in many facets of life. At the same time, a lot of effort has been put forward by scientists and climate campaigners to increase public awareness related to issues concerning climate, which is partially brought on by excessive consumption and unsustainable lifestyle (Hess, 2021). Need for sustainable living is becoming crucial to individuals as they grow more aware of these challenges (Parzonko et al., 2021). Future generations will be significantly impacted by the issues we currently face as a result of the climate crisis, which makes it imperative that we switch to more sustainable lifestyles. The paper aims to raise awareness about the environmental degradation which is caused by the rapid growth of fast fashion and advocates sustainable options an individual can take for a greener future.

### **What is Fast Fashion?**

Fashion is, mostly, vital while posing one's robust personality be it in a society or social media. It signifies one's identity apropos to specific strata of the society. Today, Fashion has become a means to express one's views and identity (Khare, 2014). Fashion, most importantly, fast fashion, has grabbed the attention among the section of the society, who are dealing with the on-going climate crisis. Fast Fashion is frequent production of cheap clothing while chasing rapidly changing fashion waves around the world. Companies have strategies to attract more sales by pushing new design collections so frequently that it in turn triggers a "FOMO" (Fear of missing out) phenomenon among the consumers. To achieve the kind of production scale of producing low cost and quality merchandise, companies are not only using the

unsustainable resources, but have also resorted to exploiting poor developing countries where corruption is the norm. These fast fashion merchandise are present to the masses at lowest possible cost (Abrahamson, 2011; Magnuson et al., 2017). Zara, H&M, Forever 21, Uniqlo, Primark, Fashion Nova, to name a few, are the companies dealing in fast fashion.

### **Growth and Dominance of Fast-fashion**

The high demand of cheap and easily replaceable fashion has been the driving factor for the growth and dominance of these fast fashion industries, valuing them at approx. USD 93.66 billion in 2022 and is projected to reach USD 167.50 billion by 2030, making a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.70% (Kings Research, 2023). This sales uptrend is attributed to young populous, looking for cheap and affordable merchandise prices (Gartex India, 2024). The fast fashion companies have profited hugely by systematically designing its operation and supply so efficiently that it takes only weeks to deliver and restore merchandise in the respective stores (Surge.AI, 2022). Fast fashion is approximately to be part of 10% of global carbon emissions, especially water and textile waste, amounting to 92 million tons of merchandise rotting in the landfills annually (Surge.AI, 2022).

The young population has ignored the awareness campaigns about the negative impact of fast fashion, for the quick and affordable fashion, and this population is projected to grow to 1.3 billion by 2030 (Kings Research, 2023). This social media driven demand has only been a stimulus for the industry, however, it has increased the dominance of the industry. It has warranted the interference to bring suitable and fair practices in the fast fashion industry.

### **Harmful Effects of Fast Fashion**

Among other various impacts, climate change stands out to be highly impacted, making the industry responsible for almost 10% of global carbon emissions, beating emissions from all other major industries (Earth.Org, 2024). The fast fashion industry's growth is based on the frequent requirement of resources by exploiting fossil fuels, among others. The projection is that the fast fashion industry with its current practices will increase greenhouse emissions by almost 60% by 2030 (Earth.Org, 2024). The fast fashion industry affects various aspects in its dealing, however, water waste and pollution stands out. It is the leading cause of polluting the water bodies by continuously dumping its toxic waste in the river streams (Plastic Collective, 2023). It takes around 700 gallons of water to make a piece of cotton shirt and 2000 gallons for a piece of jeans (Earth.Org, 2024). Most importantly, 85% of merchandise ends up in waste, making a nightmare for its management (Plastic Collective, 2023). Needless to say, its exploitation of poor labour in developing countries, in most cases, becomes a human rights issue by making laborers work over-time in unsuitable conditions for low wages (Qutubuddin, 2023).

### **Sustainable Fashion/Clothing**

According to Clark (2008), Sustainable fashion, sometimes known as "slow fashion," involves not only producing clothing more slowly than fast fashion but also considering the ecological influence that clothing production has on all aspects of the environment. Reducing the environmental impact of clothes over its whole lifecycle is the goal of sustainable clothing, often known as eco-friendly clothing or ethical clothing/ fashion. According to Keller (2024), sustainable clothing focuses on using environmentally friendly materials that are acquired sustainably and don't include hazardous pesticides or fertilizers. Energy usage and waste creation are kept to a minimum during the production procedures.

Emeritus (2024) suggests that firms should lower their carbon footprint by promoting recycling and upcycling activities and implementing energy-efficient production practices. As per Brimsar (2014), it is imperative to guarantee equitable remuneration, secure labor environments, and compliance with labor laws for every laborer engaged in the manufacturing process. Sustainable apparel promotes fair trade principles and supply chain transparency. Sustainable fashion also promotes a change in consumer behavior toward more conscientious shopping. In order to minimize waste and decrease the frequency of purchases, it promotes customers to invest in high-quality clothing that is made to last longer (Keller, 2024). This slow fashion strategy is in contrast to the fast fashion model, which encourages a throwaway society marked by rapid clothes consumption and disposal.

### Key Features of Sustainable Clothing:

- **Eco-Friendly Materials:** Sustainable clothing uses recycled, organic or biodegradable materials such as organic cotton, cashmere, hemp, bamboo, or soy etc. For example, organic cotton is grown without the use of harmful pesticides or artificial fertilizers that reduces soil and water pollution (Emeritus, 2024). Likewise, resource-saving and waste-diversion from landfills is facilitated by recycled polyester derived from plastic bottles.
- **Ethical Production:** Manufacturers of sustainable fashion give priority to ethical production methods, making sure that their workers and employees are paid fairly and have a safe workplace.
- **Waste Reduction:** The sustainable clothing aims to reduce waste, greenhouse gas emissions and energy use by employing cutting-edge production techniques like made-to-order and zero-waste pattern creation. Safer and natural dyes are used instead of toxic ones.
- **Durability and Longevity:** The fundamental component of eco-friendly fashion is to create apparel that are both timeless and durable. This results in promoting long-lasting, high-quality purchases from customers and lowers the frequency of buying and the total amount of resources consumed.
- **Circular Economy:** Many eco-friendly fashion companies use a circular economy strategy by planning their products' end-of-life considerations. To reduce waste, this involves promoting upcycling, recycling, and appropriate clothing disposal (Emeritus, 2024).
- **Transparency and Traceability:** Placing a high priority on supply chain transparency by informing customers about the origins of materials and the working conditions in which clothing is made.

### Think Green: Pick Sustainable Clothes Next Time!

Now that we understand the significance of sustainable clothing, let's discuss how to shop more sustainably for our wardrobe. Here are some ways to update our wardrobe while reducing the impact on the environment:

1. **Select environmentally friendly fabric:** Always check the labels of garments before making a purchase to find out what materials are used. Choose sustainable fabrics like hemp, cashmere, linen, organic cotton, or soy silk.
2. **To strengthen the community's economy and lessen carbon emissions,** buy eco-friendly and sustainable clothing from local nearby retailers.
3. **Consider donating your unused clothes** instead of throwing them away.
4. **Make an effort to repurpose, upcycle, or alter your old clothing** to make new ensembles. It's a fantastic method to provide your wardrobe a fresh look by utilizing things you currently own.
5. **Another choice is to rent or purchase used, or second-hand, apparel.** This is a cost-effective and

green method to help out small businesses in your community.

6. Adopt a minimalist clothing strategy by prioritizing quality over quantity and choosing more robust and long-lasting pieces.

By implementing these practices, we contribute to sustainability and lessen the harm the fashion industry does to our environment.

### Success Stories in Sustainable Fashion

Sustainable fashion is becoming increasingly popular in India as people are becoming more conscious of environmental problems and ethical standards in the clothing industry. Some of the eco-friendly clothing brands in India are:

1. **Maleema:** It is a fashion brand that emphasizes the need of using recycled and organic raw materials for the production of garments. It also promotes to apply RRR (reduce, reuse, recycle) approach in product finishing and packaging.
2. **Doodlage:** This brand has turned out an eco-friendly substitute for fast fashion, a sustainable fashion firm that turns leftover fabric scraps into fashionable apparel.
3. **Maati:** The initiative uses upcycled materials in its collections and places a strong emphasis on zero-waste production. The firm sells a variety of apparel goods, such as unisex t-shirts and Kutchi embroidered jackets created from antique rugs, without using plastic packaging.
4. **No Nasties:** The firm manufactures clothing that is 100% vegan, organic, and fair-trade. They use natural colors and make sure that people are treated fairly throughout their supply chain to create clothing that is beneficial to the environment.

These sustainable local brands are addressing environmental concerns and encouraging ethical labor standards while manufacturing fashion apparel.

### Conclusion

In order to strike a balance between style, environmental stewardship, and social equality, eco-friendly clothing embodies a comprehensive approach to fashion. The sustainable fashion movement seeks to bring about a more conscientious garment industry through emphasizing eco-friendly materials, ethical labor methods, waste reduction, durability, circularity, and transparency. Making informed decisions as customers gives us the ability to make an impact on the apparel industry. To embrace these sustainable fashion practices, we ought to motivate ourselves to live sustainably for greener future.

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