



Sustainable Fashion Consumption: Influence Of Fashion Consciousness And Environmental Concern

Rebecca Lalmuanpuii^{1*}, Dr. Carolyn Vanlalhriati², Dr. R. Lalhmingthanga³

^{1*}Research Scholar, Department of Management, School of Economics, Management & Information Science (SEMIS), Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram, India

²Assistant Professor, Department of Management, School of Economics, Management & Information Science (SEMIS), Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram, India

³Associate Professor, Govt. Johnson College, Aizawl, Mizoram, India

Citation: Rebecca Lalmuanpuii, et.al (2024) Sustainable Fashion Consumption: Influence Of Fashion Consciousness And Environmental Concern, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(1), 4045-4053
DOI: 10.53555/kuey.v30i1.7731

ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

Sustainable consumption involves making mindful decisions about consumption, utilisation and disposal of items, and has been recognised as one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), envisioned to be used as a "common framework" for global prosperity and peace. The fashion industry in particular thrives on mass consumption; precipitated by trend-focused, fast-paced product lifecycles to entice consumers, without consideration of its adverse impact on the environment. Therefore, this study wishes to address the issue by exploring the relationship between fashion consciousness and environmental concern with the consumption of sustainable fashion, and whether they play a significant role in influencing consumers' consumption pattern. The study targeted consumers of apparel (fashion) goods, and data were collected from 101 individual Gen-Z, Millennial and Gen-X consumers residing in the state of Mizoram in North-East India through an online survey. The survey comprised of several items divided into 4 sections namely, 1) Demographic information, 2) Interest in Fashion, 3) Environmental concern, and 4) Awareness of and behaviour towards sustainable fashion consumption. A 5-point Likert ranking system was used in the survey. Linear regression was used to find the relationship between the variables. Analysis of data shows us that environmental concern has a significant influence on sustainable fashion consumption, whereas fashion consciousness does not. The findings however also bring to notice the gap in the understanding of sustainable consumption practices by consumers. These findings contribute to existing literature on sustainable consumption in the field of fashion by understanding consumer awareness and willingness to adopt sustainable fashion consumption practices. Furthermore, the study suggests managerial implications for fashion business decision-makers in implementing changes to achieving sustainable supply chains, and towards sustainable marketing and educating consumers.

Keywords: Sustainable Fashion, Sustainable Fashion Consumption, Fashion Consciousness, Environmental Concern

1. Introduction

The ever-evolving modern world of globalization and advancements in technology have impacted the way consumers consume. Consumption forms the very basis of the fashion industry (Ma et al, 2012). Majority of the brands and organisations in the fashion industry are profit-oriented and lack environmental concern; they often push for sales-increasing promotions that can lead to irresponsible consumption behaviour by their customers. This has been expedited by the introduction of "fast fashion" in the recent years. Fast fashion emphasises on the consumer's "insatiable thirst for novelty" (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006) and hastening the production of new collections with shorter "fashion seasons" where the sole focus is on speed of the product cycle without taking accountability of its negative implications or the sustainability aspect (Ozdamar-Ertekin, 2016).

The two terms fashion and sustainability are unlikely to be fundamentally compatible concepts, where the nature of the former involves short and quick-paced production, distribution and consumption cycles (Ertekin

& Atik, 2015) and the latter entails mindful practices and ethical values (Cervellon et al., 2010) that are often absent from the fashion industry. The fashion industry heavily relies on its consumers; and many of the consumers, who show affinity towards fashion, have long been dictated by the fast-paced nature of the industry having short and brisk cycles (Ma et al., 2012). This trend-focused industry introduces new designs and styles that ramp up the rate of consumption every season to increase the industry sales turnover. However, considerations for the sustenance of the industry due to its adverse effects on the social and ecological aspects have gained prominence in the emerging times (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022).

However, the negative effects of the current garment or fashion industry is making way into the awareness of consumers, leading to distaste towards over-consumption (Geiger & Keller, 2017) that has been heavily influenced by fast-fashion. Consumers are gradually becoming more educated and concerned about the detrimental effects of their over-consumption habits on the environment, as well as the implications of over-consumption and over-production (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). Environmentally conscious fashion consumers are for demanding change in the operation of the fashion industry and are also taking action into their own hands (Yoon, Lee, & Choo, 2020).

It therefore becomes essential to understand consumers' environmental concern and sustainable consumption behaviour when it comes to the consumption of fashion (Minton & Rose, 1997). It is necessary to evaluate and understand whether fashion-consciousness alone can determine consumption patterns that are sustainable, with the growing concerns towards the influence of the sector on over-consumption, and how it could possibly influence market trends. This research aims to study the influence of consumers fashion-consciousness as well as environmental concern towards eco-friendly fashion practices in the case of Mizoram in North-East India.

2. Conceptual Background

2.1 Sustainable Fashion Consumption

Sustainable fashion is an all-inclusive term that encompasses all goods, technology, activities, and stakeholders to achieve a carbon-neutral industry based on transparency, equality, ecological integrity, animal welfare, and social justice (Henninger, Alevizou & Oates, 2016). The concept of sustainable fashion involves an ethical approach adopted in the entire fashion value chain - from designing, sourcing raw materials, producing, selling, and consuming in a manner that reduces the industry's negative influence on the planet as well as its inhabitants. Additionally, consumers' perceptions of sustainable fashion have evolved through time, and words like "eco-fashion" and "ethical fashion" have grown in popularity (Davidavičienė, Raudeliuniene & Zubrii, 2019). The following table summarises the various definitions of Sustainable Fashion Consumption found in past literature.

Table 1: Sustainable Fashion Consumption Definitions from past literature

Definition	Author(s)
Relationship with clothing that is ethical in purchase and consumption	Clarke & Holt, 2016
Emotional ties that influence a person's long-term interactions with their clothes.	McIntyre, 2019
Slow fashion that can increase the consumption of environmentally friendly clothing.	Gupta, Gwozdz, & Gentry, 2019
Behavior that respects the environment and has a harmonious relationship with altruistic principles.	Geiger, Grossman & Keller, 2018
Consists of different consumption approaches: renting, borrowing, trading, and purchasing second-hand.	McNeill & Venter, 2019
One of the frequently recommended approaches for making fashion retail sustainable is reuse.	Hedegard, Gustafsson, & Paras, 2019

Some of these definitions imply that sustainable fashion consumption encompasses more than just the surface value as it takes a deeper approach towards the emotional sentiment of the consumer (Tey, Brindal & Dibba). According to studies (Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; Zimmer et al., 1994), consumers who are environmentally conscious and adopt eco-friendly behaviours are inclined to shop for more sustainable products. Additionally, consumers who are more likely to engage in environmentally conscious behaviours are also more likely to engage in consumption practices that are sustainable (Kim & Damhorst, 1998).

2.2 Fashion consciousness

The process of consumption throughout numerous categories of goods is moulded by the desire that people have to give meaning and express themselves by creating a sense of identity. This becomes more prominent in the case of fashion, driven by vanity and visibility (Berger & Heath, 2007). According to Simmel (1957),

fashion is an amalgam of societal uniformity as well as distinct individual identity, where any piece of apparel, works of art, actions, or point of view may become fashionable. Fashion consciousness is described as an individual's extent of engagement with the latest style or fashion trends (Nam et al., 2006). It constitutes an individual's personal affinity and interest in fashion, and less of being a forerunner in the fashion business as an innovator or opinion leader. According to Belk (1988), the use of attire may be employed to both reaffirm and generate ideas about the individual to others. It is through clothing that consumers seek to express their unique identities that adhere to societal conventions (Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Murray, 2002). Furthermore, consumers that are more inclined to be interested in fashion are privy to more clothing-related knowledge and are therefore more probable to take pleasure in shopping for clothes (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Sproles, 1979). Shopping-loving consumers exhibit certain lifestyles, intentions, and perspectives (Lee & Kim, 2008; Shim & Kotsiopulos, 1993). According to Shim & Kotsiopulos (1993), their reasons for buying are a reflection of their social and recreational identity. They care about looking put together, and they rarely hesitate to buy styles they enjoy (Moye & Kincade, 2003). These fashion-conscious consumers therefore influence the overall consumption pattern in fashion. Considering this already existing passion for clothing can boost the attraction of customers to clothing advertising, marketers consider it is an advantageous trait of consumers (Richards & Sturman, 1977; Kaiser & Chandler, 1984). This study seeks to contribute to the body of literature through examining the role of fashion consciousness as a determining factor in sustainable fashion consumption practises. Therefore, we arrive at the first hypothesis.

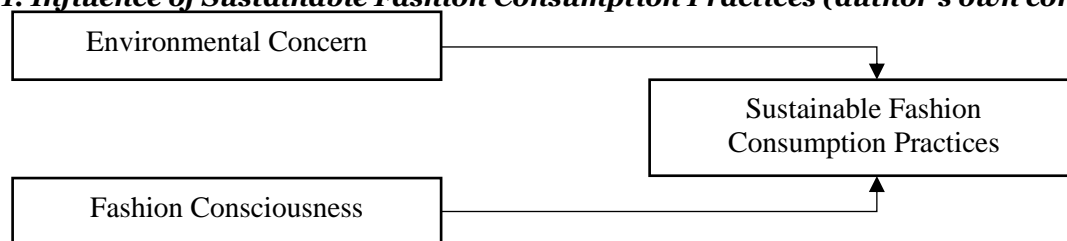
H₁: Fashion consciousness has a positive relationship with sustainable fashion consumption practises.

2.3 Environmental concern

Environmental concern is a term used to describe psychological variables that influence a person's tendency for environmentally friendly actions (Zelezny & Schultz, 2000). The notion of environmental concern emerged from the West in the 1960s amongst consumers who resisted acquiring specific goods due to their ecologically damaging consequences (Grunert & Juhl, 1995). Over time, this frame of mind grew entrenched, and customers developed sensitivity towards buying environmentally hazardous goods. Irresponsible consumption of goods and services causes several adverse impacts on the environment. For example, the items we purchase are responsible for change in climate, contamination, declines in biodiversity, and reduction of invaluable resources, either in a direct or indirect manner through the product lifecycle. The process of consumption in the fashion sector needs to pay heed to its detrimental environmental impact. Therefore, responsibility falls on the shoulder of both manufacturers and consumers. The term "environmental responsibility" outlines a state in which an individual communicates a desire to engage in behaviour aimed at addressing environmental issues—acting rather as a consumer with an understanding of societal-environmental well-being rather than as a consumer with individualistic economic interests (Stone et al., 1995). This study aims to explore the impact of consumers' environmental concern on their sustainable consumption. Sustainable consumption intention is a term that pertains to an individual's degree of consideration for the environment, and is sometimes seen as an immediate precursor to environmental concern (Yue et al., 2020). We therefore formulate our second hypothesis.

H₂: Environmental concern has a positive relationship with sustainable fashion consumption practises.

Figure 1: Influence of Sustainable Fashion Consumption Practices (author's own conception)



The objectives of the study are:

- 1) To examine the relationship between fashion consciousness and sustainable fashion consumption practices; and
- 2) To examine the relationship between environmental concern and sustainable fashion consumption practices.

3. Method

An online survey questionnaire was distributed to collect primary data from respondents using a sample drawn from Gen-Z (18-26 years), Millennial (27-42 years) and Gen X (43-58 years) consumers residing in Mizoram in North-East India, where (n)101 responses were returned. The survey instrument was divided into 4 parts to achieve the objectives of the study, namely 1) Demographic information, 2) Interest in Fashion, 3) Environmental concern, and 4) Awareness of and behaviour towards sustainable fashion consumption. Apart from demographic questions, several variables were identified to represent each section and statements were formulated to measure those variables. Closed-ended structured questions pertaining to the variables included:

importance of fashion, self-perception through clothing, forms of expression, effort and contribution towards protecting the environment, interest in sustainable fashion, preference of sustainable fashion over fast fashion, awareness of sustainable fashion consumption practices, etc., were included in the survey to ensure the quality of responses. The items used a 5-point Likert ranking system to answer statements ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Following the collection of data, linear regression has been used to find out the relationship between Fashion Consciousness and Environmental Concern with Sustainable Fashion Consumption Behaviour.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Analysis

Response analysis shows that a majority (70.3%) of the respondents were female and male respondents constituted 28.7% while 1% did not choose to disclose their gender. 59.4% of the respondents were Millennials, 30.7% belonged to Gen Z and 9.9% to Gen X.

Table 2: Demographic profile of the respondents

		Count	%
Age	Gen-Z (18-26 years)	31	30.7
	Millennials (27-42 years)	60	59.4
	Gen-X (43-58 years)	10	9.9
Total		101	100
Gender	Male	29	28.7
	Female	71	70.3
	Prefer not to say	1	1.0
Total		101	100
Employment Status	Employed full-time	27	26.7
	Employed part-time	8	7.9
	Home-maker	2	2.0
	Student	35	34.7
	Retired	1	1.0
	Seeking opportunities	14	13.9
	Self-employed	14	13.9
Total		101	100

4.2 Attitude towards Fashion and Environmental Consciousness

Regarding interest in fashion, 40% of the respondents showed a positive inclination while 47% had a neutral stance on fashion. Only 19% did not show any interest towards fashion. 42% of the respondents stated that they believed they have good taste in fashion. 45% of the respondents believe that clothing is a way of self-expression and 66% expressed that they care about the way they dress in public. The overall trend seen in the responses towards fashion orientation are positive. To more than 83% of the respondents, it was important to make efforts to protect the environment for future generations and 81% answered that it would mean a lot to them if they could contribute to protecting the environment. This tells us that environmental consciousness is high among the respondents (Mainieri et al., 1997).

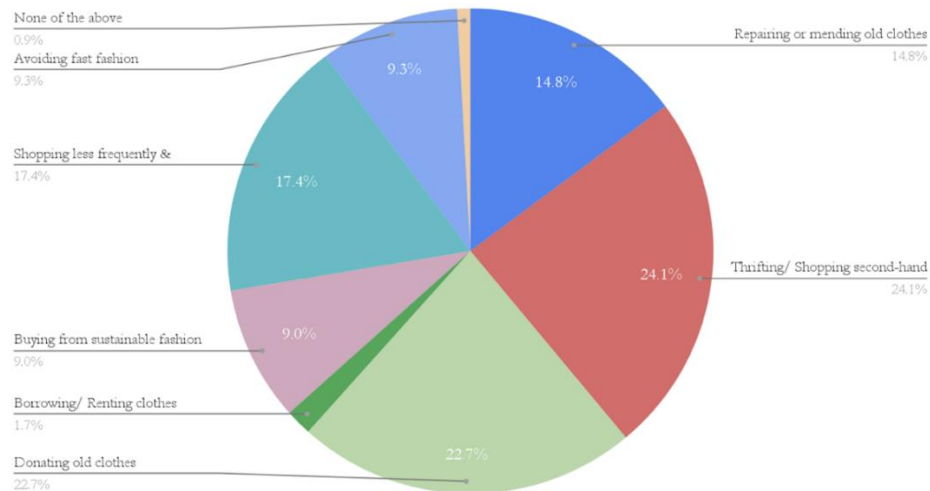
4.3 Attitude towards Sustainable Fashion Consumption

Moreover, 80% of the respondents believe that it is important to have a sustainable approach towards fashion, while more than half (56%) were aware of sustainable practices in fashion. 66% respondents were interested in learning more about sustainable practices in fashion and 63% expressed their desire to incorporate these practices in their lifestyle. When asked about fast fashion consumption, only 28% of the respondents said they avoid it due to its harmful effects on the environment; 33% said when they shop for clothing they care about whether it is sustainably or ethically made while 40% of the respondents were neutral about this aspect. However, 52% of the respondents stated that they would choose sustainable fashion over the former if given the choice, and 64% that they would feel honoured to choose a fashion brand that engages in promoting sustainability.

Further analysis of fashion conscious respondents in particular shows that only 26% of respondents who were interested in fashion had awareness of sustainable fashion consumption practices; 32% showed interest in learning more about these practices and 30% indicated wanting to incorporate these practices in their lifestyle. Only 20% of fashion conscious respondents stated that they would choose sustainable fashion over fast fashion.

When asked about respondents' existing sustainable fashion consumption practices, thrifting or shopping second-hand showed the highest frequency (f=84), followed by donating old clothes (f=78), then shopping less frequently & choosing good quality products (f=60), and repairing or mending old clothes (f=51). Avoiding fast fashion (f=32) and buying from sustainable fashion brands (f=31), while borrowing/ renting clothes showed the least response (f=6). Only 3 responses stated that they did not follow any sort of sustainable fashion practises mentioned above. This shows us that a majority (97%) of the respondents, regardless of fashion consciousness or environmental concern, already practice some form of sustainable fashion consumption.

Figure 2: Respondents' Existing Sustainable Fashion Consumption Practices



Further, linear regression was carried out to test the hypotheses and find out the relationship between fashion consciousness and environmental concern with sustainable fashion consumption behaviour.

Table 3: Model summary

Model Summary										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
						R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.661 ^a	.437	.429		.61771	.437	53.588	2	138	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), fashion consciousness(FC), environmental concern(EC)

Source: Author's own calculation

As depicted by Table 3, the value of R^2 is 0.661 which shows the independent variables' prediction of satisfaction has a good value.

Table 4: ANOVA

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	40.895	2	20.447	53.588	.000 ^b
	Residual	52.656	138	.382		
	Total	93.551	140			
a. Dependent Variable: sustainable fashion consumption practises(SF)						
b. Predictors: (Constant), fashion consciousness(FC), environmental concern(EC)						

Source: Author's own calculation

Furthermore, the variability of the independent variables is 43.7%, signifying it's significance. As shown in table 4, the dependent variables are significantly predicted by the independent variables [$F(2,138) = 53.588$, $P < 0.05$]. Therefore, the model used proves to be a good fit of data.

Table 5: Coefficients

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.682	.315		2.168	.032
	FC	.076	.064	.081	1.188	.237
	EC	.597	.064	.629	9.263	.000
a. Dependent Variable: sustainable fashion consumption practises(SF)						
b. Predictors: (Constant), fashion consciousness(FC), environmental concern(EC)						

Source: Author's own calculation

Table 5 shows that fashion consciousness as a predictor does not have significance i.e., ($p < 0.05$), whereas the other predictor, environmental concern is significant. This therefore indicates that a significant relationship between fashion consciousness and sustainable fashion consumption practises (the dependent variable) does not exist.

$$Y = .682 + .076X_1 + .597X_2$$

Table 3 indicates that, with regard to model 1, a significant regression equation has been formed to the aforementioned variables with a p value less than the presumptive significance threshold of 5%. Therefore, from the above equation, it has been deduced that:

- As $\beta = 0.076$, t value = 1.188 and p value = 0.237, it is greater than the assumed significance level of 5%, and hence observed that fashion consciousness has no influence on sustainable fashion consumption practises. **Thus, the hypothesis H₁ (fashion consciousness has a positive relationship with sustainable fashion consumption practises) is rejected.**
- As $\beta = 0.597$, t value = 9.263 and p value = 0.000, it is lesser than the assumed significance level of 5%, and hence observed that environmental concern has positive and some influence on sustainable fashion consumption practises. **Thus, the hypothesis H₂ (environmental concern has a positive relationship with sustainable fashion consumption practises) is accepted.**

According to survey results, consumers are generally aware of sustainability and ethical consumption concepts, but presented a drop in existing sustainable consumption practices when it came to fashion conscious consumers in comparison to those who showed concern for the environmental. We can determine from the findings that fashion consciousness did not play a deciding factor in influencing sustainable fashion consumption, rather environmental concern influences the consumption of sustainable fashion.

5. Conclusion

While stakeholders involved in fashion are taking steps to tackle the unsustainable aspects of the industry, but their long-term viability is contingent upon customers supporting sustainable fashion by adopting it. This study explored two variables that influence consumers' consumption of sustainable fashion, namely, fashion consciousness and environmental concern. Although consumers seem to worry progressively more about unethical conduct in fashion, the concern they show does not always necessarily manifest into tangible actions (Bray et al., 2010), more particularly when fashion items are involved (Joergens, 2006), which has been backed by the survey findings. It is therefore necessary to take action towards finding the factors and causes that can play a deciding factor for consumers to adopt consumption of sustainable fashion. The presence of environmental concern, however, has been found to be a deciding factor in the influence of sustainable fashion consumption.

The findings entail managerial implications on two levels, for decision-makers involved in production and for marketers. Manufacturing and production processes need to show accountability towards environmental issues involved in the fashion industry. More than 80% respondents believe that it is important to have a sustainable approach towards fashion. Marketers must offer educative campaigns, programmes and other appropriate approaches to consumers since they are not sufficiently informed about sustainable fashion and

the value it provides. Majority of the respondents (64%) stated that they would feel honoured to choose a fashion brand that engages in promoting sustainability. Consumer understanding of the significance of these sustainable approached towards fashion consumption as well as sensitivity towards these issues need to be established through education and awareness programs. Despite a majority of the respondents (97%) having already practicing some form of sustainable fashion consumption (such as thrifting or shopping second-hand, donating old clothes, shopping less frequently & choosing good quality products, repairing or mending old clothes, etc.), only over a third (33%) said they care about whether it is sustainably or ethically when they shop for clothing. Additionally, only 28% of the respondents said they avoid fast fashion due to its harmful effects on the environment. This shows us the lack of connection between awareness of sustainable fashion practices or and behaviour displayed by the respondents, which can be further explored in future research work. The study also explores only whether fashion consciousness has the influence towards sustainable fashion consumption, which has been found to be rejected, without focusing on the reasons behind the lack of influence of fashion consciousness towards sustainable fashion consumption can be delved into. Furthermore, the study's limitations is the lack of generalisability of its findings due to the administration of the survey in a single Indian state and therefore its findings may not accurately reflect the views of the entire nation, despite being deemed to be a representative sample. Hence, the study provides future scope for further study through a larger and more diverse sample size.

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