

Sustainable Consumption: A Perspective Of Apparel Consumers

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ABSTRACT

This present era contain various problems like pollution, climate change and environmental degradation, it becomes a necessity to drag the attention towards sustainability issues. In the case of apparel industry also, sustainability is the desired element for responsible consumption. Some consumers engage in luxury consumption and when this luxury word came in mind there is need to revive sustainability. In this research paper, the consumer's perspective is being studied about sustainability issues in apparel consumption through checking their knowledge and perception while purchasing apparels. It is based on the existing studies that have been conducted with reference to sustainability in apparel consumption. Most of the respondents perceive fashion with clothes and they over consume and this overconsumption destroy the goals of sustainability. So, there was a need to study about the knowledge, perception and concern of consumers related to sustainability while purchasing apparels in market. For the fulfilment of these objectives, focus group interviews were conducted and results showed that people have low knowledge and awareness about sustainability in apparel consumption and there is a need to provide more knowledge to consumers and need to spread more awareness so that people get started to think about sustainability.

Keywords: Sustainability, apparel, consumption, Knowledge, awareness and Concern

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability issues are increasing day by day in every industry due to drastically increment of environmental problems like; ozone depletion, climate change, pollution and forest destruction. One more element i.e. social imbalance of sustainability due to low wages, poor working conditions in manufacturing units or hazardous waste disposal is also prevailing. World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) reported sustainability in their own context by considering environmental, social and economic development with the fulfilment of present need with consideration of future needs also (WCED, 1987) and with

this Environmental problems are enhancing day by day so there is need to create awareness and knowledge about how people can help sustainability by their valuable contribution. Alternative ideas through which sustainability can be achieved that are, education and awareness of people (Fletcher, 2008).

To attain sustainability in true sense, it is necessary to organise and perform every activity with the consideration of your interest as well as interest of future generation also. “Apparel industry of India is growing very fast and likely to account for \$141 billion by 2021 (Khare, 2017). Sustainable consumption of apparels means purchasing, using and disposing apparels in sustainable manner. Consumers are interested to solve environmental problems and they have concern towards environment but when sustainable clothing market is considered, their way of acting on purchase of clothes in sustainable manner is different (Shaw et al., 2006). It means they may or may not perform actions with consideration towards environment. Manufacturing of clothes, use and dispose of clothes contains various elements which are not environmental friendly. Same is the case with rest of apparels except clothes. Overconsumption of apparels is the biggest challenge in front of Indian economy. In the sustainability aspect of clothing, one more element is included that is; People who are working in the manufacturing process of clothes. Problems of child labour and poor working conditions prevail in these sectors. These issues are called sweatshop shopping and people want clothes which are sweatshop free. People in developed countries pay a lot of attention to check from where the product arrive which they are going to buy if it came from that place where problems of poor working conditions prevail and child labour exists they don't buy it at all. But in this paper it is not be considered about sweatshop shopping and while conducting focus group interview questions are not asked on this particular sweatshop shopping's issue.

There is a well-developed literature available on sustainable apparels in western countries due to concern of people there but in Asian context specifically to India, there is very less research is done on this particular phenomenon. People had high level of concern for sustainability but because of their low level of environmental and sustainable knowledge they create a mismatch between their concern and their knowledge and finally footprints of this mismatch has shown in their purchase decisions (Wilhelm, 2009)

Therefore, in this research paper we will try to give a contribution for filling this gap and in current paper it is asked from respondents their knowledge level about sustainability, level of their environmental concern and their perception for buying sustainable apparels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Goworek et al. (2012) gave their valuable contribution on “The sustainable clothing market: an evaluation of potential strategies for UK retailers” and this study is conducted in UK. Department of environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) had given funding for this study to know about what consumers think about the sustainability issues while the consumption of clothes and what retailers make policies for sustainable clothing. Research methodology includes qualitative research in which they include focus group interviews of consumers, home tasks and workshops. Number of participants was 99. After conducting the research, results showed that people have limited awareness of clothing’s sustainable impacts. If consumers are behaving sustainably while the consumption of cloths then it does not mean they are doing this intentionally rather many other factors and forces are there which influence them or sometimes they are not even aware of using these sustainable clothing. Disposal and maintenance was also influenced by their habits and daily lifestyle activities. This study showed that consumers are not much aware of bad impacts of their purchase and disposal of clothes.

Shaw et al.(2006) conducted their research on “Fashion victim: the impact of fair trade concerns on clothing choice” in the area of UK. In this study, ethical consumption of clothes was the main subject matter. Ethical concerns are related with environmental, societal and people issues. Exploitation of labour, child labour and poor working conditions are some problems which prevail in clothing manufacturing units. Objectives of this were comparing the difference between what consumers intend to behave while purchasing and what they actually behave in clothing sector along with there is another objective that was to identify constraints that restrain the consumers from sustainable purchasing. Main preference of this paper was Sweatshop free shopping. Questionnaire was sent to 894 respondents from which 262 had given the responses. Firstly, before getting final results, behavioural intentions were checked and after passing of six weeks then their actual behaviour were studied on the basis of semi-structured questionnaire. After getting, we found that only 32% people did shopping that is sweatshop-free and others had either did not find sweatshop-free clothes due to low availability or did not have intention in purchasing sweatshop free(ethical) clothes.

Lee (2012) conducted his study on "Young Generation Y consumers’ perceptions of sustainability in the apparel industry”. Eighty respondents were selected aged 18 to 25; they were young female college going students. This study was conducted to know what consumer’s level of knowledge about sustainability is in general and in apparel industry

specifically. Results showed that consumers have low level of knowledge regarding general sustainability and sustainability regarding of apparel industry also. At the end suggestions were given for more education needed to get people aware about sustainability. 11 open ended qualitative questions were asked and on the basis of these questions further discussion was done. Participants talked about basic knowledge of sustainability and environmental issues. They thought laundering had not any effects on environment and therefore no need for paying consideration on it despite it has a lot of negative effects on environment. Participants supported that sustainability issues should be incorporate in the apparel industry but this agreement was mixed when others thought it is the responsibility of apparel retailers. Finally results showed consumers want to do for sustainability even in apparel industry but they had lack of awareness of how this sustainability can be achieved while purchasing clothes.

McNeill & Moore (2015) conducted their study on “Sustainable fashion consumption and the fast fashion conundrum: fashionable consumers and attitudes to sustainability in clothing choice.” This study was conducted in New Zealand. While conducting this research two stages were followed, in first stage open ended survey was conducted in which 28 participants were choose to know the basic understanding of their knowledge about sustainability and ethical consumption of clothing. After this in second stage 10 in-depth interviews were conducted in which five were male and five female. Findings of this study showed Consumers did not explain the difference between ethical and sustainable clothing. On the basis of data collected, consumers had also divided into various categories like self-consumers who think only about their personal benefits, social consumers who have concerned about society and finally sacrifice consumers who wanted to give less impact on world in the case of sustainability.

Connel&Kozar (2014) gave their valuable contribution on “Environmentally Sustainable Clothing Consumption: Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviour”. Objectives of this study were to get knowledge about attitude, knowledge and behaviour of consumers towards production and distribution of clothing industry. After conducting the research it was found that consumers have lack of knowledge, lack of availability of sustainable clothing and lack of information available on the tags of clothes. Consumers have positive attitude towards clothing. But there is some mismatch among knowledge, attitude and behaviour towards environmental sustainability. There is a gap between what people think and what they do it may be due to some personal (cost) or contextual (situation) factors.

Kang & Kim (2013) conducted their study on “What Are Consumers Afraid of? Understanding Perceived Risk toward the Consumption of Environmentally Sustainable Apparel.” Objective of this research was to gain insight about the perception of various risks in the consumption of environmental friendly apparels. Area for this was selected South Korea and United states. Before going to other aspects, first task is done on exploring of ideas on various risks that exist in the apparel consumption after this exploration the effect of these risks on attitude and behavioural intention was checked. After exploring the ideas finally they found major four risks in apparel consumption that were; psychological, financial, social and performance risks. Open ended questions were asked for the collection of data. EFA, CFA and SEM were run on the collected data. After running the tests and building a model results showed that effect of performance risk on attitude and behavioural intentions were not significant and consumers are concerned more about financial, psychological, and social risk.

Kang et al. (2013) conducted their study on “Environmentally sustainable textile and apparel consumption: the role of consumer knowledge, perceived consumer effectiveness and perceived personal relevance” and study areas were South Korea, US and China. In this, extended theory of planned behaviour was used. This data was collected from 701 respondents of students of large universities of these three countries. For this study, organic cotton clothes were selected. EFA, CFA and SEM were employed to know consumers attitude, subjective norms and behavioural control. Findings showed that there is positive effect of all three components of theory of planned behaviour on consumer’s perceived knowledge, perceived consumer effectiveness and perceived personal relevance but perceived behavioural control did not influence the behavioural intentions.

Birtwistle & Moore (2007) provided to research world a new insight from research work on “Fashion clothing – where does it all end up” and this study was conducted in UK consumers. Attitude and behaviour of Disposing of fashion textiles was important consideration of this study. Focus group, interviews and in-depth interviews were undertaken. Interviews with charity shop managers were also made after exploring from in depth interviews that attitude of people was related to charity more. Findings explained female were more interested in buying fashion apparels. Mostly people didn’t have idea about how much time people keep their clothes. Charity shopkeeper had stated they receive large amount of clothes in charity. People also agreed they have lack of awareness about disposing of products. They don’t know what the consequences would occur related to sustainability by their disposal of clothes.

Joung&Poaps (2011) conducted their study on “Factors motivating and influencing clothing

disposal behaviours”. Total 232 respondents were selected for the survey in which those respondents were selected who were college students of South-eastern US University. Multiple regression analysis was conducted on the collected data. Five independent variables of environmental concern, economic concern, information unavailability, charity concern and convenience and four dependent variables; resale, donation, reuse and discard were used. Behaviour which depicts environmental concern was resale and donation and discarding behaviour is made due to the concern for convenience.

Bianchi & Birtwistle (2011) gave their valuable contribution on “Consumer clothing disposal behaviour: a comparative study”. Two study areas were selected for study that was Australia and Chile. SEM was applied on proposed model. Donation behaviour is predicted by awareness of environment and the other one is age. Female of Australia were more involved in recycling as compared to Chile female consumers. Australian consumers donate more as compared to Chile consumers.

Khare (2017) conducted their study “Antecedents to organic cotton clothing purchase behaviour: study on Indian youth” and this study was carried out in India in three metropolitan cities (Bangalore, Delhi and Kolkata). Convenience sampling technique was used. Findings showed that past purchasing behaviour and experience of this past behaviour influence the purchase decisions of consumers but peer influence as well as knowledge of consumers did not influence the behaviour of the purchasing of environmentally sustainable clothing.

Khare&Sadachar (2017) gave their valuable contribution on“Green apparel buying behaviour: a study on Indian youth.” Study was conducted in India. Convenience random sampling was used and Structural equation modelling done on the proposed model. After all work is done, results showed that peer influence on green buying of clothes had not any influence. In this study a new variable was added that was consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII). It had also no influence on the green behaviour. CSII was related somewhat like subjective in this people try to make confrontation with their special ones.

Sharma & Pal (2019) conducted their study on “investigation about consumer attitude and its antecedent towards environmental sustainable apparel: A case study in Indian context.” Number of respondents was 272 and these respondents were chosen on the basis of snowball and convenience sampling technique. The main objectives of this study were; to know consumer’s environmental concern level, their knowledge level about impact of textile on

environment and the impact of this knowledge on their attitude. For analysing the data correlation and descriptive statistics were applied. Findings of this study showed that attitude formation with environmental concern is positively correlated. Their knowledge level was also quite low and definitely it has impact on their attitude for purchasing environmentally sustainable apparels.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To know the level of awareness among apparel consumers about sustainability.
- To study the concern for sustainability among apparel consumers.
- To get insight about relation among awareness level, concern for sustainable and their behavioural intentions towards apparel consumption.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To attain the objectives of this study 12 focus group interviews were conducted in Yamuna Nagar district of Haryana, India. Respondents who are above 18 and have some knowledge about purchasing of apparels are selected for interviews. Some respondents did not know what the term sustainability says. They had some level of confusion about sustainability issues and environmental issues.

Sustainability is somewhat related to environment protection.....sustainability is something a mean through which we can protect our environment.....

Very few said

I have not heard about what is sustainability.

Others had a little awareness what this sustainability term depicts and if they know about this term they were not sure while explaining about sustainability

I don't have much knowledge about sustainability but I think sustainability means fulfil our present needs but with a broad consideration of future generation also.....it is something like attachment of present with future.

And when it was asked about questions related to their own concern about sustainability most of the people showed their concern for sustainability. Some people showed no concern for environment which are very few in number. Most of them said they are concerned about environment and sustainability because numerous problems arise due to unsustainable economy.

I always like to do something for protecting our nature. Even if I see someone is doing harm with nature I usually try to stop him/her and tried to get known to other also about

how much you are harming the environment and what can be various harmful consequences will arise from their this wrong behaviour.

But most of them have some confusion about how can we get sustainability while consumption of apparels. They have concern about environment and societal benefits but when it was asked what you did when you purchase and dispose off products they didn't know how they could done for sustainability through purchasing and disposing of apparels.

I want to give contribution towards sustainability and whatever I know about this I usually take steps to go towards sustainability. I always prefer to perform that activity..... But how this sustainability can be achieved by purchasing of apparels I don't know.

People involve in more consumption of clothes and jewellery etc. but when asked to them they said

I want to give contribution towards sustainability but good apparels are important in this fashionable world. So, we buy these apparels to look good and I think it does not have any impact on sustainability.... But honestly speaking I don't know about the impact of apparel consumption on sustainability.

Very few in numbers also said

If it has some destructive impacts then it is the retailer's responsibility to solve this issue.

These are the basic discussion s which is done with consumers and by observing all these it can be said that people had lack of awareness while the consumption of clothes about their negative impacts on environment. There is a need for more generation of awareness and knowledge so that consumers came to know how to remove destructive aspects in the consumption of clothes.

CONCLUSION

After conducting the research and focus group interviews it has found that the problem of sustainability in apparel consumption is lack of awareness level. People know about sustainability but they have lack of awareness about how this can be achieved through the purchase of apparels and want to know how it can be achieved. Environmental concern for environment is also high but the problem is that they don't know the sustainability issues in overconsumption of apparels.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This study is conducted only on very few consumers. Only 12 focus group interviews were conducted any new researcher can also increase this number. Other main limitation of this study was it is conducted only in one district i.e. Yamuna Nagar district only. In future any

other area may be selected for the study. In place of focus group interviews any other technique may also be used.

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