Amplifying Sustainability in the Indian Fashion E-commerce Marketplace

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Abstract

Eco-friendly lifestyle is gaining prominence due to which the fashion industry landscape is changing dramatically with sustainable fashion emerging as the zeitgeist of the present era. This study presents an overview of the scope of sustainable fashion and lifestyle products in the e-commerce marketplace post COVID-19 pandemic. Further, research on consumer demographics and buying behavior has been undertaken and applied as the basis to suggest areas of improvement in the customer's shopping experience with respect to sustainable fashion and lifestyle products in the Indian marketplace. The sample comprised 221 Indian e-commerce consumers, who actively purchase sustainable products from various online platforms. Findings from the survey positively reinforce the crucial role of sustainability in influencing the fashion and lifestyle e-commerce space. It also highlights the need for the e-commerce marketplace players to embrace this specialized yet essential category of sustainable fashion and lifestyle products, so as to accelerate their growth and engender enhanced customer experience in the post pandemic period. Outcomes of the study highlight the importance of enhancing the sustainable proposition of the brands through various means, including but not limited to providing distinct visibility on platforms, personalizing the customer experience, strengthening the trust, credibility, and authenticity through detailed sustainability claims, blogs and QR codes. This study aims to provide direction to the e-commerce marketplace players in their efforts to capture a larger consumer base and to reinforce the trust of their consumers in environmental preservation. While it provides an overview of the changing disposition of the consumer towards eco-friendly fashion, there is a possibility of a bias due to the ongoing pandemic which may or may not hold in normal circumstances or in the post pandemic era.

Keywords: Sustainable fashion, conscious fashion consumer, e-commerce, online marketplace, fashion and lifestyle, consumer behavior

Introduction

Faced by wide criticism of its negative planetary impact, the fashion industry which "includes a variety of stakeholders along the value chain and refers to the production of clothing, leather and footwear made from textiles and related goods, and extending from the production of raw materials and the design and manufacturing of garments, textile and leather accessories and footwear, to their distribution, consumption and disposal" (UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion, n.d.) has been redefining its sustainability credentials. Building on the Sustainable Apparel Coalition's Higg Index which provides a framework for brands to measure their own supply chain impact, fashion's sustainability metrics includes data on carbon emissions, use of chemicals, and water consumption. Through mindful production systems and innovative business models, the industry has been owning its responsibility in contributing to the gravity of the situation and taking steps to reshape the business landscape through sustainable products.

The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019 led to governments issuing advisories and intermittent norms on safety regulations and social distancing contingent on the mutations of the coronavirus led to imposition of restrictions on physical movement, and shortage of goods requiring consumers to improvise with available resources. During the pandemic, consumer sentiment was reflected in their spending intent across categories, many having modified their spending patterns to essentials, while cutting back on discretionary categories including low-cost fast fashion sold by giant brands which have accelerated the damage to the environment. The shift in buying patterns saw consumers eschew excess consumption and opt for local offerings. Other important consideration for consumer motivation in choosing brands translating to their purchasing decisions is a wider concern for sustainability encompassing the environment, lives and livelihoods. Consumer motivation drives brands to be conscious in their offerings.

COVID-19 precipitated disruption of financial markets as it upended supply chains across global economies. Widespread impact of the coronavirus decelerated the expected growth projection of the fashion industry, making it necessary to find alternative pathways to attain growth. Among the most cited drivers of consumer decisions on their brand choices are availability, price sensitivity, value as well as convenience of shopping. To forge long-term relationships with consumers, assessment of consumer preferences, interests, and pain points to identify critical intervention points and avenues are essential for businesses. This necessitated technology and digital media platforms to play a greater role in reaching out to consumers to create a buzz and ensure their continuing loyalty. As the pandemic reshapes the world, more consumers have begun shopping online in greater numbers and frequency. According to new data from IBM's 2020 U.S. Retail Index, the pandemic has accelerated the shift away from physical stores to digital shopping by roughly five years (Pastore, 2020). Accelerated rate of digital adoption has been a dominant trend. The 2021 Global Payments Report by World pay FIS, a financial technology product and services provider, tracked trends across 41 countries and found that digital commerce accelerated during the pandemic. Widespread use of e-commerce touch points has led to the digitalization of purchasing modes as e-tailers leverage omnichannel avenues to amplify purchasing experiences and to cater to diverse shopping preferences. This includes strategies of business expansion of the fashion and lifestyle segment reflecting awareness and commitment to the inclusion of sustainability thinking in virtual marketplaces. Given that consideration of sustainability is a factor that affects consumer decisions, e-commerce players are increasingly using omnichannels of marketing.

Literature Review

This is a nascent but expanding field of study being developed through tacit knowledge and academic research, construed by an understanding of the urgency for change. Creating new markers for a vast industry that epitomizes the ability to profit from an incomplete accounting model requires leadership skills and practices of transformational design that offer the potential for fashion to change not only itself but also to influence more broadly how mankind can live well without jeopardizing the future. The need for realignment of business and social objectives, need for sustainable business models, fair working conditions, organic and environmentally friendly materials traceability, and certifications (Johnston, 2012), responsible end-of-life disposal systems to avoid increasing landfills (Niinimaeki , 2014) are imperative. Though COVID-19 did not create the current crisis in fashion, it has been instrumental in driving values around sustainability into the limelight, generating discussions on issues of overconsumption, materialism, and irresponsible business practices (Amed, et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting societal and economic shutdowns required to contain it presented the apparel, footwear, and textile industries with unprecedented challenges. But while this crisis strains their commitment to sustainability, it simultaneously demands that companies accelerate their progress on sustainable initiatives in order to be competitive in the market that will emerge after the pandemic. While sustainability is in danger in some areas of the industry, companies that embrace it will be among the leaders of a resurgent fashion industry on the other side of the pandemic (Martinez-Pardo, et al., 2020). Trend forecasts suggest that the global health crisis will lead to a rise in the overall consumer demand for items that are closely associated with values, well-being, trust and the collective good – specifically in categories such as fashion and beauty, viewed as being 'close to the body'. Transparency will be of high relevance for all stakeholders; consumers are likely to spend less money and more consciously, and sustainable and ethical action within supply chains and fair working conditions will be imperative. This situation may accelerate the shift to greener, more sustainable supply chains, which will not only be decisive for businesses, but also impact the future of the fashion industry as a whole (Ricchetti and Palma, 2020). A survey conducted in April 2020 across more than 2,000 UK and German consumers showed that in practice, consumers have already begun changing their behaviors making significant changes to their lifestyles to lessen their environmental impact and achieve sustainability goals (Granskog, et al., 2020). Though many production centers are concentrated in developing countries like India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, studies on these geographical regions are scanty. Research on environmental management practices for textile industry in emerging economies like India remains highly unexplored. Moreover, previous studies on the textile sector in India have focused largely on its technological as well as economic aspects, with hardly any study capturing the managerial perspective towards sustainability issues and practices.

Rising awareness of sustainability in India

Traditional production systems for textiles and clothing in India, have been environment-benign processes of making and disposal. The same industry now has a high impact on the environment, second only to agriculture in terms of water consumption, causing water body pollution due to the discharge of untreated effluents, air pollution prior to processing of Fibers and during spinning and weaving generating dust, cotton lint etc. (Sharma and Narula, 2020)

Home to one-sixth of the world's population and widely estimated to become the most populous country in the world by 2030, India is likely to play a pivotal role in ascertaining the relative success or failure of global goals for sustainable development. A rapidly growing economy along with a large domestic market has made India one of the most important players in global supply chains (Phelan, 2020). Previously, because of environmental or social impact and now in response to post-COVID behavior, sustainability is moving into the mainstream for customers as they evaluate its effect on their purchasing patterns. A study by Capgemini Research Institute (2020) which involved 750 large businesses and 7500 consumers across nine countries including

India indicates changing mind-sets of consumers towards sustainability. This is re-enforced by the State of Fashion 2020 report (BOF and McKinsey, 2020) which states that sustainability is gaining importance in India with the local market predicted to reach nearly USD 59.3 billion in terms of revenues in 2022, thus making it the sixth-largest globally after the UK and Germany. The recent increase in demand for eco-friendly and conscious clothing in the country points to sustainability as an important driver in consumers' purchasing decisions. Even though the industry is at a nascent stage, the market for eco-friendly clothes in India is growing at a steady pace. Manufacturers are embracing better practices to make clothes that leave less impact on the environment. A recent survey of YouGov (Bhatia, 2019) conducted for consumers in India reported that a majority of buyers consider a sustainable production process as a priority while shopping for fashion products, although material, design, price, and fit, have a more controlling influence. New recent data reveals that more than 83 percent of people consider sustainability when buying fashion products (Taskin, 2019).

Online shopping and e-commerce markets in India during COVID-19

The fashion and lifestyle market has two distinct distribution channels - offline such as shopping malls and physical stores, and online channels such as e-commerce marketplace and exclusive brand websites (Daedal Research, 2020). The Indian textile and apparel industry contributes 13 percent to the country's total export earnings and 2.3 percent of the country's GDP. This industry reached a value of USD133 billion in 2020 (IMARC Press Release, n.d.) growing at the expected CAGR of ~12 to reach an estimated INR 16,637 billion (USD 220 billion) by 2025-26 (Wazir Advisors, 2020). The growth projection for exports is still expected to reach INR 5242 billion (USD 70 billion) by the year 2024 (Televisory, 2020). Despite the economic downturn, the e-commerce industry in India witnessed exponential growth, recording a 17 percent growth in order volumes as of June 2020, which was much higher in comparison to the pre-lockdown period (ibid.) Consumers are now looking for ease of shopping that is more convenient, affordable and accessible with multiple options, better offers and easy return policies. The growth in online sales has enabled the textile industry to reach consumers across the nation. Industries have been working towards rebounding from the effects of COVID-19 while a significant change has been observed in consumer behavior. Rising hesitation among the customers to visit physical stores and lockdown regulations across India have tilted the domestic consumer market towards online shopping (Sharma, 2020). The pandemic has accelerated a shift to online shopping, an increased need for omnichannel, and major changes in consumer shopping habits (Wertz, n.d.). Seamless offline/online transactions and multi-channel integration are the way forward for the accelerated future growth in the post pandemic period (Bhalla, 2020). There has been an increase in the frequency of the first-time e-commerce users (FTUs) / first-time online shoppers in India who were previously inhibited by the notion and modalities of online shopping but are now switching to such new platforms.

Government initiatives, and most significantly the post pandemic altered consumer behavior, the e-commerce has revolutionized the way business is conducted in India and is expected to reach USD 27 trillion by the end of this decade (Sharma, 2020). Initiatives by the Government of India such as Make in India (2014), India Inclusive Innovation Fund (2014), Digital India (2015), Skill India (2015), and Start-up India (2016) have accelerated e-commerce growth in the country. Consultancy firm, Redseer reports that e-commerce giants, Amazon and Walmart owned Flipkart have sold estimated goods worth INR 29,000 crore (USD 4.1 billion) between 15-21 October 2020, a massive increase from the previous amount of USD 2.7 billion in 2019 (Press Trust of India, 2020). The massive growth in online retail in the country, enabling consumer access to global and local brands are attributed to the increasing penetration of the internet, smartphone boom and the launch of 4G network as the key drivers of consumer technology and the companies that profit from it.

The pandemic has necessitated new ways of thinking and doing by modifying existing practices. The role of online players in adopting leadership roles to promote the consumption of sustainable products and to enhance the current offerings of online sustainable fashion and lifestyle stores, gains relevance. In the aftermath of COVID-19, consumer motivation and behavior are likely to impact sustainable fashion in India. The need to ascertain if these findings can be used to suggest new areas of improvement for sustainable e-marketplace stores in India, leads to the research methodology.

Research Methodology

Based on the findings of the literature review, some research questions guided this research:

- What are the demographics and buying behavior of sustainable fashion consumers in India?
- What is the consumer demand for sustainable fashion and lifestyle products in India?
- Can these findings be used to suggest new areas of improvement for sustainable e-marketplace stores in India?

To address these research questions, examination of the relationships among variables namely frequency of purchase, willingness to buy, readiness to spend on sustainable goods, price, packaging, and quality, was necessary. A research design frame was drawn up to study consumer demographics, motivations and purchasing behavior. A sampling frame was developed and administered to a sample size of 221 respondents identified through a non-probability, judgemental sampling approach, where ~95 percent were from Delhi NCR identified on the basis of their awareness of the fundamental aspects of sustainability and continuous consumption of fashion (clothing and lifestyle) products on e-commerce portals such as Nykaa fashion, Myntra For Earth, Zalora, IKKIVI and Amazon that conformed to one or more aspects of sustainability.

To ascertain the scope of sustainability on an e-commerce platform, a questionnaire was developed and administered online to a sample of 315 respondents, out of which 221 fully completed responses were received back. A survey of was undertaken to understand customer responses to sustainability in Indian e-commerce marketplaces. Pie charts, bar charts and histograms are used to organize and condense the data into easily interpreted visuals.

Results of Data Analysis

Data on the demographic profiles of the respondents was analyzed on the basis of their age and gender. The final sample consisted of 221 respondents whose responses were analyzed, as below:

Age

Of the total responses obtained, the largest respondent group of green consumers of 45.2 percent were in the age group of 18-25, followed by 27.6 percent in 26-35 years and 16.3 percent in the age group of 36-45 years (Figure 1).

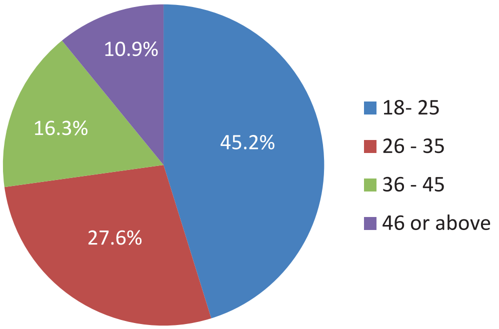

Figure 1: Age and sustainability awareness of respondents

All the respondents were forward-thinkers, proactive in identifying sustainable brands that are built on the stated criteria of sustainability. In general, previous studies reveal an inverse relationship between age and environmental behaviors, attitude, and knowledge signifying a greater tendency and environmental sensitivity among the relatively younger population (viz. those in the age group of 18-24 years and 24-35 years) to effectively search for the environmentally friendly products. This re-iterates the research of Jain and Kaur, (2006) that though green consumerism is on the rise, not all the consumers are equally green. To be able to more effectively market green products and ideas, marketers need to segment their market and use differentiated marketing approach for each target segment. The younger population from 18-35 years are the front runners in sustainability awareness. Further, increased frequency of the other age groups also indicates their inclination towards environmental and personal wellness.

Gender

The sample comprising 54.8 percent of female respondents, 44.8 percent of male respondents and 0.4 percent of others is a perfect simulation of the entire target audience (Figure 2).

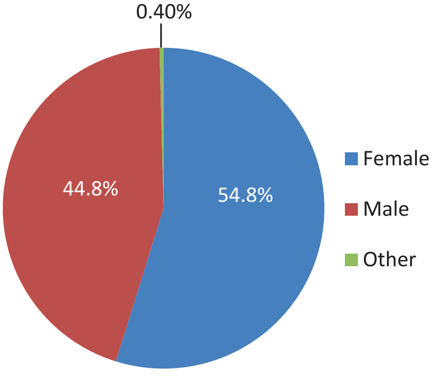

Figure 2: Distribution of sample by gender

Gender roles exhibited by men and women that govern the attitudes, skills, and social development have an impact on the displayed behavior. Women consider the result of their actions more carefully as compared to men (Tong, 2012). In general, women are found to perform better than men in terms of their involvement in environmental activism, increased willingness to seek eco-friendly products, and conservation behavior.

Frequency of consideration and purchase decisions based on product sustainability

The survey also aimed to derive an up-to-date assessment of sustainable fashion consumption of the consumers. Two questions aimed to ascertain the frequency of consumer respondents who consider sustainability or environmental friendliness of a product while making purchases (Figure 3 and 4).

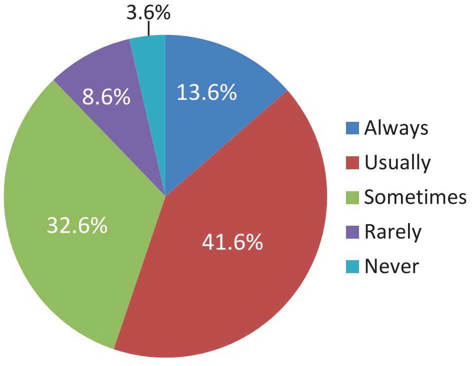

Figure 3: Frequency of consideration of product sustainability

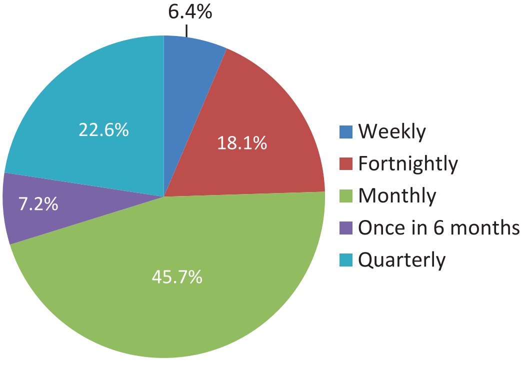

Figure 4: Frequency of purchase decisions based on product sustainability

Data analysis showed that 41.6 percent of the respondents 'usually' consider the frequency of consideration of product sustainability while making purchases, followed by 32.6 percent who consider this factor 'sometimes' while purchasing, 13.6 percent who 'always' consider this, followed by 8.6 percent who admitted to 'rarely' consider it. To find out the buying pattern by the same group of respondents, 45.7 percent claimed to purchase sustainable products every month, followed by 22.6 percent who shop quarterly, 18.1 percent buy it fortnightly and 7.2 percent make purchases once in every 6 months.

Preferred shopping format

The fashion market continuously develops and is mirrored similarly in the outlets from where consumers prefer to purchase their clothing. In the survey, consumers reported their use of different formats of shopping for sustainable fashion items (Figure 5).

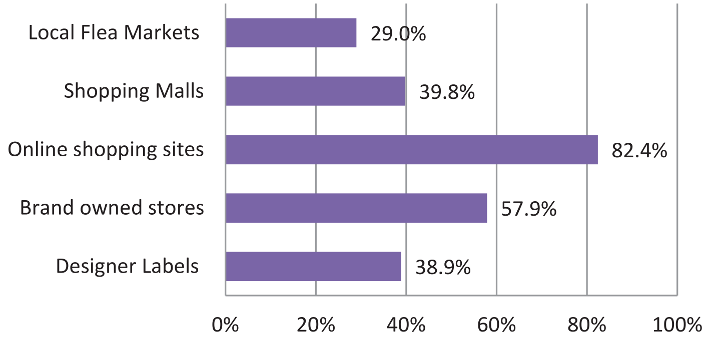

Figure 5: Preferred shopping format of respondents

The survey indicated that for an overwhelming 82.4 percent, online shopping was the most preferred format. From the perspective of scope and demand, this finding indicates how offering customers an opportunity to use online platforms for shopping for a range of sustainable products from a selection of brands could work well within the market.

Choice of a preferred sustainable product category

The survey attempted to ascertain consumer preference across different sustainable product categories of consumables ranging from beauty and personal care, home and living, and clothing for men, women and children.

Figure 6: Preferred sustainable product category

The data indicated that the largest segment comprising 62.9 percent of the respondents was interested in making purchases in the beauty and personal care category, 58 percent in the home and living category, and 56 percent in womenswear category (Figure 6). In the post pandemic period, there is rising demand for clean and natural beauty, as well as sustainable home and living. The findings also indicate that the least preferred category for sustainable purchases is menswear. This can be attributed a higher presence of women shoppers (54.8 percent) as compared to men (44.8 percent) on sustainability portals.

Importance of different criteria for purchasing sustainable products

Questions were framed to find out the importance of specific criteria while shopping for sustainable products. These included the attributes of being handcrafted, low environmental impact, cruelty-free, ethically produced, and recycled.

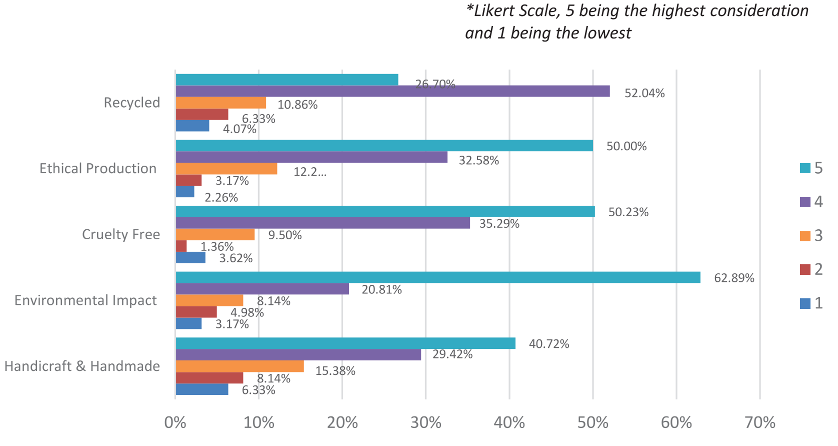

Figure 7: Important criteria for shopping for sustainable products

The data indicated that while shopping for sustainable products, the respondents placed high importance on environmental impact of products that are eco-friendly and naturally dyed, with 62.89 percent of the consumers considering it a very important criterion, followed by 50.23 percent considering cruelty-free and ethical production (in terms of being made in a safe regulated environment through organic farming) as a very important criterion. 70.14 percent of the respondents consider handicraft and handmade as an important criterion (Figure 7). These findings ascertain the popularity of different factors based on consumer attraction and ratings on a Likert scale.

Checkpoints for recognizing sustainability in a product

The survey also attempted to understand the checkpoints of product labeling, packaging, product description, certification that buyers recognize to differentiate between sustainable and other products.

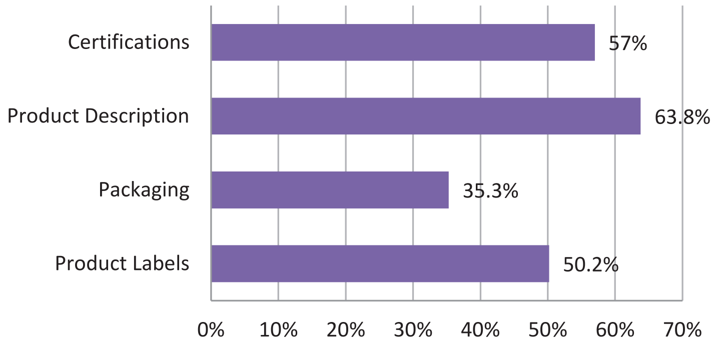

Figure 8: Sustainability checkpoints in products

It was noted that the majority of customers constituting 63.8 percent considered product description as an important factor followed by 57 percent who consider product certifications as an important checkpoint to differentiate products (Figure 8). This indicated the imperative, as a business, to inform the consumer about product sustainability through detailed product descriptions and certifications information to aid consumer decision making.

Assessment of respondents' consumer behavior towards their shopping experiences for sustainable products

The respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with the statements indicating consumer behavior regarding sustainable products (Figure 9).

With the growing awareness for social responsibility and its role on the brand image, it is being increasingly recognized that customers are demanding more sustainable practices. Around 78.28 percent agreed that they purchase eco-friendly products only after considering the environmental impact and initiatives of brands. In terms of purchasing behavior, the majority of customers comprising 85.07 percent of the respondents, opined that sustainability comes with a price. This indicated a clear gap regarding the need to educate consumers about the availability of more budget-friendly options.

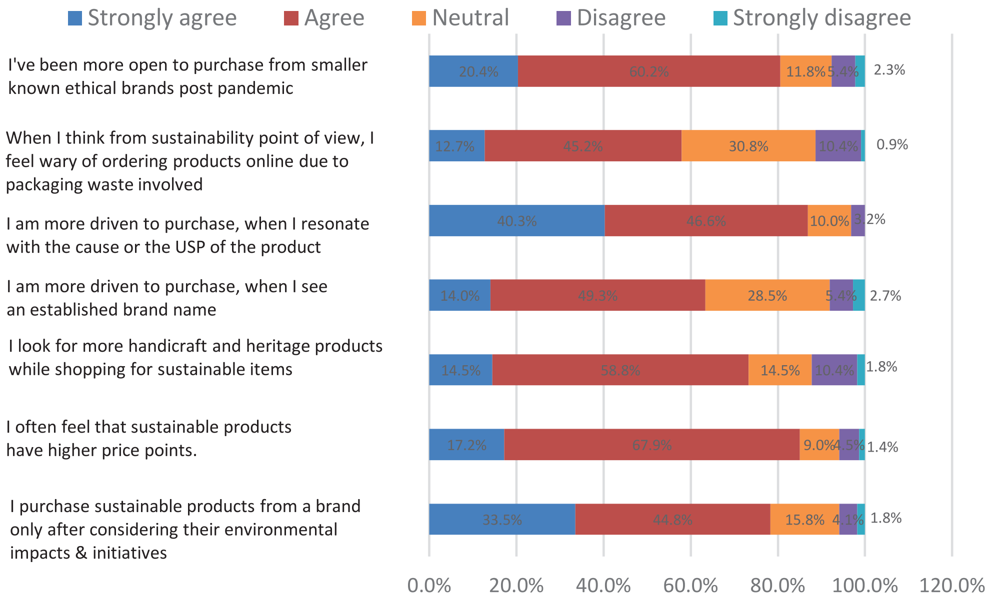

Figure 9: Agreement on different shopping experience

With the 'Make in India' and 'Vocal for Local' initiatives launched during the pandemic, consumers have been evincing interest in heritage handloom and handcrafted styles with 68.32 percent agreeing to specifically look for such sustainable products while shopping. 80.54 percent of the customers seemed more likely to experiment with smaller or less-known ethical brands to infuse newness in traditional narratives amid uncertain times.

While 63.35 percent of the respondents agreed to being more driven towards the purchase of sustainable products from an established brand name, 86.88 percent felt that they are more likely to purchase sustainable products when they resonate with the USP of the products as per the options offered to the respondents in the questionnaire. Hence, indicating the increasing shift of consumers towards more meaningful purchases.

Importance of different factors while purchasing sustainable products

The respondents indicated their perceived importance of different factors while purchasing sustainable products (Figure 10).

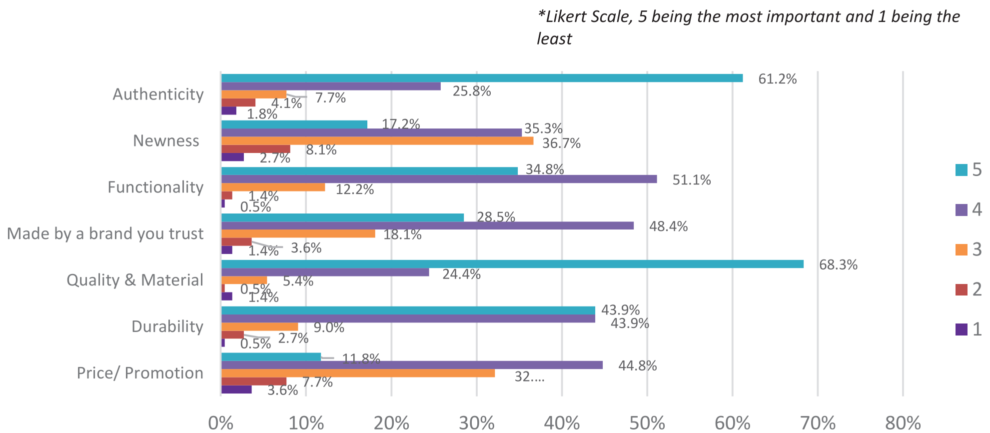

Figure 10: Importance of different factors in the purchase of sustainable products

Quality and material were rated as the most important factor indicating environmental friendliness of products by 68.33 percent of the respondents. Consumers are increasingly looking for durability in products and authenticity concerning eco-labels and certification in the products with 87 percent of consumers rating it to be an important factor. When choosing a sustainable product, an increasing number of consumers feel that factors of price and newness of design trends are relatively less important attributes.

Willingness to purchase sustainable products from online marketplace

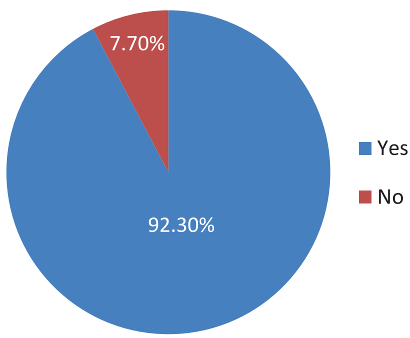

Figure 11: Willingness to purchase

The survey findings indicate that the majority of the respondents, 92.3 percent are willing to purchase sustainable products from an online marketplace platform thus clearly indicating the need and scope of such platforms (Figure 11).

Fail points or pain points in the success of the online marketplace platform

One of the primary purposes of the survey was to understand the consumer pain points and apprehensions while purchasing sustainable products.

Data analysis (Figure 12) showed that 66.5 percent of the customers are of the opinion that lack of awareness while 61.5 percent feel that lack of authenticity of sustainable brands are important reasons for the non-performance of online sustainable marketplaces. It also emerged that 54.8 percent express trust as an important factor and lack of the same may negatively impact the effective functioning of the online platform. This indicates that trust, credibility and authenticity need to be constantly reinforced to inculcate awareness among the customers.

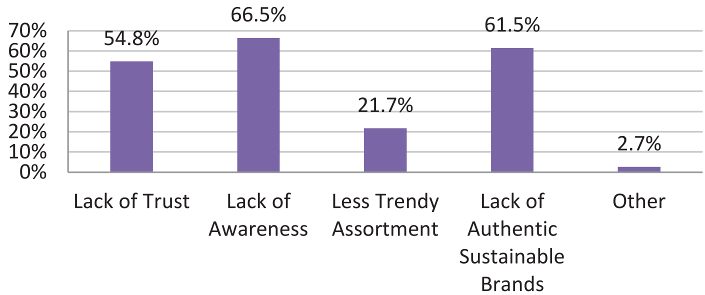

Figure 12: Frequency of fail points in the success of online marketplace platforms

Disposal mode

With only 9 percent of consumers throwing away their unwanted clothing items, it is inferred that increasing focus on sustainability is turning them towards textile recycling through various organizations, donations to charity and domestic help (Figure 13). This indicates a rise in consumer sentiment for circular economy which offers alternative ways to extend the useful product life cycle of used products.

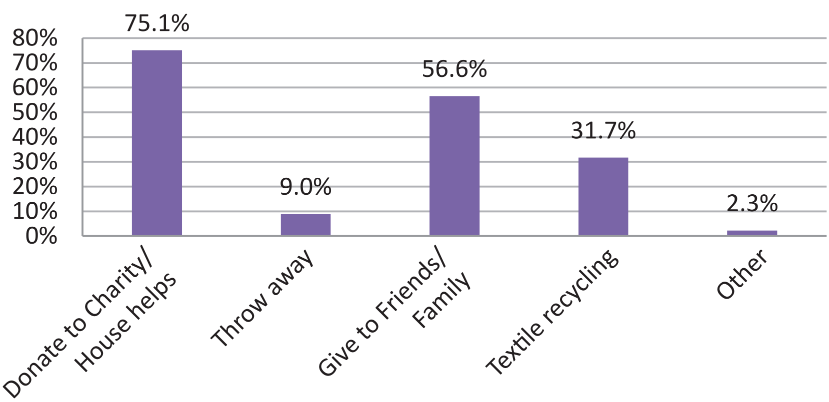

Figure 13: Disposal mode of unwanted clothing

Findings and Discussion

It is evident from the findings of the survey that engagement with sustainability and environment has deepened especially during and in the post pandemic period with consumers actively seeking industry players to take on a more responsible stance while taking the social and environmental impacts of their businesses into account. This presents an opportunity for fashion brands to reiterate their commitment to sustainability as an integral component of short-term and long-term strategic planning. Based on the survey, some suggestions are proposed to enable brands effectively deliver the message of sustainability.

– According to the Clean Beauty Market Forecast 2027 Report (Brandessence Market Research, 2022), increased consciousness of skin types is propelling the growth of the global market size for clean or sustainable beauty products at a significant CAGR of 12.07 percent from 2020 to 2027. In terms of revenue, the global clean beauty market estimated at USD 5439.6 million in 2020, is further expected to reach USD 11558.5 million in 2027. Once a niche trend and now a mainstream trend, the beauty segment earlier comprising 62.9 percent of consumers interested in the beauty and personal category, has propelled the organic beauty and well-being domestic market to an all-time high with Millennial and Gen Z leading the way to conscious consumerism. Hence increasing the visibility of the sustainable beauty category in the online store through homepage banners and social interventions can help brands to capitalize on this strong trend.

– Sustainability and authenticity are twin brand values that can power business growth. With 86.43 percent of respondents rating authenticity as an important criterion while purchasing sustainable products, it is imperative to assure customers regarding sustainability claims of the product. 50.2 percent of respondents are convinced of the reliability of product labels in claiming a product as sustainable. Hence, incorporating a distinct eco-friendly label or blurb on the products can help consumers easily identify the sustainable product and aid in justifying the sustainability claims of the product and help brands in providing an authentic consumer experience.

– Displaying adequate information about the USP, material details, and sustainability aspects of a product would establish a relationship of trust between the manufacturer and consumer through powerful narratives and storytelling. 63.8

percent consumers identified a product as sustainable based on its description as its environmental and ethical credentials. The inclusion of rich content using GIFs, infographics and PDP banners can propel brands towards content-led propositions while engaging the customers.

- With choices of several style options in apparel, the first step towards expansion is increasing visibility of the store. 61.5 percent of the respondents felt that there is a lack of authentic sustainable brands in the market and therefore, providing the consumer with adequate choices of sustainable fashion would be the most important criteria for making a purchase. Ease of purchase, price, and perceived value becomes increasingly important. E-commerce marketplace players can expand their brand selection by on boarding more sustainable brands in the Indian market.

- Traceability and authenticity of sustainable products are of prime importance for the customers. 54.8 percent of respondents believe that brand trust is critical, failing which could result in non-performance of the e-commerce platform. This points to the importance for re-enforcing trust, credibility and authenticity through transparent information regarding certification, data points, and sustainability claims on the platform.

- 85 percent of the respondents feel that purchasing behavior is influenced by the perception that sustainability comes at a price. This highlights the need to inform consumers about the availability of budget-friendly sustainable options in India. Hence a promotional banner for highlighting the price-friendliness of the sustainable products can lead to higher sales conversions.

- A strong tilt towards traditional handlooms and handicraft products was evident from the findings of 73.3 percent respondents who consider it 'very important' and 40.72 percent consider it 'important' while shopping for sustainable products. This is a major opportunity for Indian manufacturers to expand their range of sustainable collections to capitalize on the rising consumer sentiment in the post COVID period.

- According to the Circular Fashion Summit by lablaco (2020), the potential value of circular economy could be as much as USD 5.3 trillion and gaining momentum. With only 9 percent of consumers throwing away their unwanted clothing items, consumers are now increasingly turning to new means to dispose of their unwanted clothing items. Brands can participate by offering services such as textile recycling, sale of second-hand goods, offering upcycling services, and partnering with brands in exchange for customer discounts and loyalty points, to move towards a circular economy model, harness the zeitgeist to reduce waste and maximize the sustainability demands of the customer.

– Consumers' brand loyalty and purchasing decisions are highly contingent on availability of detailed sustainability initiatives of the brands. It is recognized that customers are demanding more sustainable practices, with around 78.28 percent agreeing to purchase eco-friendly products only after considering the environmental impact and initiatives of brands. Hence, providing transparency details of production methods through blogs, QR codes, and content-led propositions can engage the customers and communities better, thus helping brands to educate the Indian customers.

– Personalization is very important to engage shoppers, encourage repeat purchases, drive sales and increase conversions. Brands can deliver personalized in-store experiences by showing content, sections and banners, product recommendations, and special offers based on the browsing behavior and purchase history of the customer. Developing a customized atmosphere for every customer, basing their interests and behavioral aspects can help brands in delivering a unique user experience and driving sales.

Conclusion

The aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis is seeing a wave of change in consumerism patterns and consumer behavior. The pandemic is accelerating trends that were in motion prior to the crisis as shopping shifts to digital, and consumer motivations and behavior are spurring sustainability concerns. Businesses that communicate their ethical, environmental-conscious values to the consumers, are likely to lead sustainability conversations in manufacturing, marketing and promotion of fashion. This article provides an overview of fashion and lifestyle e-commerce platforms that are incorporating sustainability as part of their short-term and long-term strategic planning and reorganize for the next normal after the COVID-19 pandemic through recommendations like personalization, online banners, and visibility plans, pricing, and promotional strategies. It points to the possibility of future adoption of this specialized yet essential category of sustainable fashion and lifestyle products for the accelerated future growth and enhanced customer experience in the post pandemic period.

The limitation of this study is the sample size of 221 respondents mostly concentrated in Delhi NCR. Future studies can aim at studying a larger sample with balanced representation across India. It was undertaken during the pandemic when the consumer sentiment for sustainability was at an all-time high and hence there might be behavioral and consumption bias which may or may not hold in normal circumstances or in the post pandemic era.

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