

Analyzing the Perception of Sustainable Consumption of Apparel Among Adult Consumers

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ABSTRACT

Due to the constant evolution of fashion trends, consumer consumption patterns are increasing, depleting natural resources and increasing environmental pollution. This threatens the very existence of the next generations. To address this, significant changes to existing trends in manufacturing and consumption are required, not only to mitigate the environmental damage that has already occurred but also to reverse it. The present study examined adult consumers' perceptions of sustainable consumption, with a specific focus on clothing purchase behavior. A survey was conducted among 100 adult consumers using convenience and snowball sampling techniques at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi. The findings revealed that although most respondents demonstrated a relatively high level of awareness and knowledge regarding sustainable consumption (mean = 3.42), their actual consumption patterns remained largely unsustainable. Consumer purchasing behavior was primarily driven by the pursuit of satisfaction, with 64% of respondents purchasing clothing for style, fashion trends, or price-related incentives such as discounts, while only 35% reported buying clothing based on necessity. The study identified key factors influencing consumer choices, barriers to the adoption of sustainable practices, and gaps in the effectiveness of current brand communication strategies. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers to design targeted interventions and for manufacturers to strengthen and refine their marketing strategies toward sustainable fashion solutions.

Keywords: Buying Behavior, Overconsumption, Sustainable Consumption, Sustainable Apparel

INTRODUCTION

Consuming 'green', 'natural', 'biodegradable', and 'sustainable' items has gained popularity on a global scale. This is especially noticeable since the United Nations has set 17 SDG to be accomplished as of 2030. The Brundtland Commission, a committee of the UN, stated in 1987 that

sustainability is described as "the current necessities must be met without sacrificing the potential of the next generation to fulfill their individual requirements. "Unsustainable methods of manufacturing and consumer behavior are the root causes of the three global disasters such as pollution, decline in species diversity and global warming. Together with environmental deterioration,

these issues represent a serious danger to human welfare and long-term viability of the development goals.

The expense of maintaining usable textiles is high from an environmental and financial point of view. The hazardous substance, which is used in dry cleaning processes, has been associated with reproductive issues like miscarriage and infertility among men, as well as neurological conditions (MacEachern, 2008). Environmental pollution, decreasing biodiversity, and changes in the climate are the three global problems that arise from irresponsible ways of manufacturing and consumption. These challenges and the resulting harm to the ecosystem pose a danger to both the attainment of the Goals for Sustainable Development and the health of humans. A major factor in the degradation of ecological systems arises from human activities (Grunert and Juhl, 1995). De Voy et al. (2021) suggest that residents of more wealthy, ethnically diverse, and clothing-store-rich areas produce a notably larger amount of clothing scraps than residents of other geographic regions.

Kibert et al. (2011) argue that in the upcoming years, our ability to manufacture will be severely impacted by the gradual exhaustion of natural resources. This makes the next generation's basic survival in danger. The existing ways of manufacturing and usage need to change significantly in order to start the repair after which revert back the harm done to nature. In order to examine adult consumers' perceptions of sustainable consumption, this research was carried out.

Kozar and Hiller (2012) conducted a study that revealed that consumers' degree of participation in sustainable clothes purchase

habits is low, even though they are aware of and worried about matters of sustainability pertaining to the manufacture and utilization of clothes. Zhang & Shi (2022) concluded that social status is positively impacted by the primary elements of vibrant color, diversity of media, and interaction with it. Thus, social status significantly impacts impulsive purchasing decisions in the variable association. Sigaard & Laitala (2023) contend that most customers favored fibers made from nature over synthetic versions. This goes contrary to suggestions given by material sustainability assessment instruments that include Higg Materials Sustainability Index (MSI), which rates many artificial fibers higher than organic ones and existing market methodologies.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the socioeconomic characteristics of respondents
- To evaluate respondents' knowledge and awareness of sustainable apparel consumption
- To assess respondents' purchasing and consumption behaviors to maintain sustainability

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, was the study's universe and location. A descriptive survey study approach was applied. Students on the Banaras Hindu University campus in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, between the ages of 18 and 35, comprised the target population and the population area. Snowball and convenience sampling were the methods used, and the

sample size was 100. The study included a 5-point Likert scale in the questionnaire. The data type was quantitative. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean, percentage, and average.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic characteristics of respondents

- Based on the findings, 70% of participants were in the 18–5 age range 30% were in the 26–3 age range. The responders were 23.72 years old on average.
- Fifty percent of the respondents were pursuing their graduation degree, while the other 50% were seeking postgraduate and doctoral degrees.
- The majority of responders, or 53%, were from families having monthly

incomes of between 40,000 and 60,000 rupees. Additionally, 43% of the respondents had a family income of between 20,000 and 40,000 rupees per month. The respondents' average monthly family income as 41,200 Rs.

Respondents' knowledge and awareness of sustainable apparel consumption

Buying behavior

The majority (64%) of respondents indicated that they purchased clothing primarily for style, fashion trends, affordable prices, and sales, while only 36% stated that their purchases were driven by necessity. Several studies have demonstrated that social and ecological consciousness affect shopping decisions; however, purchase selections for fashion have been discovered to be commonly influenced by other aspects, such as style. Freudenreich & Schaltegger, 2020; Choi & Han, 2019; Gupta, Gwozd, & Gentry, 2019; Bly, Gwozd, & Reisch, 2015).



Figure 1: Reasons to buy new clothes

Frequency of shopping :

The majority of respondents (78%) purchased garments every one to two months, while only 22% made purchases within four months. This high frequency of

purchasing contributed to more impulsive shopping behaviors. According to Wood (1998), an impulsive purchase was characterized as a decision made without thoughtful consideration and often during intense emotional states.

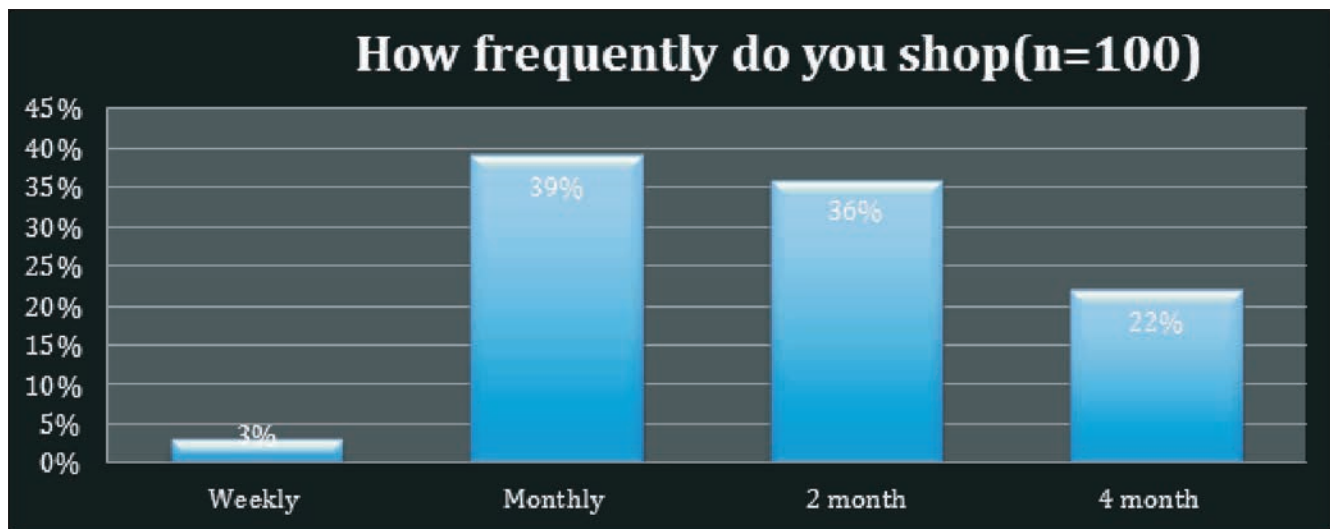


Figure 2: Frequency of shopping

Mostly like to shop

The majority of respondents (51%) preferred shopping online, while only 23% were inclined to shop at local businesses that

support traditional handicrafts. Song et al. (2007) found that trust levels among online shoppers increase as customer visibility on apparel sales websites grows.



Figure 3: Mostly like to Shop

Quality checking :

Only 21% of respondents indicated that they check for eco-friendly and biodegradable qualities before purchasing. The majority,

however, focus on other factors such as color or design (43%), fabric material (67%), and texture or seam (27%) when assessing product quality.



Figure 4: Pre-Purchase Quality Evaluation of Apparel by Consumers

Fabric preference :

Fifty-four percent of respondents preferred natural fabrics, while 9% favored synthetic fabrics, and 37% opted for a blend of both. Hatch & Roberts (1985) found a connection between price and fiber type, with wool-based clothing receiving much higher ratings than synthetic or acrylic-based alternatives, but this was only evident at higher price

points. However, the sustainability of cotton production in India is a concern. India accounts for 55% of global pesticide use on just 5% of cotton-growing land. Additionally, it takes 2,700 gallons of drinking water over nearly three years to produce a single cotton t-shirt. According to Noble (2007), 1.5 billion cubic meters of fresh water are consumed annually in textile manufacturing in poorer nations.

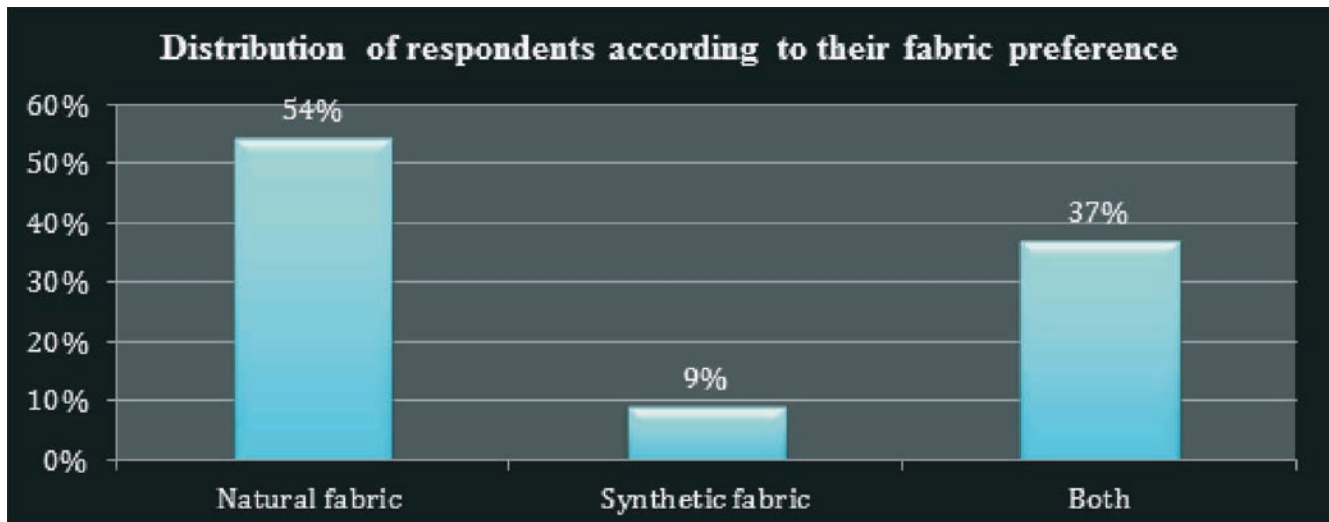


Figure 5: Fabric preference of respondents

Eco-friendly cloth shopping

The results showed that very few respondents actively purchased eco-friendly clothing. Most of them (75%) reported that they either rarely bought or had never bought eco-friendly apparel, while only 25% purchased such clothing once in six months. This low level of adoption was influenced by several reasons. The most common issue was the limited availability of eco-friendly clothing, as reported by 45% of respondents. High prices were another major concern, with

44% stating that eco-friendly apparel was too expensive. Additionally, 33% of respondents said they were not sufficiently aware of eco-friendly clothing options, indicating a lack of clear information and promotion. Trust was also a concern, as 20% of respondents were unsure whether eco-friendly claims made by brands were genuine. Overall, these findings suggest that cost, availability, limited awareness, and lack of trust are key factors preventing consumers from choosing eco-friendly apparel more frequently.



Figure 6 : Reasons for Low Purchase of Eco-Friendly Clothing Among Respondents

Disposal of clothes

Sixteen percent of respondents recycled their clothes, 71% threw their clothes in the garbage, and 13% burned their clothes. These statistics showed that a large majority of people disposed of their clothes in

ways that are harmful to the environment, especially through garbage disposal and burning. This might be due to a lack of awareness about sustainable options, or the inconvenience of recycling or donating clothes.

Respondents' purchasing and consumption behaviors to maintain sustainability

Table 1 : Sustainable consumption (bought secondhand clothes or rented clothes ever for occasional functions)

S.No.	Statements	1 Never	2 Rarely	3 Sometimes	4 Often	5 Always	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1.	I have bought second hand clothes	80	13	5	1		1.30	Highly unacceptable
2.	I have rented clothes for occasional functions	78	9	8	3	2	1.4	Highly unacceptable
	Total Overall Weighted Mean Score						1.35	Highly unacceptable

(i) Sustainable consumption :

The results revealed a very low acceptance of alternative and sustainable clothing practices among the respondents. A large majority of respondents reported that they had never purchased second-hand clothes or rented clothes for occasional functions. The weighted mean score for purchasing second-hand clothes was 1.30, indicating that this practice was highly unacceptable. Similarly, renting clothes for occasional functions recorded a weighted mean score of 1.40, which also reflected a high level of non-acceptance among respondents. One of the key reasons for this reluctance appears to be cultural or social norms that prioritize buying new clothing for formal events, making alternatives like second-hand or rented clothes less acceptable. These findings suggest that respondents showed strong resistance toward reusing or sharing apparel, preferring conventional purchasing practices over sustainable alternatives.

The total overall weighted mean score for these practices was 1.35, which clearly falls in the category of highly unacceptable. This indicates an overall negative attitude toward second-hand clothing and clothing rental practices, highlighting limited adoption of circular fashion behaviors among the respondents.

(ii) Understanding of Apparel

Sustainability Among Respondents:

The study results indicated a strong awareness of the term "apparel sustainability" among respondents. Specifically:

- 39% of respondents selected all available options, suggesting a broad understanding of sustainability-related concepts.
- 38% of respondents associated sustainability with eco-friendly and biodegradable alternatives, highlighting a specific focus on environmentally responsible materials.

However, further analysis could explore whether this awareness translates into sustainable purchasing behaviors or remains at a conceptual level.



Figure 7: Awareness of Apparel Sustainability Among Respondents

S. No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1.	I have had a desire to know where your clothes come from.	14	21	28	19	18	3.06	Moderately accepted
2.	I check tags while buying clothes to analyze toxic materials.	30	14	17	17	22	2.87	Moderately accepted
3.	I donate my clothes.	4	16	28	30	22	3.50	Accepted
4.	I use repaired clothes of my own.	15	18	33	24	10	2.96	Moderately accepted
5.	I consider the environmental and social impact of clothing while buying clothes.	17	20	32	16	15	2.92	Moderately accepted

6.	Sustainable consumption of apparel is required for the next generation to save natural resources for our next generation.	13	4	9	47	27	3.71	Accepted
7.	Clothes should be made eco-friendly for sustainability.	7	2	9	51	31	3.97	Accepted
8.	Sustainable consumption of apparel is more important in today's climatic change era.	6	4	8	57	25	3.91	Accepted
9.	Overconsumption is the reason for overproduction in the apparel industry, which leads to environmental damage.	5	6	9	56	24	3.88	Accepted
10.	People should consume less clothes.	6	11	23	48	12	3.49	Accepted

Total overall weighted mean = $34.27/10 = 3.42$ (Agreed to the statement but not highly agreed.)



(iii) Knowledge and Awareness towards Sustainable consumption :

The research findings indicated that most of the respondents agreed with statements related to sustainable consumption, with a mean score of 3.42. This suggests a generally positive attitude toward the concept. However, despite their higher levels of education, respondents did not demonstrate strong knowledge or agreement regarding sustainable consumption. Notably, 50% of respondents were pursuing postgraduate or doctoral degrees, yet their understanding of sustainable consumption was not as high as it might be expected according to their level of education. This suggests that formal education alone may not directly correlate with awareness or knowledge of sustainable consumption, highlighting a potential need for targeted education or awareness campaigns on sustainability topics.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that while the majority of respondents are knowledgeable and aware of sustainable consumption (mean = 3.42), their actual consumption patterns remain unsustainable. The key insights from the study include that consumer behavior is driven by satisfaction rather than sustainability. Sixty four percent of respondents purchase clothing primarily for style, fashion trends, affordability, or sales, while only 35% buy clothes based on necessity. Fifty one percent of respondents shop online, a trend that significantly contributes to impulsive buying behavior. The

vividness and richness of modern media further encourage fast fashion consumption and impulsive purchasing decisions. These findings highlight a gap between awareness and action, suggesting the need for effective interventions such as education, policy measures, and sustainable fashion promotions to encourage more responsible consumer behavior. It can also be concluded that while education plays a role in knowledge and awareness, respondents still need to recognize that human activities are the primary cause of environmental decline. The global crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution are all fueled by environmentally harmful systems of consumption as well as production. These issues, along with the ongoing environmental degradation; pose significant threats in achieving Sustainable Development Goals and human well-being. In the long run, we must use biodegradable and completely eco-friendly fabrics, including organic cotton, hemp, jute, and silk, as long as the fabrics made from our apparel are recycled or repurposed into innovative creations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this investigation, both convenience and snowball sampling methods were employed. It is recommended that future research expands its scope beyond college and university students. Most existing studies on this topic have predominantly focused on standard college-age populations, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings. The sample size and the precise target population limit the result's generalizability. A larger sample size can produce more accurate

results for hypothesis testing in future studies.

A descriptive research methodology was used to convey respondents' perceptions. However, an alternative research design, such as an in-depth analysis, could have provided additional insights.

Limited research has been conducted in the Indian context, and thus it is suggested that further studies include respondents from a diverse range of occupations.

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