



## MOVING TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE FASHION: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES IN FASHION INDUSTRY

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### **Abstract**

*In recent years, there has been an increasing demand for sustainable fashion across the world, driven by a combination of consumer awareness and government initiatives promoting sustainable development. The environmental and social cost of the fast fashion industry also pushes people to reconsider fast fashion and highlight the need for a more sustainable business model and practices in the fashion industry. Sustainable fashion aims to promote the utilization of environmentally friendly materials and production methods that reduce environmental degradation and enhance the social and economic conditions of the workers employed in the sector. This includes the use of natural and organic materials, the reduction of waste, and the promotion of fair trade and ethical manufacturing practices. The present study aims to examine the benefits as well as challenges in this fashion segment. The study also provides a brief outline on various sustainable practices followed in the fashion industry.*

**Keywords:** *Fashion Industry, Sustainable Fashion, Fast Fashion, Sustainability, Pollution*

### **Introduction**

The fashion industry is one of the most resource intensive and pollution-plagued industries in the world. It has been riddled with multiple ethical issues ranging from exploitative labor practices to the promotion of unscrupulous consumption. The fashion industry has also significant impact on the environment. The industry produces significant carbon emissions, uses trillions of liters of water annually, and is responsible for making millions of tons of waste each year. The fashion world alone contributes 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions, surpassing the combined emissions of aviation and shipping. About 20% of all industrial water pollution originates from the textile manufacturing and dyeing process. The industry generates over 92 million tons of waste every year, with the vast majority of that waste going to landfills and incinerators. The fashion industry is also associated with the violation of human and animal rights, including the use of harsh chemicals in production, which can lead to illnesses among workers and sometimes even congenital disabilities among children forced to work in this field. In developing countries, poor working conditions are provided in order to keep prices low.

The fashion industry has also been linked to the violation of animal and human rights in addition to these environmental problems. Harsh chemicals used in production lead to illnesses in workers and occasionally cause congenital disabilities in kids who are forced to work in the fields as children. Low pay and poor working conditions in developing nations have been sacrificed to keep prices in fast fashion low. The workers at these companies are not given a comfortable factory working environment. The expansion of fast fashion also contributes to the detrimental effects of the fashion



sector. Only a small proportion of clothing waste is recycled, while the vast majority of clothing waste ending up in landfills.

1. The fashion industry is one of the important part of our economies , accounting for more than 2.5 trillion \$USD in value and employing more than 75 million people around the world. The industry has seen tremendous growth in recent years, with clothing production doubling from 2000 to 2014. While consumers purchased 60% more clothing in 2014 than they did in 2000, they kept only half as much of it as long.(McKinsey & Company, 2016).
2. Fashion production is accountable for 10% of the world's total carbon emissions, drying up water sources and polluting rivers and streams, while 85% of textiles end up in landfills every year (UNECE, 2018)
3. Plastic makes up about 60% of all the materials used in the fashion industry.(UNEP, 2019)
4. Every year, 500,000 tons of micro fibers are discharged into the ocean as a result of clothing washing, which is equivalent to 50 billion plastic bottles.(Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017)
5. Every year, the fashion industry uses about 93 billion cubic metres (enough to meet the needs of five million people) , which is a major contributor to water shortages in some regions of the world.(UNCTAD, 2020)
6. About 20% of global industrial wastewater pollution comes from the fashion sector (WRI, 2017).
7. One in six individuals are employed in a fashion-based profession, and more than 80% of all garment workers are underpaid women or girls , reported by Fair Trade Certified.
8. Every second, a quantity of textiles equivalent to one garbage truck full is disposed of in landfills or burned (United Nations Alliance for Sustainable Fashion )

Hence, to address its externalities, the sustainable fashion movement was born. As these negative impacts become more perceptible and widely known, sustainable fashion is increasingly receiving attention from policymakers and fashion stakeholders. In recent years sustainable fashion is gaining momentum as the world becomes more eco-conscious, with significant shifts occurring in the global fashion industry. Sustainable fashion aims to promote the use of eco-friendly materials and production processes that reduce the negative impact on the environment and improve social and economic conditions for the workers involved in the industry. They are specifically hinged on environmental conservation, worker empowerment, ethical sourcing, responsible consumerism, and corporate social responsibility. It is the fashion developed by companies that prioritize the well-being of their employees by providing them with a living wage, safe and healthy working conditions, and monitoring their environmental impact through the use of more sustainable materials and reduced resource consumption throughout their product lifecycle.

### **Sustainable fashion takes many forms, including**

- **Eco-friendly fashion brands**  
Eco friendly fashion brands focus on sustainable and eco-friendly fashion. Most eco friendly fashion brands use natural & organic materials, fair trade brands and transparent supply chains  
Eco friendly fashion is clothing made with eco conscious materials and processes that reduce environmental impact.
- **Circular fashion**  
Circular fashion refers to the closed-loop approach to clothing design, manufacturing, and consumption. It focuses on reducing waste and promoting sustainability through the use of recycled and up cycled materials and the promotion of clothing repair and maintenance.

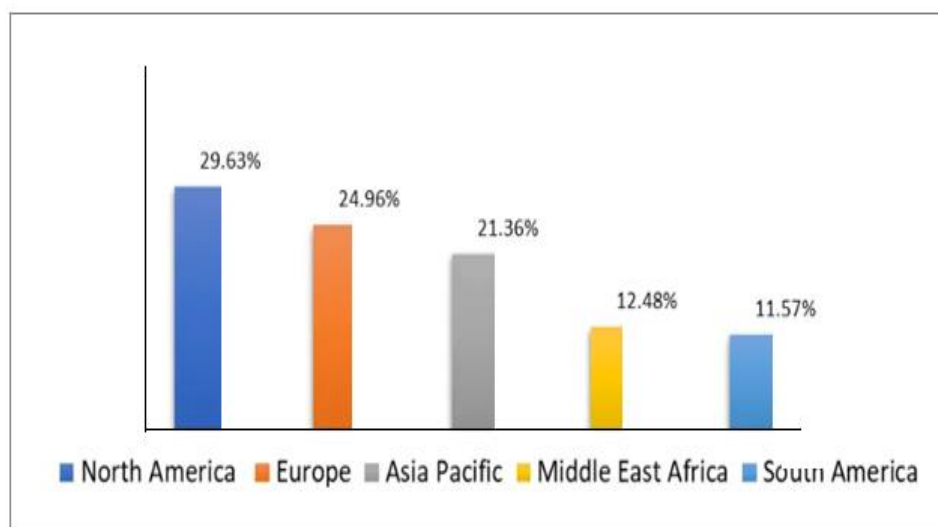


- **Zero waste**  
Zero waste is the practice of reducing waste throughout a garment's entire life cycle, from manufacturing to disposal. This means reducing waste during production, using recyclable materials, and promoting the recycling or up cycling of clothing rather than throwing it away.
- **Upcycling and recycling**  
Upcycling and recycling are two critical practices in a sustainable fashion. Up cycling is the process of transforming an item of material or clothing into a new, higher-value item, while recycling is the process of breaking down an item of material and transforming it into a new product.
- **Ethical and fair trade practices**  
Eco fashion also incorporates ethical and fair trade practices. This represents ensuring that all workers involved in the manufacturing process are paid fairly and work in safe conditions. It also implies employing materials that are sourced in an ethical and sustainable way.
- **Natural clothing**  
Natural clothing is produced from materials such as wool, linen, and cotton. These materials are renewable and biodegradable, making them more sustainable than synthetic materials.

The sustainable fashion market is still in its early stages, but it has shown steady growth over the past few years. The global sustainable fashion market size was estimated to be worth at USD 6.89 Bn in 2022 and the total sustainable fashion revenue is expected to grow by 8.2 % from 2023 to 2029, reaching nearly USD 11.96 Bn.

In recent years, many brands and designers in India have adopted sustainable practices to address issues caused by fast fashion. The sustainable fashion market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 10.6% during 2022-2027, according to a report by Research And Markets.

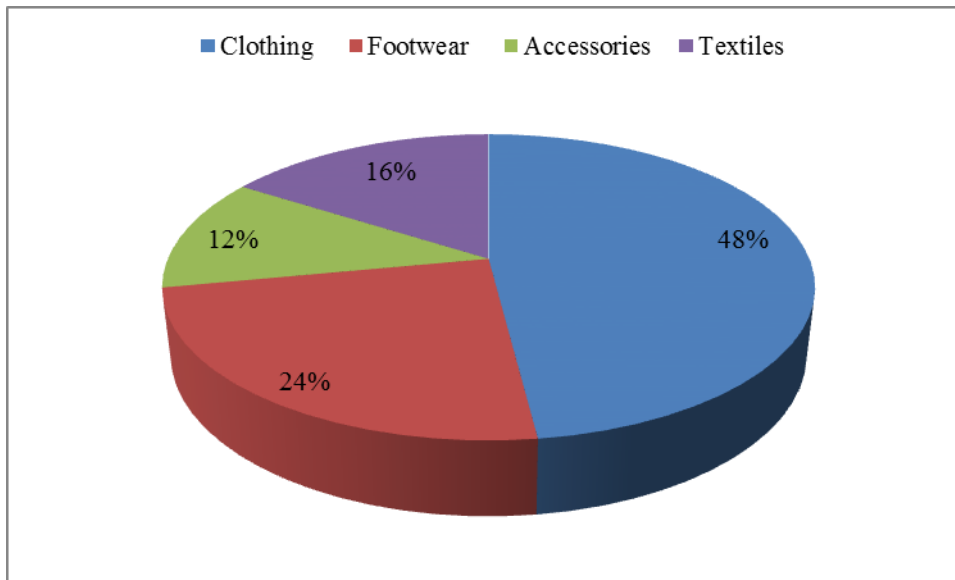
**Figure1: Sustainable Market Regional Insights by % (2022)**



Source: Maximum Market Research



**Figure 2: Sustainable Fashion Market by Type(%) (2022)**



Source: Maximum Market Research

The market's growth will be propelled by increased consumer awareness, government initiatives, and the availability of sustainable materials, as per Research And Markets.com. This article explores the importance of sustainable fashion and the benefits and challenges to this transformative movement. By understanding and embracing sustainable fashion, people can contribute to a more responsible and ethical fashion industry.

### Significance of the Study

The fashion industry is among the biggest contributors to pollution and social injustice. In addition, this industry has been also accused of violating animal and human rights. Sustainability in fashion means reducing environmental impact, improving social conditions, encouraging mindful consumption, and supporting local communities. It involves addressing issues such as excessive waste, water pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, unethical labor practices, and the depletion of natural resources. By embracing sustainability, the fashion industry can work towards minimizing its negative impact, preserving the planet for future generations, and creating a more equitable and sustainable and equitable fashion ecosystem. Young people of Generation Z are more likely than any other generation to be willing to pay higher prices for sustainable goods. The environmental impact of fast fashion is well known to this generation and they show strong values regarding environmental issues. Sustainable fashion has become a necessary move towards more responsible practices in an effort to protect our planet from further environmental damage.

### Objectives

- To examine the importance of sustainable fashion in fashion industry
- To identify the benefits and challenges in sustainable fashion sector.



## Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature. Secondary data collection technique is used to examine the important aspects for this study,. Data has been collected from varied sources like published papers, books, websites, blogs and articles.

## Review of Literature

Hustvedt (2008) observed that fiber origins, types, and manufacturing processes shape consumers' perception of sustainable fashion product characteristics. Consumers prefer to purchase clothing made with sustainably sourced fibers and use value-based labels

Chan & Wong (2012) suggest that product-related characteristics do not have a direct influence on consumer decision-making when it comes to purchasing sustainable fashion products. Rather, store-specific characteristics for e.g: ambiance, convenience, aesthetics have a positive effect on consumer consumption decisions when it comes to sustainable fashion products, which can be further impeded by high-cost premiums.

Fletcher (2012) argued that fashion can make a positive contribution to the SDGs by engaging in sustainable activities and utilizing fair trade practices. This can lead to a decrease in energy consumption, a decrease in and improvement of natural resource and water consumption, a reduction in the burden of landfilling, and a decrease in the use of toxic chemicals.

Gleim et al.(2013) identified higher prices and limited accessibility of sustainable fashion as two of the main barriers to sustainable fashion consumption.

Ozdamar (2015) identified a variety of macro-environmental barriers, including globalization, the desire for economic expansion, inadequate public policies, and a lack of adequate infrastructure and resources. Additionally, the study has identified a number of micro-environmental obstacles, such as the attitude-behavior gap, aesthetic concerns, a lack of knowledge and understanding of sustainable practices, a lack of trust in their reliability, and inaccurate assessments of their effectiveness.

McNeill & Moore (2015) revealed that individuals' environmental and social concerns, beliefs about sustainable fashion, and their past behavior related to ethical consumption influence their perception of sustainable fashion purchases.

In the modern era, many individuals are cognizant of the environmental damage caused by pollution and the need to incorporate sustainable practices into their fashion choices. (Shim et al., 2018).

Niinimäk et al. (2020) opined that the ultimate solution to the detrimental effects of the fashion industry is a complete transition away from the short-term, fast-fashion model and towards a more sustainable, circular model.

Sharma (2020) stated that the success of sustainable fashion will only be possible if sustainable fashion brands have access to an affordable range of eco-friendly raw materials and technologies.

According to Brandando (2021), the main barriers to sustainable fashion consumption are perception of poor quality, fashion, fit, and trendiness

Bianchi and Gonzalez (2021) revealed out that sustainable fashion brands are high-end fashion brands with high prices, meaning that eco-conscious women mostly purchase sustainable fashion through



practices such as buying second-hand retail or reusing their apparel instead of buying sustainable fashion brands.

### **Benefits**

The fashion industry has made it quite clear in recent years that they are making changes to become more sustainable. There are many reasons why the fashion industry is struggling with this change. One of the main reasons is down to the fact that they got into the habit of using cheap products and mass-producing items to maximize their profits. Sustainable fashion offers numerous benefits, both for the environment and for society as a whole.

**Environmental Benefits-** One of the most significant benefits of sustainable fashion is its ability to reduce the environmental impact. Sustainable fashion promotes using natural and organic materials, renewable energy sources, and responsible production processes that minimize waste, water pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions.

**Reduces greenhouse gas emissions:** Sustainable and slow fashion practices can have a positive impact on greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the carbon footprint of the fashion industry. These practices can include the use of renewable energy sources, the use of organic materials, and the implementation of circular design principles.

**Conserves water resources:** Able to conserve water resources by avoiding water intensive crops, toxic chemicals and dyeing processes.

**Minimizes waste generation:** The fashion industry can also reduce waste generation by using reusable, repairing, recycling and up cycling items. Buying second-hand clothing has many environmental benefits, such as extending the life cycle of clothing and reducing waste.

**Reduces carbon footprint:** It is estimated that buying pre-owned clothing reduces around 85% of the carbon footprint of an item. This is because most of the steps in making a new item, such as harvesting the materials, manufacturing and transporting it, have already been done.

**Social Benefits-** Sustainable fashion also has a positive social impact by ensuring fair and safe working conditions for workers in the fashion industry.

**Promotes fair trade and ethical labor practices:** Sustainable fashion promotes ethical practices in the fashion industry, such as fair labor practices, safe working conditions, access to education and health care for garment workers. From complying with independent audits to providing transparent supply chains, sustainable brands often do more to safeguard their workers' rights and safety. Also ensures that workers are given livable compensation, provided with standard benefits, have security of tenure.

**Supports local communities and artisans:** Sustainable fashion supports local communities by sourcing materials and manufacturing products locally. By sourcing materials and skills from local communities, sustainable and slow fashion helps preserve their cultural heritage and support their livelihoods. This can have long term positive effects on local economies with homegrown brands, a workforce that can provide manufacturing labor, and craftsmen and artisans as well as individual customers looking for unique fashion statements that aren't found everywhere else.

**Empowers consumers:** Sustainable fashion enables consumers to make informed choices and express their values and identity through their clothing style. Small batch production allows designers to create



unique designs made out of finer materials. Consumers are inspired to make more ethical fashion decisions and select clothing that reflects their values.

### **Customer Benefits**

**Saves money and time:** While sustainable fashion may have a higher initial cost, its durability and longevity result in long-term cost savings. Sustainable fashion focuses on producing sturdy, high-quality clothing, reducing the need for frequent replacements.

**Improving Quality and Durability.** In contrast to fast fashion, sustainable fashion encourages the production of high-quality clothing. Sustainable fashion brands use high quality materials and construction techniques. As a result, garments last longer and need to be replaced less frequently.

**Enhances creativity and self-expression:** Sustainable fashion challenges designers to find new ways to create clothing that is both sustainable and fashionable, leading to increased creativity and innovation in the fashion industry. This can result in innovative, eye-catching, environmentally friendly fashion trends. Greater emphasis on making sure each item meets its highest potential for craftsmanship and design. The sustainable fashion industry is continuously innovating and finding new ways to minimize its environmental impact, which can lead to the development of new and improved products.

**Improves health and wellbeing:** Fast fashion items often undergo a long and intense chemical process before ending up on our hangers. Those chemicals often pose a real danger to our health as well. One of the important benefits of sustainable fashion is that it helps to avoid exposure to harmful chemicals, allergens, or synthetic fibres that can prevent skin irritation, allergies, or respiratory problems. That makes it an attractive choice.

### **Challenges**

**Cost:** Sustainable fashion is often more expensive than fast fashion. This is a major concern for many consumers who want to switch to sustainable fashion. This is due to the fact that many of the materials used in the production of sustainable fashion, including organic cotton, recycled polyester, and other materials, are more expensive and difficult to obtain than traditional materials. Furthermore, the production methods of sustainable fashion, such as the use of dyes that are non-toxic and water-saving, can also increase the cost.

**Limited options:** Sustainable fashion may not have as many styles as fast fashion brands. Fast fashion brands can produce a lot of styles and designs in a short amount of time, making it seem like there is no limit to what we can buy. Sustainable fashion, on the other hand, has a limited number of styles, making it less appealing to people who want a lot of options when they shop.

**Time:** Sustainable fashion brands take longer time to manufacture their products. This is because they may use more time-consuming, labor-intensive processes and may focus on ethical and eco-friendly processes rather than speed.

**Resistance to adoption:** Some people think of sustainable fashion as "hippie" or "granola," which can make it hard for them to get into it. To be successful in the fashion industry, a shift must be made in the consumer mindset, which is currently driven by the fast fashion. Companies that rely on volume won't be able to easily switch to sustainable processes. Their focus on growth is a major obstacle. All fashion segments need to work together to make sustainable fashion a reality.



**Green washing:** Some brands truly commit to sustainability and others just greenwash their products (market themselves as sustainable, but continue to source from unsustainable suppliers). It can be hard for consumers to differentiate between genuine sustainability-oriented brands and those that simply advertise their products as "green". Companies that advertise themselves as "sustainable" without the necessary processes and policies are exploiting conscious consumers and creating a climate of distrust and disinformation within the industry.

**Supply chain transparency:** There are some sustainable fashion brands that don't have completely transparent supply chains. This can lead to a situation where consumers don't know exactly where or how their clothing is made.

## Conclusion

Sustainable fashion is a complex, rapidly expanding industry that is in its early stages of development. It is attempting to make a significant impact on the fashion industry through innovation and the promotion of a more conscious and sustainable approach. This segment of fashion sector provides a solution to a range of environmental and social issues from excessive waste and water pollution and greenhouse gas emissions to unethical labor practices and natural resource depletion. It has many other benefits, durability, fashionability and style. By adopting a sustainable approach to fashion, brands can reduce their negative impact, protect the planet for generations to come, and create a more sustainable and equitable fashion ecosystem. Transitioning from traditional fashion practices to sustainable one would require significant time and resources. It would also require a cultural reset, which demands a shift in mainstream consumer preferences as well as a shift in consumer mindsets. In order for sustainable fashion to be successful, it requires a comprehensive effort from brands, consumers and government. As the need for sustainable fashion is increasing, it is expected that more companies and designers will begin to incorporate sustainable practices into their operations, making it easier for people to find and buy sustainable fashion products. Sustainable fashion may still be a long way off, but it's a sector that has a great potential to create a promising future that values people, the environment and style.

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