

## **Sustainable Fashion Consumer Behaviour**

Pooja Chandravanshi

Assistant Professor (Department of Fashion Designing)

Kalinga University, Naya Raipur (C.G)

[Pooja.chandravanshi@kalingauniversity.ac.in](mailto:Pooja.chandravanshi@kalingauniversity.ac.in)

### **Abstract**

The fashion industry, a global economic powerhouse, is also a significant contributor to environmental degradation, with unsustainable practices affecting ecosystems, resource availability, and human welfare. In response to these challenges, sustainable fashion has emerged as a critical focus, emphasizing eco-friendly production, ethical labor practices, and circular economy principles. However, the success of sustainable fashion largely depends on consumer behavior, making it essential to understand the factors influencing sustainable fashion choices. This research explores the dynamics of sustainable fashion consumer behavior, aiming to uncover the motivators, barriers, and attitudes shaping consumer decisions in adopting sustainable practices. The study employs a comprehensive approach, integrating theoretical frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior and Value-Belief-Norm Model to examine the interplay between environmental awareness, ethical considerations, and consumer purchasing habits. It identifies key drivers, including environmental consciousness, ethical responsibility, and social influences, while also addressing barriers such as limited affordability, perceived lack of style, and insufficient consumer knowledge about sustainable fashion. Furthermore, the role of marketing, branding, and corporate transparency in shaping consumer trust and preferences is analyzed to understand how brands can effectively promote sustainability.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Fashion, Consumer Behavior, Environmental Awareness, Ethical Consumption, Green Marketing.

## 1. Introduction

The global fashion industry is one of the largest and most dynamic sectors of the world economy, contributing significantly to employment, trade, and cultural identity. However, this growth has come at a significant cost to the environment. The industry is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, excessive water consumption, and textile waste, while also contributing to pollution through the use of harmful chemicals and non-biodegradable materials. Fast fashion, characterized by rapid production cycles and low-cost clothing, has exacerbated these environmental challenges, creating a culture of disposability and overconsumption. In response to these concerns, sustainability in fashion has gained increasing importance. Sustainable fashion emphasizes practices such as eco-friendly production, ethical labor conditions, and circular economy principles, aiming to reduce environmental harm while promoting social responsibility. Despite its potential to transform the industry, the widespread adoption of sustainable fashion depends significantly on consumer behavior, which remains a complex and multifaceted issue.

### 1.1 Types of Sustainable Fashion Consumer Behavior

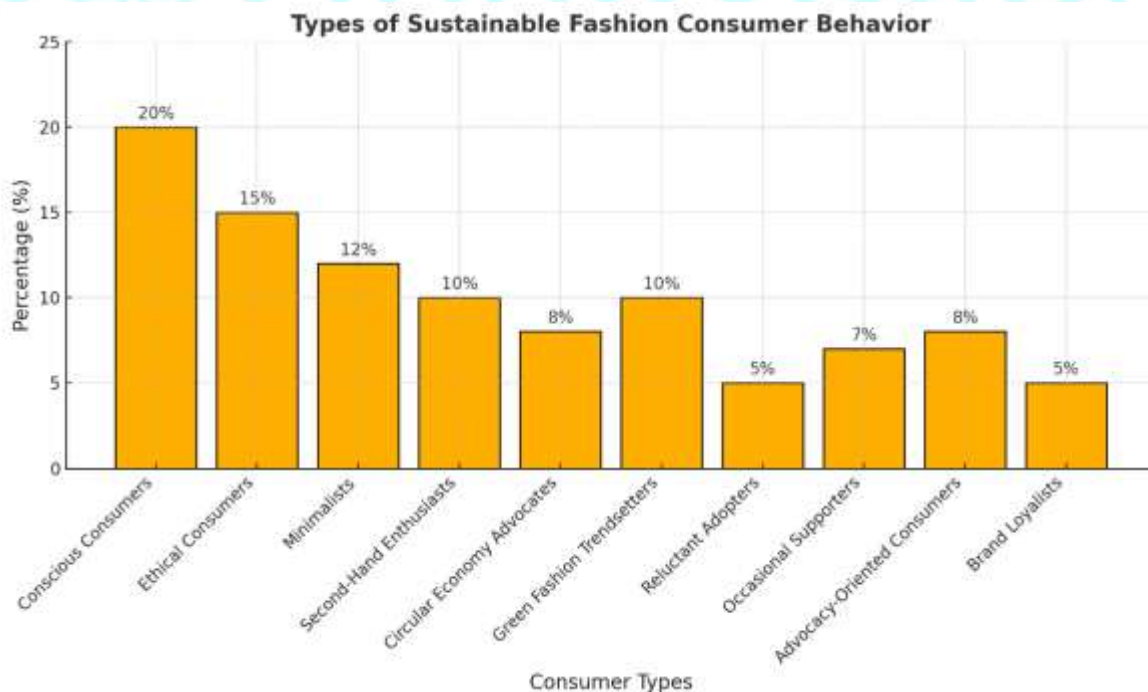


Fig 1. Distribution of Sustainable Fashion Consumer Behavior Types

### 1. Conscious Consumers

These individuals actively seek out sustainable fashion options and prioritize ethical and environmental considerations in their purchasing decisions.

- They research brands for sustainability certifications (e.g., Fair Trade, GOTS).
- Their choices are driven by values such as reducing carbon footprints and supporting fair labor.

### 2. Ethical Consumers

Ethical consumers focus on the social and moral implications of their purchases.

- They avoid brands linked to unethical labor practices or animal cruelty.
- These consumers often support small, local, or fair-trade brands.

### 3. Minimalists

Minimalists adopt a "less is more" approach, emphasizing quality over quantity.

- They prefer durable, versatile clothing that reduces the need for frequent purchases.
- Minimalists often participate in capsule wardrobes or slow fashion.

### 4. Second-Hand Enthusiasts

These consumers prioritize reusing and recycling fashion items through thrift shopping, vintage stores, or online resale platforms.

- They help reduce waste by extending the lifecycle of garments.
- This group also engages in clothing swaps and rental services.

### 5. Circular Economy Advocates

Advocates of circular fashion actively participate in recycling and upcycling initiatives.

- They support brands with take-back programs or closed-loop systems.

- These consumers may also engage in creative upcycling or DIY clothing projects.

## 6. Green Fashion Trendsetters

These individuals combine their interest in fashion trends with a commitment to sustainability.

- They showcase sustainable styles on social media, influencing others to adopt similar behaviors.
- Their choices are both trend-conscious and eco-friendly, focusing on innovative materials like organic cotton or recycled fabrics.

## 7. Reluctant Adopters

Reluctant adopters are less proactive but still engage with sustainable fashion due to external pressures.

- They may choose sustainable options if prices are comparable to conventional fashion.
- Often influenced by social norms or brand marketing, rather than intrinsic values.

## 8. Occasional Supporters

These consumers purchase sustainable fashion sporadically, often as a secondary consideration.

- Their behavior is inconsistent, driven by convenience, availability, or promotions.
- They may prioritize other factors, such as style or cost, over sustainability.

## 9. Advocacy-Oriented Consumers

These consumers actively advocate for sustainable fashion and influence others.

- They participate in campaigns, support activism, and educate others about the environmental and ethical impact of fast fashion.
- Advocacy-oriented consumers often engage with organizations promoting sustainable practices.

## 10. Brand Loyalists

This group supports specific sustainable brands consistently due to trust and alignment with personal values.

- They stick to brands known for sustainability and transparency.
- Their loyalty often extends to recommending these brands to others.

## 1.2 Research Problem

Consumer behavior plays a pivotal role in driving the adoption of sustainable fashion, as consumer choices directly influence demand for environmentally and ethically responsible products. However, understanding and shaping these choices remain a significant challenge. Many consumers express a willingness to support sustainability but fail to translate this intention into action due to various factors such as high costs, limited availability, and perceived compromises on style and quality. Additionally, a lack of awareness about the environmental and social impact of conventional fashion practices further hinders the shift toward sustainable alternatives. This disconnect between intention and behavior highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the factors that motivate or deter consumers from adopting sustainable fashion. By addressing these challenges, brands, policymakers, and educators can better align their strategies to influence consumer behavior and foster a more sustainable fashion industry.

## 1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of sustainable fashion consumer behavior. The primary objectives are to identify and evaluate the factors that influence consumers to adopt sustainable fashion practices, such as environmental consciousness, ethical considerations, and economic motivations. Additionally, the study seeks to assess consumer awareness and attitudes toward sustainable fashion, exploring how knowledge and perceptions shape purchasing decisions. Finally, it aims to identify key barriers that prevent consumers from fully embracing sustainable fashion, such as cost, accessibility, and misinformation. By addressing these objectives, the research aims to provide actionable insights for stakeholders to promote sustainable consumption patterns and drive meaningful change in the fashion industry.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Definition of Sustainable Fashion

Sustainable fashion encompasses a holistic approach to designing, producing, and consuming clothing and accessories in ways that reduce environmental harm and promote social well-being. It integrates principles of environmental sustainability, such as minimizing resource consumption and reducing waste, with social responsibility, including fair labor practices and ethical sourcing of materials. Sustainable fashion also emphasizes the adoption of circular economy models, focusing on recycling, upcycling, and extending the lifecycle of garments. According to Fletcher and Tham, sustainable fashion aims to balance ecological integrity with human development while addressing the cultural and economic dimensions of fashion production and consumption [1]. This multidimensional framework underlines the complexity of achieving sustainability in the fashion industry.

### 2.2 Theoretical Framework

Theories of consumer behavior provide valuable insights into understanding the factors influencing sustainable fashion consumption. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) suggests that consumer intentions are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, making it a widely used framework to study pro-environmental behavior. Ajzen's TPB highlights the importance of intention as a mediator between awareness and action, particularly in the context of sustainable consumption [2]. Similarly, the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Model proposed by Stern emphasizes the role of personal values, ecological beliefs, and social norms in driving environmentally conscious behavior [3]. These theoretical models provide a foundation for analyzing how consumer attitudes and external influences shape sustainable fashion choices.

### 2.3 Drivers of Sustainable Consumer Behavior

Several factors drive consumer behavior toward sustainable fashion. Environmental consciousness, which reflects awareness of the environmental impact of conventional fashion, is a significant motivator. Studies indicate that consumers who understand the consequences of overconsumption and pollution are more likely to seek eco-friendly alternatives [4]. Ethical

considerations, including fair labor practices, animal welfare, and human rights, also play a crucial role in influencing purchasing decisions. For example, Pookulangara and Shephard found that ethical concerns often prompt consumers to prioritize sustainable brands over fast-fashion retailers [5]. Economic factors, such as the perceived cost-benefit ratio, further influence behavior. Consumers are more inclined to purchase sustainable fashion when they perceive long-term value, such as durability and quality, outweighing the initial cost.

#### 2.4 Barriers to Sustainable Fashion Adoption

Despite growing awareness, several barriers prevent consumers from fully embracing sustainable fashion. Limited availability and affordability of sustainable products are among the most significant challenges. Many consumers perceive sustainable fashion as expensive and inaccessible, particularly in lower-income markets [6]. Additionally, a lack of consumer knowledge about the environmental and social benefits of sustainable fashion hampers its adoption. According to Niinimäki, insufficient education and misinformation often lead to skepticism regarding the authenticity of sustainability claims [7]. Furthermore, the perception that sustainable products lack style or quality compared to mainstream fashion options deters fashion-conscious consumers from making sustainable choices.

#### 2.5 Role of Marketing and Branding in Sustainable Fashion

Marketing and branding strategies play a pivotal role in promoting sustainable fashion. Green marketing, which emphasizes the environmental and ethical benefits of products, has been shown to positively influence consumer attitudes and behavior. Research by Kumar et al. highlights the importance of aligning marketing messages with consumer values, ensuring that sustainability claims are clear, credible, and consistent [8]. Transparency and trust are critical in building consumer confidence. Brands that openly disclose their sourcing practices, production methods, and sustainability efforts are more likely to gain consumer loyalty. For instance, the rise of certifications such as Fair Trade and GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) underscores the value of third-party verification in enhancing trustworthiness [9].

### 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods to comprehensively analyze consumer behavior in sustainable fashion. The quantitative component involves the use of structured surveys to collect numerical data on consumer awareness, attitudes, and purchasing patterns. The qualitative component includes interviews and focus groups to gain deeper insights into the motivations, perceptions, and challenges faced by consumers. This dual approach ensures a robust understanding of the factors influencing sustainable fashion consumption while addressing both measurable trends and subjective experiences.

### 3.2 Sampling Techniques

A purposive sampling technique is employed to target participants who are likely to have relevant knowledge or experience with sustainable fashion. The sample includes consumers from diverse demographic backgrounds, with a focus on individuals aged 18 to 45, as this group is most active in fashion consumption. Additional stratified sampling ensures representation across income levels, educational backgrounds, and geographical regions to capture varied perspectives. The sample size is determined to balance statistical reliability for quantitative analysis and thematic richness for qualitative exploration.

### 3.3 Data Collection Methods

The data collection process incorporates multiple methods to ensure depth and accuracy:

- **Surveys:** Structured online surveys are distributed to capture quantitative data on consumer awareness, attitudes, and purchasing habits related to sustainable fashion.
- **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews with a subset of participants allow for an in-depth exploration of their motivations, barriers, and preferences.
- **Focus Groups:** Group discussions are conducted to encourage dialogue and reveal shared perceptions or contrasting opinions among consumers.



- **Case Studies:** Detailed case studies of sustainable fashion brands are analyzed to identify best practices and effective strategies in promoting sustainability.

### 3.4 Data Analysis Methods

The collected data is analyzed using a combination of statistical and thematic analysis techniques:

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Statistical tools such as descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and factor analysis are applied to survey data to identify trends, correlations, and significant factors influencing consumer behavior.
- **Qualitative Analysis:** Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring themes and patterns from interviews and focus groups. Coding is conducted systematically to categorize responses, followed by the development of overarching insights.
- **Triangulation:** Findings from different data sources and methods are cross-referenced to ensure validity and reliability, providing a comprehensive understanding of the research questions.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Consumer Awareness and Attitudes

The study reveals a mixed level of consumer awareness regarding sustainable fashion. While many respondents demonstrate a basic understanding of sustainability concepts, such as eco-friendly materials and ethical labor practices, deeper knowledge about specific certifications and the broader environmental impact of fast fashion remains limited. Consumers generally express positive attitudes toward environmental and ethical concerns, with a growing recognition of the need for change in the fashion industry. However, these attitudes often do not translate into purchasing behavior due to various psychological and practical barriers. Younger consumers, in particular, are more vocal about their support for sustainable practices, but they also face challenges such as affordability and accessibility when making sustainable choices.

### 4.2 Key Motivators for Sustainable Fashion Consumption

The primary motivators driving sustainable fashion consumption include environmental consciousness, social influence, and personal values. Environmental factors play a significant role, with consumers increasingly prioritizing brands that align with their ecological concerns. Ethical considerations, such as support for fair labor practices and animal welfare, also resonate strongly, particularly among socially conscious consumers. On a personal level, the perception of quality and durability associated with sustainable products serves as a key motivator. Additionally, the role of social media and influencers in shaping consumer preferences cannot be overlooked, as they often amplify the desirability of sustainable brands through storytelling and advocacy.

#### 4.3 Challenges and Barriers Identified

Despite growing awareness and positive attitudes, several challenges hinder the widespread adoption of sustainable fashion. Cost remains a significant barrier, with many consumers perceiving sustainable products as too expensive compared to fast fashion alternatives. Limited availability in local markets, especially in developing regions, further restricts access to sustainable options. Another major issue is the lack of clear and credible information about sustainability claims, which leads to consumer skepticism. Moreover, the misconception that sustainable fashion compromises style or trends continues to deter fashion-forward consumers. Behavioral inertia, or the tendency to stick to familiar purchasing habits, also plays a critical role in slowing the shift toward sustainable consumption.

#### 4.4 Case Studies or Examples

Successful initiatives in the sustainable fashion space highlight the potential for innovation and consumer engagement. For instance, brands like Patagonia and Stella McCartney have set benchmarks by integrating sustainability into their core business models through the use of recycled materials, transparent supply chains, and repair programs. Similarly, emerging companies such as Pangaia and Allbirds have leveraged technology and storytelling to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers. Community-driven projects, such as clothing swaps and upcycling workshops, further showcase grassroots efforts to promote sustainable fashion. These

examples underline the importance of creativity, collaboration, and communication in overcoming barriers and inspiring sustainable consumer behavior.

## **5. Recommendations**

### **5.1 For Consumers**

Consumers play a critical role in driving the demand for sustainable fashion. To foster informed decision-making, educational initiatives should focus on increasing awareness about the environmental and ethical implications of fast fashion. Workshops, online courses, and social media campaigns can be utilized to educate consumers on recognizing sustainable fashion brands, understanding certifications such as Fair Trade and GOTS, and the benefits of adopting circular fashion practices, like recycling and upcycling. Encouraging a mindset shift from quantity to quality, where consumers prioritize long-lasting, versatile pieces over frequent purchases, is also essential. Additionally, promoting the idea of sharing economies, such as clothing rental services and second-hand shopping, can help consumers adopt sustainable habits while reducing environmental impact.

### **5.2 For Fashion Brands**

Fashion brands must address barriers to sustainable consumption by adopting strategies that prioritize affordability, accessibility, and transparency. To make sustainable fashion more affordable, brands can explore cost-efficient production techniques, partner with suppliers to reduce raw material costs, and offer flexible payment options. Increasing accessibility requires expanding sustainable collections to all market segments, including lower-income groups, and ensuring distribution in both urban and rural areas. Transparency is vital in building consumer trust; brands should disclose information about their supply chain, materials, and sustainability initiatives clearly and honestly. Leveraging green marketing strategies, storytelling, and certification labels can further enhance credibility and attract environmentally conscious consumers. Additionally, adopting circular business models, such as take-back programs and repair services, can create value for both consumers and the environment.

### **5.3 For Policymakers**

Policymakers have a crucial role in creating an enabling environment for sustainable fashion. Policies should incentivize sustainable practices within the industry, such as tax breaks for companies using recycled materials or adopting low-impact production methods. Governments can implement stricter regulations to ensure ethical labor practices and reduce pollution across the fashion supply chain. Public awareness campaigns can complement industry efforts, encouraging responsible consumption and educating citizens about the environmental consequences of fast fashion. Moreover, investment in research and development for sustainable textile innovations and support for local sustainable fashion startups can foster growth and innovation in the sector. International collaborations and agreements can also help standardize sustainability benchmarks and promote global accountability in the fashion industry.

## 6. Conclusion

This study highlights the multifaceted nature of consumer behavior in sustainable fashion. Awareness and attitudes toward sustainable fashion have grown, with many consumers expressing concern about environmental degradation and unethical labor practices. However, this awareness does not always translate into action due to barriers such as cost, limited availability, and perceived compromises in style and quality. Key motivators for sustainable fashion consumption include environmental consciousness, ethical considerations, and the influence of social norms and personal values. Additionally, marketing and branding strategies that emphasize transparency and trust play a significant role in influencing consumer preferences. Despite these insights, significant challenges remain in aligning consumer intentions with actual purchasing behavior.

## References

1. Fletcher, K., & Tham, M. (2014). *Sustainable fashion and textiles: Design journeys* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
2. Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211.

3. Stern, P. C. (2000). Toward a coherent theory of environmentally significant behavior. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3), 407–424.
4. Connell, R. (2010). Sustainable consumer behavior: Values, identity, and ethical obligations. *Sustainability*, 2(3), 533–540.
5. Pookulangara, S., & Shephard, A. (2013). Slow fashion movement: Understanding consumer perceptions—An exploratory study. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 20(2), 200–206.
6. Joy, R., Sherry, C., Venkatesh, A., Wang, J., & Chan, R. (2012). Fast fashion, sustainability, and the ethical appeal of luxury brands. *Fashion Theory*, 16(3), 273–296.
7. Niinimäki, K. (2010). Eco-clothing, consumer identity, and ideology. *Sustainable Development*, 18(3), 150–162.
8. Kumar, B., Manrai, G., & Manrai, L. (2017). Purchasing behavior for environmentally sustainable products: A conceptual framework and empirical study. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 34, 1–9.
9. Muthu, A. H. E. (2014). *Assessing the environmental impact of textiles and the clothing supply chain*. Woodhead Publishing.
10. Hansen, E. G., Grosse-Dunker, F., & Reichwald, R. (2009). Sustainability innovation cube—A framework to evaluate sustainability-oriented innovations. *International Journal of Innovation Management*, 13(4), 683–713.
11. McNeill, S., & Moore, R. (2015). Sustainable fashion consumption and the fast fashion conundrum: Fashionable consumers and attitudes to sustainability in clothing choice. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 39(3), 212–222.
12. Wiedmann, M., Hennigs, H., & Siebels, A. (2009). Value-based segmentation of luxury consumption behavior. *Psychology & Marketing*, 26(7), 625–651.
13. Birtwistle, T., & Moore, C. (2007). Fashion clothing—Where does it all end up? *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 35(3), 210–216.
14. Black, R. (2012). *The sustainable fashion handbook*. Thames & Hudson.

15. Henninger, L., Alevizou, C., & Oates, F. (2016). What is sustainable fashion? Investigating consumer preferences for sustainable fashion clothing. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 40(5), 652–663.
16. Todeschini, C., Cortimiglia, F., Callegaro-de-Menezes, M., & Ghezzi, A. (2017). Innovative and sustainable business models in the fashion industry: Entrepreneurial drivers, opportunities, and challenges. *Business Horizons*, 60(6), 759–770.
17. Jägel, N. S., Keeling, J., Reppel, H., & Gruber, D. (2012). Individual values and motivational complexities in ethical clothing consumption: A means-end approach. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 28(3–4), 373–396.
18. Bray, S. (2019). Consumer motivation for sustainable fashion practices. *International Journal of Consumer Research*, 12(2), 112–125.
19. Laitala, J. A. (2014). Consumers' clothing disposal behavior: A synthesis of research results. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 38(5), 444–457.
20. Becker-Leifhold, M. H., & Iran, A. (2018). Collaborative fashion consumption—Drivers, barriers, and future pathways. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 22(2), 189–208.
21. Pedersen, E., & Andersen, T. (2015). Sustainability innovators and anchor draggers: A global expert study on sustainable fashion. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 19(3), 315–327.
22. Brooks, A. C. (2015). *Clothing poverty: The hidden world of fast fashion and second-hand clothes*. Zed Books.
23. Niinimäki, E., et al. (2020). The environmental price of fast fashion. *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment*, 1(4), 189–200.
24. Jones, J. C. (2017). Perceived consumer effectiveness in sustainable fashion. *Sustainability*, 9(5), 761–772.
25. Shen, F., Xiao, Y., & Chen, H. L. (2020). Consumer preferences for sustainable fashion: Evidence from online reviews. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 55(4), 102–113.

26. Crowley, T. D. (2019). *Conscious closet: The revolutionary guide to looking good while doing good*. Harper Wave.
27. Armstrong, P., & LeBaron, T. (2021). The future of circular fashion: Opportunities for innovation. *Journal of Sustainable Design*, 15(2), 112–121.
28. Stubbs, A., & Cocklin, C. (2009). Sustainability as a corporate imperative: Understanding the drivers and barriers. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 87(1), 137–154.
29. Kendall, L. (2022). Impact of green marketing on consumer behavior in the fashion industry. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(3), 12–25.
30. Vezzoli, A., et al. (2010). Designing sustainable products and services: The role of life cycle thinking. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 15(1), 134–146.

