

Sustainability Issues in Fast Fashion Clothing

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to study the sustainability issues in the fast fashion clothing industry. The fast fashion industry quickly replicates the latest trends in clothing from fashion shows, catwalks etc. and makes it available at cheaper rates in retail markets. While this industry helps the youth to have access to new fashion at lesser rates, it uses such materials to make clothes that lead to waste that cannot be disposed of in an environment friendly manner. This leads to pollution of water, soil and air. This industry has a large number of consumers but when it comes to sustainability there is a challenge. In this paper consumer awareness on sustainability in fashion clothing and its impact on buying behavior is proposed to be studied. There is a general belief that consumer awareness transforms their buying behavior. The survey instrument is a questionnaire containing statements on the demographic profile of the respondents, their awareness levels regarding sustainability and their buying behavior in fast fashion clothing. The responses would be measured using a five point Likert scale. The respondents would be millennial and Gen Z as they are the biggest consumers in the fast fashion industry. Analysis would be done using Weighted mean scores and correlation to understand sustainability issues in the fast fashion industry. This paper would be of relevance to the players in fast fashion clothing and to policy makers in knowing consumer preferences, attitudes, awareness levels and their choices. This paper will thus help in bringing about changes in the fast fashion world to make it more sustainable.

Keywords: Sustainability, fast fashion, consumer awareness, buying behavior.

1. INTRODUCTION

This is a century where consumers are buying more clothes and wearing them for less time than ever before. Garments are discarded very quickly as there is change in fashion.

Fast fashion clothing refers to an industry where the manufacturers produce clothes by imitating the styles of celebrities and models in fashion shows using cheap material to make it affordable. These kind of clothing is mostly preferred by genX and millennials. Since fashion changes very fast these clothes are very quickly discarded.

This fast fashion clothing is a big concern for 2 major reasons. Firstly while producing these clothes cheap dyes and materials are used which pollutes the environment to a great extent. Secondly these clothes when dumped are not easy to discard.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has spearheaded an initiative towards a zero waste world. Fast fashion is a big business where plastic fibers, waste water, toxic dyes are polluting the water bodies.

The fast fashion business model is that of quick turnover, high volume, cheap prices.

Followers of fast fashion, mostly teenagers to early 40s may wear an item just a few times and discard it.

It is extremely difficult for the fast fashion industry to embrace sustainability as that makes the clothing line more expensive and therefore unaffordable.

Fast fashion by itself is not sustainable. The industry is responsible for 10% of global carbon emissions and will increase by 50% by 2030. The industry is responsible for 20% of global waste water. Nearly 10% of microplastics dispersed in the ocean each year come from textiles.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Xiaoyang Long, Javad Nasiry (2022) in their paper titled ‘Sustainability In Fast Fashion Industry’ have found that quality goes down as consumers give more importance to fashion and this leads to higher environmental impact.

2.2 Bo Zhang et al (2021) in their paper ‘Consumer Attitude towards Sustainability of Fast Fashion Products in the UK’ have found that there is better awareness of sustainability but this does not automatically translate to buying behaviour. Policy interventions like taxes and subsidies are still needed to bring in sustainability in the fast fashion clothing

2.3 Greg Peters et al, (2021) ‘The Need to Decelerate Fast Fashion in a Hot Climate - A Global Sustainability Perspective on the Garment Industry’ in their paper have found that social benefits and environmental impacts per mass of garment have come down however much greater improvements in carbon foot prints can be achieved by eliminating fossil-fueled electricity supplies and by eliminating fast fashion as a business model.

2.4 Hoang Tien Nguyen, Doan Minch Duc Le, Thein Thong Minh Ho, Phuong Mai Nguyen (2020) ‘Enhancing Sustainability in the Contemporary Model of CSR: a case of fast fashion industry in developing countries’ discuss that fast fashion industry brings the risk of unsustainability to developing countries and therefore these companies have to bring about a sustainable CSR model and promote sustainable leadership and integrate corporate culture.

2.5 Elisa Arrigo (2020), ‘Global Sourcing in Fast Fashion Retailers : Sourcing Locations and Sustainability Considerations’ have found that fast fashion retailers identify sustainability as a key element to consider in selecting sourcing locations since sustainability issues at suppliers factories may represent relevant hidden costs.

2.6 Mark K. Brewer (2019) in his paper ‘ Slow fashion in a Fast Fashion World: Sustainability and Responsibility’ has concluded that the slow fashion movement provides an alternative to the fast fashion model, since slow fashion movement brings suppliers and producers more closely with consumers, thereby enhancing sustainability and corporate social responsibility.

2.7 Sofia Garcia-Torres et al (2017), ‘Effective Disclosure in the Fast Fashion Industry: from Sustainability Reporting to Action’ in their paper have found that there should be shift in focus from reporting to action, financial performance towards sustainable value creation and corporate boundaries towards value creation for the broader sustainable ecosystem.

3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is undertaken to mainly find out whether consumers of fast fashion clothing are aware about sustainability.

Generally fast fashion clothing is embraced by youngsters who would prefer to spend less on fashionable clothing. They may not give too much importance to the environmental issues or consider

the ill effects of fast fashion on the employees in the industry. The study aims to draw the attention of policy makers towards this issue.

The study also aims to inculcate a sense of responsibility among the buyers while choosing their clothes.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the awareness levels of the younger population regarding sustainability issues in the fast fashion industry.
2. To find out whether the awareness of sustainability issues in this industry influences buying behaviour.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study is discussed in this section.

5.1 TARGET POPULATION

The target population for this study is Gen Z and millennials as they are more interested in fashionable clothing.

5.2 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Random sampling technique was used in this study.

5.3 SAMPLE

A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed and 99 completed responses were received. The response rate being 83% .

5.4 INSTRUMENT

Primary data was collected through questionnaires. The questionnaire had two parts. The first part was concerned with getting details about the demographic profile of the respondents.

The second part of the questionnaire had statements to study the awareness levels and buying behaviour of the respondents.

5.5 STATISTICAL TOOLS

The demographic profile of the respondents was analysed using percentages and pie charts.

Likert's five point scale was used to understand the responses for statements relating to the study. The five point scale is as follows:

Strongly agree -5; Agree -4; Neutral -3; Disagree - 2; Strongly disagree-1.

Weighted mean scores were used to analyse and interpret the responses to the statements relating to the study.

6. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

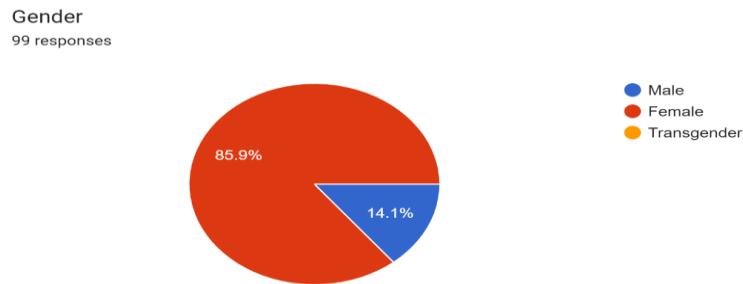
In this section the analysis and findings are presented.

A total of 99 responses were collected through a valid questionnaire.

In the first section of this chapter the demographic profile of the respondents is analysed as follows:

6.1 Gender

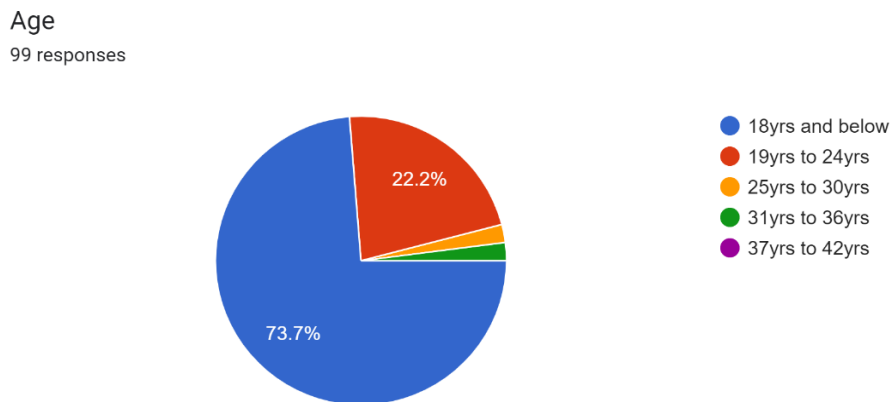
Figure No.6.1 Pie Chart showing responses to gender



85.9% of the respondents are female. 14.1% are male. Female respondents are more when compared to males.

6.2 Age

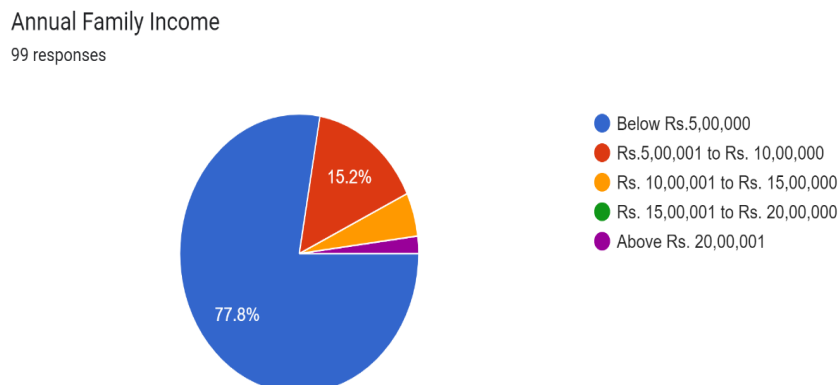
Figure No.6.2 Pie Chart showing responses to Age



When it comes to age 73.7% of the respondents belong to age group of 18 years and below. 22.2% respondents belong to the age group of 19 years to 24 years.

6.3 Annual Income

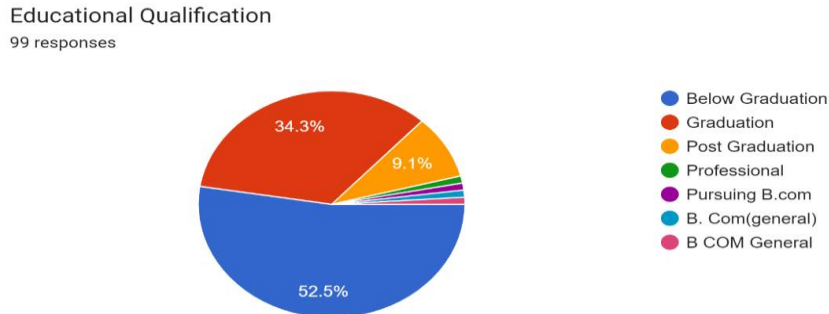
Figure No.6.3 Pie Chart showing responses to Annual Income



77.8% of the respondents have a family income of below Rs.500000/- 15.2% of the respondents have income between Rs.500000 to Rs.1000000.

6.4 Educational Qualification

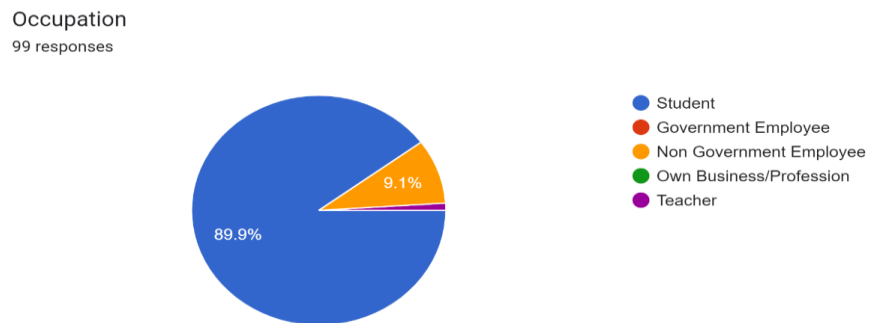
Figure No.6.4 Pie Chart showing responses to Educational Qualification



52.5% of the respondents have educational qualification below graduation. 34.3% of the respondents are graduates. 9.1% of the respondents are graduates.

6.5 Occupation

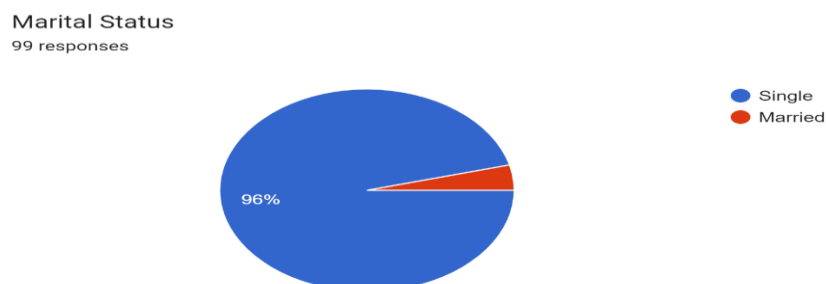
Figure No.6.5 Pie Chart showing responses to Occupation



Out of 99 respondents 89.9% are students. 9.1% are Government employees.

6.6 Marital Status

Figure No6.6 Pie Chart showing responses to Marital Status



96% of the respondents are single. Remaining are married.

In the following section the objectives taken up for the study are analyzed

To study the awareness levels of the younger population regarding sustainability issues in the fast fashion industry.

In order to test the first objective certain statements were put forth in the questionnaire, Based on the responses the weighted mean scores were calculated for each of these statements.

In the following table the statements and the mean scores are given

Table 6.1 Table Showing the Weighted Mean Scores for Statements on Sustainability Issues in Fast Fashion Clothing

S.NO.	STATEMENTS	WEIGHTED MEAN SCORE
1.	Fast fashion is cheap, trendy clothing designed based on ideas from catwalk, celebrity culture and turns them into garments in high street stores at great speed to meet consumer demands	3.33
2.	Textile production contributes more to climate change than international aviation and shipping	3.41
3.	Fast fashion industry is responsible for as much as 10% carbon dioxide emissions	3.47
4.	Workers in the fast fashion industry are mostly paid very less	3.56
5.	Workers in the fast fashion industry are exposed to toxic dyes and work in poor conditions	3.75
6.	The pollution waste and emissions of fast fashion industry are fueling	3.72
7.	Fast fashion is not sustainable and is harmful to the environment	3.66

As is evident from the above table for all the statements the weighted mean score is above 3. The overall weighted mean score comes to 3.55. This shows that the respondents are aware of the sustainability issues prevailing in the fast fashion industry to some extent.

Having understood that there is awareness regarding the ill effects to a certain level, an attempt is made to understand the buying behaviour of our respondents which is the second objective.

To find out whether the awareness of sustainability issues in this industry influences buying behaviour.

The questionnaire had statements to understand the buying behaviour of the respondents. Some statements were given to know whether the respondents keep fashion as a priority over sustainability when they buy clothes and some other statements were given to test the vice versa.

Following tables give the weighted mean scores for these two sets of statements.

Table 6.2 Table showing the Weighted Mean Scores for Buying Decisions Based on Fashion and Latest Trend

S.NO	STATEMENTS	WEIGHTED MEAN SCORES
1.	I always buy clothes that are latest in the fashion world	3.28
2.	I spend more on clothes that are very fashionable	2.93
3.	Whenever I shop for clothes, I ask the salesperson for the latest arrival	3.35
4.	When it comes to latest fashion and sustainability, I choose latest fashion	3.19
5.	Consumers of today buy more clothes and wear them for less time	4.06

It can be seen from the above table that for most of the statements the weighted mean score is more than 3 except for the statement which is ‘I spend more on clothes that are very fashionable.’

The score is above 4 for the statement ‘Consumers of today buy more clothes and wear them for less time.’

The overall weighted mean score for the above statements is 3.36 which goes to show that the respondents are interested in buying clothes that are in trend and fashionable. The following table shows the weighted mean scores for statements which gives priority to sustainability over fashion while buying clothes

Table 6.3 Table showing Weighted Mean Scores for Statements which give importance to Sustainability over Fashion while Buying Clothes

S.NO.	STATEMENTS	WEIGHTED MEAN SCORES
1.	I buy clothes made of natural fibers	3.05
2.	I don't mind spending extra to purchase clothes that are sustainable	3.14
3.	I urge my family members and friends to buy clothes that are manufactured keeping in mind environmental safety	3.15
4.	I urge my family to buy clothes that can be recycled and used	2.49

For the above statements the weighted mean scores are slightly above 3 and for the last statements it is below 3. The overall weighted mean score for the above statements is 2.95 which is well below 3 which

goes to show that respondents do not prioritize environmental and sustainability issues while buying clothes.

It can be well understood from the study that even though there is some awareness about sustainability issues in fast fashion industry as is evident from the first objective, the same is not resulted in conscious buying behaviour as seen in the analysis of the second objective.

7. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 For Consumers

The following suggestions are put forth to the consumers of fast fashion clothing

1. These consumers have to educate themselves with the hazards inherent in fast fashion clothing.
2. Buy fewer but good clothing brands which practice sustainability
3. Choose quality over quantity and use clothes for longer periods.
4. Buy trans seasonal clothes that can be used in all seasons
5. Instead of dumping clothes as waste, mend it and donate them.
6. Support local weavers who use natural fibers to produce garments.

7.2 For manufacturers and retailers

Though in the recent past many fast fashion brands have improved on their sustainability and eco friendly production methods, the following suggestions are given to the manufacturers and sellers for getting better with their good practices:

1. The manufacturers have to bring in sustainability and environment friendly practices w in their production process.
2. As much as possible natural fibers can be used.
3. Retailers can also think of ways to buy back old clothes, recycle it and sell them at lesser prices to the underprivileged so that dumping of clothes can be avoided.
4. Can give proper instructions to consumers on how clothes have to be washed and maintained so that the life of the garment is enhanced.

7.3 For policymakers

The following suggestions are given to policy makers

1. Create awareness among the younger population about sustainability issues.
2. Can give incentives and subsidies to promote manufacturers who give importance to environment friendly practices.
3. Encourage local weavers to take their products to the consumers.

7. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study was conducted at a small level to understand sustainability issues in the fast fashion industry.

The same study can be done with more statements and respondents to understand the problem better.

More studies can be conducted in this area to bring in awareness and transform buying behavior.

Case study taking a particular outlet can be done and suggestions can be given.

A study can be done with fashion designers to understand their working patterns and their consciousness when it comes to designing fashion outfits.

Studies can be done among workers in the industry to understand their issues regarding working conditions.

CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to study the sustainability issues in fast fashion industry. From the analysis it can be understood that respondents are to some extent aware of sustainability issues in fast fashion. However it has not positively impacted their buying behaviour.

It may look like fast fashion comes with less price but actually it comes with a very heavy price since these industries emit pollutants hazardous to our planet earth.

Thus it can be concluded that these brands are improving on their environment friendly practices however there should be more awareness among the younger generation regarding fast fashion clothing and they have to become informed buyers.

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