

Fabric sustainability : An eco-conscious perspective of Indian consumers

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Abstract

Sustainable living is the need of the hour, keeping the demands of the environmental concern. The apparel industry has a 10% contribution to the carbon footprint. This research paper identifies the components that influence the perception of fabric sustainability and the choices made by consumers in purchasing organically made apparel. The study also aims at knowing the numerous influences made by variables identified, such as green attitude, environmental concern or social responsibility, peer pressure and recycling. The researcher has identified the research gap between the intention to buy organic apparel and the actual purchase. Factors positively affect the purchase behaviour of consumers preferring

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sustainable apparel. The purpose of this study is an overview of sustainable fashion consumption. The groundwork of the study was conceptualized with the existing literature review. Percentage analysis was used to categorize independent variables. Descriptive statistics were analysed using the test of normality and reliability analysis. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), reliability tests, average variance and discriminant validity, were also extracted. The hypothesis was tested with a model developed for sustainable apparel businesses in the industry through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach. Data analyzed in the study shows a positive relationship between the conceptualized factors such as recycling, awareness, responsibility/environmental concern, green attitude, and eco-labelling with the purchase pattern of the consumers who procure organic apparel. All the measures were found robust. Test of normality and Cronbach's alpha shows standard values that are globally accepted. The hypothesis was found to be supported through the SEM approach. The paper aims to fabricate awareness and purchase intentions among consumers considering sustainable apparel. This study has bridged the gap found through other literature reviews. A unique workable model was designed and can be deployed by the fashion industry as a new mix for attracting consumers towards sustainable apparel.

Subject Classification: 00-02.

Keywords: *Fabric sustainability, Organic apparel, Awareness, Indian consumers, Green attitude.*

Introduction

Fabric sustainability, or sustainable fashion, has dominated in recent years. Sustainable fashion is attributed to textile products and considers the entire process of the fashion system (Kirsi Niinimäki *et. al.*, 2011). Consumers, in all probability, have initiated the use of environment-friendly apparel. Fashion sustainability intends to create a flourishing ecosystem (Amira Mukendi *et. al.*, 2020). These comprise the longevity of the textiles, reduced waste, and reduced environmental harm caused to the environment by adopting eco-friendly manufacturing practices. Slow fashion incorporates values such as quality, ecologically amicable and fair-trade practices in manufacturing materials or textiles (Kate Fletcher, 2007). Sustainable fashion is a movement towards ecological integrity that addresses the fashion industry's environmental aspects. The textile industry can be sustainable by adopting eco-friendly practices in textile manufacturing, such as using green power, etc. The basic principle of sustainability is to reduce, reuse and recycle (Larney M *et. al.*, 2010). Sustainability is also achieved through the conservation of natural resources.

Quality of life can be improved when customers are taught the values of green products. The fashion industry is restoring to slow fashion or reverse innovation, also termed eco-friendly fashion. Consumers are getting off the ground with ethical and environmentally friendly apparel

(Hill J. *et. al.*, 2012). International clothing brands have devoted themselves to eco – collections to manifest their contribution to saving the environment. Handweaving is empowered through enhancing the capacity of competitiveness and making them bargainous in the global market (Liz Thankom Mathew, 2018). Fast fashion further deals with extreme consumerism and adversely affects the environment. Apparel manufactured through fast fashion is smart and generates quick cash, keeping up with new trends in the market and catering to the modern needs of the consumer (Faustine Binet *et. al.*, 2019).

Along with fashion sustainability, people have also adopted green living; they include upcycling or refashioning, reviving traditions and utilizing eco-friendly approved products. This research also deals with the green attitude and green motive behind consumers who prefer green apparel (Kathleen Jacobs *et. al.*, 2018). Social influence and peer pressure play an important role in consumers' preference for purchasing organic material. Consumption of eco-friendly apparel helps humans to stay connected with their roots (Samanta K.K. *et. al.*, 2014). Nature has everything that is required for a man's living. Industrialization has resulted in the outcome of nylon, synthetic and microfibers which are man-made, have taken the upper hand in the market and have polluted the environment due to the non-decomposable element present in them. Marketers are forced to take initiatives to promote green apparel. This study aims at the positive attitude of customers toward organic material, their willingness to buy, the consumption patterns of different consumers and the green values that they possess (Connell K.Y.H *et. al.*, 2014).

Materials and Methods

Sustainability is based on the principle of ecological integrity concerning production, consumption and reproduction patterns and sub-principles such as reduce, reuse and recycle. Sustainability-oriented transformation brings together mass market, industries and customers who offer and accept more eco-friendly products and espousal of organic material in the production can lead to major market success (Erik G. Hansen *et. al.*, 2013). Textile and clothing practices have become eco-friendly, slow fashion is captivating the industry, and consumers have begun consuming more nature-friendly fashion products (R. Tryphena *et. al.*, 2017). Customers affirm a positive attitude towards organic clothing as they know moderately highly about organic textiles, especially cotton. The willingness to purchase eco-friendly clothing is believed to enhance their quality of life according to individuals who show interest in environmental

protection (Lina María Ceballos Ochoa, 2010). Manufacturing of apparel using green methods accommodates the conservation of natural resources using organic ways to produce apparel resulting in low usage of water, supplementing electricity with green power, cement from solid earth, evaporative cooling techniques etc., (V. Ralapanawe et.al, 2008).

Consumers desire quality such as the softness of the fabric products, usability etc., worth the cost paid; environmental concerns and recycling behaviour affect the involvement in buying eco-friendly clothing (Hae Jin Gam *et. al.*, 2010). Green marketing in India is at the infancy stage, and marketers can decide how safely and successfully green products, especially organic clothing, can be launched in the Indian scenario considering the income and preference of the consumer (Surya Rashmi Rawat *et. al.*, 2014). Copious factors such as trust, perceived value, attitude, and motive influence green buying. The ability of a consumer to choose a product has a time frame that enables the customers to indulge and engage in decision making which reflects shopping behaviour thus enabling rational buying (Arul Rajan K, 2020). Consumption patterns of organic clothing differ among Gen X, Y and Z (Prachi Mishra *et. al.*, 2019). Influences of past environmentally-friendly behaviour, knowledge of green apparel and peer influence on purchasing organic clothing plays a vital role in re-purchasing green apparel. Marketers should consider initiatives such as launching new organic brands and celebrity talks in media and start inculcating green values among consumers (Arpita Khare *et. al.*, 2017). Ethical consumption is not new, but it has recently gained supremacy. Knowledge of apparel manufactured eco-consciously has a significant positive influence on consumers' eco-responsible behaviour, which is reflected in green apparel consumption (Amrut Sadachar *et. al.*, 2016).

Intention to purchase green apparel, also entitled as consumer engagement among young consumers in India that substantiate social influence such as promotional campaign on green purchasing practices, can be a key predictor of choosing organic or green apparel. Attracting customers is a big challenge for manufacturers in today's scenario. Consumers are aware of the profuse environmental issues which make marketers go transparent on ethical issues regarding the manufacturing of green apparel. Eco-friendly concerns give a wide scope for challenges and opportunities in the global market (Surya Rawat *et. al.*, 2012). Sustainability is now enticing young consumers; apparel with eco-friendly manufacturing methods and organic clothing have gained sovereignty. Purchase intention toward green apparel products with materialistic or consumerist values is widely accepted globally (Mai Thi Tuyet Nguyen *et. al.*, 2019). Fashion disposal etiquette is the major ground for clothing waste and unwanted landfills, and managing textile waste has been a concern in maintaining

sustainability. Textile waste cannot be equated directly with fashion consumption, but a linkage can be identified between textile waste and the fashion index (Sabine Weber *et. al.*, 2016).

The potential impact in maintaining the sustainability of textiles concerning designing, manufacturing and marketing has become an important issue that needs immediate response from consumers and manufacturers. Garment labels play a vital role in identifying the difference between regular and sustainable clothes and have actualized far-reaching awareness of organic clothing (Helen Goworek *et. al.*, 2013). The conduct of dumping clothes is influenced by the negative attitude towards the environment and economic concerns such as discarding, donating, reusing and reselling. Environmental concerns pinned down are water waste, resource wastage and unnecessary landfills of textiles which can be recycled (Hyun Mee Joung *et. al.*, 2011). Green consumerism is the impact of green awareness among consumers, but the unfamiliarity of eco-friendly labels to recognize green products is still on hurl. Educating consumers on standard eco-labels can help identify green and conventional products (Doni Purnama Alamsyah *et. al.*, 2019). Eco-labels do not influence consumer demand apropos of sustainable textiles but have significantly impacted consumers' green behaviour. Wholesalers, retailers and end-users find the credibility of products through eco-label identification. Standardized labels have worldwide recognition and potentially increased consumer awareness (Pammi Sinha *et. al.*, 2010).

Consumer perceptions and evaluations affect consumer purchase intentions; eco-labelling is one of the important strategies of green marketing in promoting sustainable textiles. Recognition of eco-friendly labels and social responsibility go hand in hand (Sangmoo Shin *et. al.*, 2015). Consumers are concerned about their environmental impact during a purchase, which seems to be one of the major reasons companies are involved in corporate social responsibility (Nassivera F *et. al.*, 2017). Green purchase behaviour elucidates the inconsistencies of green attitude and decision-making towards the purchase of organic apparel. The decision-making process is complex and the adoption of various models in supporting this process is important to have control over predictive power (Shobeirinejad, A *et. al.* 2016). The functionality of the apparel and concern for the environment are two major predictors that influence purchase behaviour among consumers who choose sustainable clothing (Yatish Joshi *et. al.*, 2015). Purchase behaviour is affected by the consumer's prior experience, objective knowledge such as self-assessed or perceived and subjective knowledge such as personal preference, belief or opinion (Tae-Im Han, 2019). The conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1 and list of constructs of the study and for conceptual framework are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1
List of Constructs of the study

Constructs	Definition
Sustainable Fabric	Textiles are sourced in an eco-friendly way, either naturally grown or recycled.
Organic Apparels	Clothing made of natural fibers grown without the usage of chemical fertilizers.
Green Motive	Principle to save the environment through rational thinking.
Slow Fashion	An environmental concern of sourcing sustainable fabric, involving artisans to ethical purchase.

Table 2
List of Constructs of the conceptual framework

Constructs	Definition
Recycling	Reduction of waste during manufacturing and reduction of landfills.
Awareness	Need for sustainable apparel and environmentally aware consumers.
Eco-labelling	Standard labels for organic apparel are accepted globally.
Peer Pressure	The effect of being influenced by the peer group concerning the organic purchase of apparel.
Responsibility/ Environmental Concern	Responsible purchase of apparel with environmental concerns.

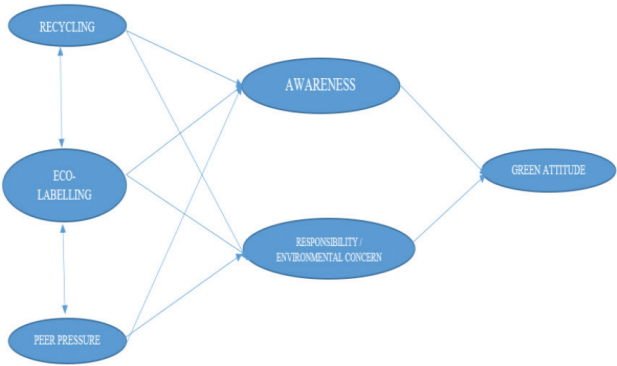


Figure 1
Conceptual Framework

Results and Discussion

The primary data collected from the customers concerning organic apparel were subjected to data analysis using JAMOV Version 1.2.19 and AMOS Version 23.0 to understand the socio-economic profile and application of the organic sustainability business model in the apparel industry. The simple percentage analysis has been applied to understand the independent factors of the respondents in the study area, and the results are tabulated in Table 3.

Table 3
Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Demographic Profile (N = 112)	Frequency	Percentage
Age (In Years)		
18-20	28	25.0
21-35	72	64.2
36-50	6	5.4
Above 50	6	5.4
Gender		
Male	38	33.9
Female	74	66.1
Educational Qualification		
Schooling/ Diploma	1	0.9
Under Graduate	56	50.0
Post Graduate	46	41.1
Professional	9	8.0
Social Status		
Student	54	48.2
Government Employee	4	3.6
Private Employee	44	39.3
Entrepreneur	10	8.9
Marital Status		
Married	27	24.1
Single	82	73.2
Others	3	2.7
Family Annual Income (In Rs.)		
2,50,000 - 5,00,000	53	47.3
5,00,001 - 7,00,000	14	12.5
7,00,001 - 10,00,000	21	18.8
> 10,00,000	24	21.4

Table 4
Results of Descriptive Statistics, Test of Normality and Reliability Analysis

Variables	Descriptive Statistics					Tests of Normality		Reliability	
	Mean		SD	Variance	Skewness Statistic (Std. Error = 0.228)	Kurtosis Statistic (Std. Error = 0.453)	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a Statistic (df = 112)	Shapiro-Wilk Statistic (df = 112)	Item-Total Statistics Corrected Item-Total Correlation
	Statistics	Std. Error							
Recycling	3.075	0.068	0.720	0.518	-0.197	-0.318	0.121	0.978*	***
REC1	2.813	0.096	1.018	1.037	0.074	-0.490	0.189*	0.911*	0.474
REC2	3.625	0.098	1.041	1.083	-0.365	-0.643	0.221*	0.890*	0.289
REC3	3.089	0.115	1.212	1.469	-0.050	-1.006	0.184*	0.910*	0.517
REC4	2.982	0.090	0.949	0.901	-0.222	0.321	0.284*	0.869*	0.537
REC5	2.866	0.094	1.000	1.000	0.054	-0.038	0.241*	0.895*	0.611
Peer Pressure	3.346	0.065	0.687	0.472	0.258	0.265	0.102*	0.975	***
PP1	3.259	0.078	0.825	0.680	-0.124	0.618	0.275*	0.859*	0.570
PP2	3.321	0.083	0.882	0.779	-0.041	0.292	0.267*	0.872*	0.737
PP3	3.482	0.088	0.930	0.865	-0.221	-0.240	0.211*	0.894*	0.691
PP4	3.500	0.093	0.986	0.973	-0.115	-0.521	0.212*	0.896*	0.601
PP6	3.170	0.091	0.967	0.935	-0.166	-0.036	0.225*	0.898*	0.366

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Eco-Labeling	2.167	0.072	0.762	0.581	1.345	2.733	0.176*	0.893*	***	0.755
ECO2	1.813	0.088	0.935	0.874	1.462	2.416	0.269*	0.762*	0.476	
ECO4	2.429	0.082	0.867	0.752	0.646	0.781	0.270*	0.857*	0.649	
ECO5	2.259	0.093	0.984	0.968	0.612	0.136	0.238*	0.876*	0.642	
Green Attitude	2.373	0.064	0.676	0.457	0.600	1.553	0.104*	0.961*	***	0.707
GA1	2.313	0.074	0.783	0.613	0.531	1.251	0.271*	0.832*	0.556	
GA2	2.089	0.083	0.876	0.767	0.644	0.688	0.237*	0.847*	0.671	
GA3	2.786	0.094	0.990	0.981	0.218	-0.398	0.197*	0.905*	0.479	
GA5	2.304	0.098	1.038	1.078	0.540	-0.278	0.231*	0.884*	0.324	
Awareness	2.887	0.089	0.938	0.880	0.216	-0.192	0.106*	0.970*	***	0.834
AW1	2.830	0.098	1.039	1.079	0.250	-0.511	0.199*	0.907*	0.745	
AW2	2.625	0.098	1.032	1.065	0.608	-0.088	0.254*	0.879*	0.746	
AW3	3.205	0.111	1.171	1.372	-0.102	-0.896	0.180*	0.912*	0.607	
Responsibility	2.719	0.074	0.784	0.615	0.385	0.043	0.100*	0.974*	***	0.778
RES1	2.795	0.092	0.978	0.957	0.014	-0.333	0.217*	0.905*	0.648	
RES2	2.839	0.095	1.000	1.001	0.055	-0.648	0.192*	0.904*	0.492	
RES4	2.464	0.096	1.013	1.026	0.337	-0.167	0.193*	0.893*	0.634	
RES5	2.777	0.100	1.054	1.112	0.038	-0.589	0.191*	0.912*	0.563	

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction; * Significance at 5% Level

Table 3 indicates that the majority of the respondents hail from the age group of 21 years to 35 years (64.2%), followed by 18 years to 20 years (25.0%), 36 years to 50 years (5.4%) and above 50 years (5.4%). Predominant respondents are females (66.1%); the rest are males (33.9%). A maximum number of respondents are educated up to the undergraduate level (50.0%), followed by post-graduate level (41.1%), professionals (8.0%) and up to school education or diploma (0.9%). A sizeable portion of the respondents is students (48.2%), followed by private employees (39.3%), entrepreneurs (8.9%) and government employees (3.6%). More than half of the respondents are singles (73.2%), followed by married (24.1%) and others (2.7%). The maximum number of respondents fall within the annual family income of Rs. 2,50,000 and Rs. 5,00,000 (47.3%), followed by above Rs. 10,00,000 (21.4%), between Rs. 7,00,001 and Rs. 10,00,000 (18.8%) and between Rs. 5,00,001 and Rs. 7,00,000 (12.5%). Descriptive statistics and the normality test have been applied to explore the characteristics of the data collected from the primary survey to validate the normal distribution in the samples. In addition, reliability analysis has been applied to test the consistency and reliability of the responses and results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 shows that out of the maximum average value of 5 (5 variables), the mean value of 3.075 is a robust recycling measure as the standard deviation is 0.720. Out of a maximum value of 5 (5 variables), the mean value of 3.346 is a robust measure of peer pressure, as the standard deviation is 0.687. Out of a maximum value of 5 (3 variables), the mean value of 2.167 is a robust measure of eco-labelling as the standard deviation is 0.762. Out of a maximum value of 5 (4 variables), the mean value of 2.373 is a robust measure of green attitude, as the standard deviation is 0.676. Out of a maximum value of 5 (3 variables), the mean value of 2.887 is a robust measure of awareness, as the standard deviation is 0.938. Out of a maximum value of 5 (4 variables), the mean value of 2.719 is a robust measure of awareness, as the standard deviation is 0.784. The test of normality indicates that the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality (Statistic Value = 0.121, 0.102, 0.176, 0.104, 0.106, 0.100 and P-Value = 0.000) and Shapiro-Wilk test of normality (Statistic Value = 0.978, 0.975, 0.893, 0.961, 0.970, 0.974 and P-Value = 0.000). The statistic values of both tests clearly indicate normal distribution in the data collected from the respondents. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was used to measure the consistency and reliability of the data. The results prove that Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient values for all the aspects such as recycling, peer pressure, eco-labelling, green attitude, awareness, and responsibility are more than 0.700, as suggested by (Cavana *et. al.*, 2001). The scale used in the instrument is more consistent and highly reliable.

Results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis

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Table 5 and Table 6 manifest that data represented good convergent validity. The Average Variance Explained (AVE) for the constructs such as recycling, peer pressure, eco-labelling, green attitude, awareness, and responsibility is higher than the squared correlation between constructs. Thus, it fulfils the criteria for establishing a measurement model with the goodness of fit, higher reliability, adequate convergent validity and discriminant validity for the primary data collected from the respondents. The establishment of the goodness of fit for the data is supported to proceed with the test of a hypothesized model for the study. Figure 2 and Table 6 indicate the results of the estimated path co-efficient of the structural equation model.

Table 6
Results of the Reliability, Average Variance Extracted and Discriminant Validity

Variables	CR	AVE	MSV	Max R(H)	Recycling	Peer Pressure	Eco-Labelling	Green Attitude	Awareness	Responsibility
Recycling	0.732	0.382	0.284	0.819	0.618					
Peer Pressure	0.819	0.486	0.353	0.852	0.352**	0.697				
Eco-Labelling	0.772	0.537	0.605	0.809	0.364**	0.147	0.733			
Green Attitude	0.751	0.441	0.605	0.792	0.371**	0.039	0.778***	0.664		
Awareness	0.85	0.655	0.582	0.867	0.418**	0.450***	0.474***	0.609***	0.809	
Responsibility	0.779	0.473	0.582	0.797	0.533***	0.594***	0.423**	0.629***	0.763***	0.688

The structural equation model has been applied to test the hypothesized model of the present study. The result indicates an acceptable overall model fit with all the fit indices. The calculated values are within the acceptable levels recommended by previous research studies. The measurement model exhibited in this study is a fairly good fit with the data collected from customers of the apparel industry in the study area. The psychometric properties of the model in terms of reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity were explored. The results of confirmatory factor analysis, reliability, average variance extracted and discriminant validity were presented in Table 6 and Table 7.

Table 7

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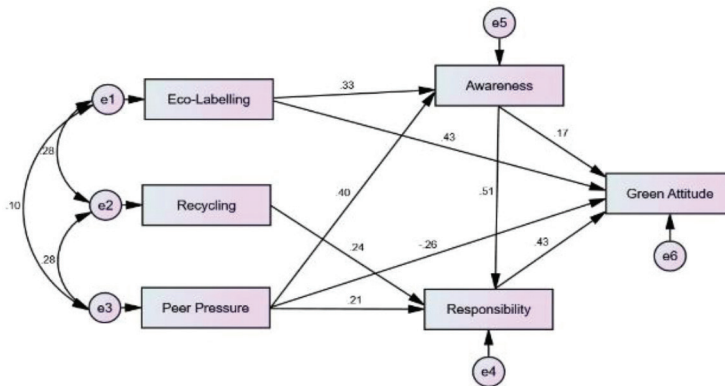


Figure 2

Fabric Sustainability Business Model for Apparel Industry: SEM Approach

Table 7 and Figure 2 reveal the results of the nine hypotheses developed for the study. The path coefficients for eight hypotheses were supported in the present study. Eco-labelling and peer pressure significantly and positively influenced awareness of organic apparel usage. Product attributes such as recycling, eco-labelling and peer pressure significantly and positively influenced the responsibility factor. The green attitude of the apparel industry customers was significantly and positively influenced by Eco-labelling and Responsibility Factors such as peer pressure has a significant and negative influence on green attitude. Awareness does not have a significant direct influence on green attitudes rather, awareness has mediated a significant positive influence with responsibility on the green attitude of the customers. Thus, the present model proves that product attributes such as recycling, eco-labelling and peer pressure significantly influence green attitudes through the mediation aspects of environmental concerns such as awareness and responsibility of the customers towards organic and sustainable business practices in the apparel industry. Environmental concern awareness with responsible practices leads to positive green attitude adoption among customers in the apparel industry.

Conclusion

Climate change has negatively impacted every dimension of living. The Indian government and the United Nations strictly take up the protection of the environment. Reduce, reuse and recycle have become the

new mantra. Every citizen is responsible for the adverse environmental effects. Though we cannot reverse the damages caused by us, we can protect the environment from further deterioration. This study paves the way to save the environment from the fashion perspective. Sustainable clothing is today's trend and has positively impacted the environment. Fashion brands claim organic clothing or green apparel to attract consumers who responsibly act towards environmental causes. There is also a misconception about green marketing in the market which is called greenwashing. The study was conducted only with a sizeable population in India which limited access to data. There was a lack of previous studies on fabric sustainability concerning Indian consumers concerning bridging the gap between the intention of purchasing sustainable clothing and the actual purchase. The awareness and practicality of choosing organic clothing were less, resulting in biased opinions.

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