

Why Fashion Brands are Pivoting Towards Sustainability

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To buy or not to buy, becomes the current dilemma. A movement has started and gained momentum slowly yet steadily.

Sustainability comes with many layers, subjective, relative, literal, and abstract. Which aspect of sustainability one caters to plays a huge role in determining its impact on the environment and humans alike.

Fashion brands range from luxury to high-street. Both are equally responsible for the climate and ecological emergency we face today

The fast fashion industry with its massive production of cheap clothing and accessories is one of the most polluting industries after oil and petroleum. It's throughout the product's lifecycle right from manufacturing to storage to usage to its disposal that makes it questionable. Millions of tons of microfibers from the clothing leak into the oceans, filling up landfills to its capacity, unethical labor market, and blocked chain supplies not to mention the carbon emissions.

The majority of the fashion brands globally use cotton or polyester in their production that significantly increases the carbon footprint. Cotton production relies heavily on pesticides and massive consumption of water. This inevitably causes loss of biodiversity and soil degradation.

The consumer today - the Millennials and the Gen Z - are more aware and conscious about the impact on the environment based on their purchase decisions. They want to align their purchases that resonate with their values and views. It's imperative to them that the brands maintain transparency about production, supply chains, and carbon emissions. As a direct consumer, it does matter what they think. However, it's not just what they want anymore, it's the immense stress on the green movement that is causing many major fashion brands to pivot towards sustainability.

Several fashion brands lacked environmental goals and commitment to sustainability that resulted in massive amounts of waste and return to landfills.

The shift to sustainability lays emphasis on durability, superior quality, aesthetic and ethical attributes. It also encourages social justice and fair trade.

Some fashion brands are retracing their steps to find alternative eco-friendly textiles.

Some fashion brands are retracing their steps to find alternative eco-friendly textiles. Sourcing sustainable fabrics from materials like organic linen, organic cotton, bamboo fibers, and plant waste.

With a huge emphasis on the green movement and the climate emergency fashion brands need to shoulder these responsibilities not just through their revolutionary campaigns. No brand can ever be 100 percent sustainable but it can undeniably lower the impact and decrease the carbon footprints on the world. Not treat fashion as disposable but something of timeless value.

If the fashion industry luxe or fast, tilt its scale now towards sustainability the years of damage will not be undone instantly but it can definitely be the start of new change.

How did Pandemic Impact the Fashion Retail

Customers have started giving preference to 'comfort', and the fashion industry taught all, that comfort doesn't mean sacrificing style.

Dr Veenu Sharma

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2020 has forced many businesses to reflect upon their existing plans. The Covid-19 pandemic has had an immense impact on almost every industry from essentials to non-essentials. Businesses faced issues like lockdowns, shutting down, pressure to deliver quickly, regulated opening and closing hours, along health and safety concerns. These major disruptions in industries made strategic players reinvent their brand. And, **fashion** industry which is already trying to keep pace with customers focusing on eco-friendly products and digital shifts was rocked by pandemics more.

'Casualization' was in progress, casual Fridays are now from Monday to Thursday, concerts got canceled, weddings postponed, thus impacting how, when, and why customers shop.

Anxiety/ Worry for the Industry

Companies have seen the most awful financial performance in 2020, which is, even more, worse than the global financial crisis in 2008-09.

Imran Amed, Founder and Editor-in-Chief of The Business of Fashion described 2020 as a difficult year and shared that "the coming year will require fashion companies to make significant changes in their value chains, as on many other fronts, while learning to reduce their risks and manage in a climate of uncertainty".

Businesses started paying more attention to monitor the emerging markets and diversifying their risk by entering into other growth areas. The excess use of social media platforms by almost all fashion businesses is creating challenges as well as high competition for businesses to retain their customers.

Customers have started giving weightage to the fashion products which have a positive impact on the environment and thus, fashion industries have to focus on the usage of sustainable fabric and promoting the same through their new sustainable model. The fashion industry has always experienced its journey from 'need' to 'want' to 'aspire', which makes it an evolving sector where there are a group of challenges and a range of opportunities.

Pandemic has made the fashion industry, remarket and retarget themselves. And then 'Department Shows' and 'Virtual Fashion Shows' became the new normal, bringing new ways of being seen and understood by the customers. This new-age customer and their changed behavior brought interesting lessons for the fashion industry and made the businesses design a new strategy model by focusing on every customer as 'one segment'.

Good News is that 'It's FASHION'

The fashion industry is just transforming not disappearing, as fashion is an essential part of one's lifestyle. The difference this industry has observed in the last year is the shift of the ground rules of self-care, from haircuts, facials, manicures to breathing, heart rate, and oxygen levels.

Customers lost interest in buying formal and professional clothes and started buying comfortable clothing and loungewear, and workwear is not a category anymore.

Erin Schmidt, a Senior Analyst at Coresight Research, mentioned, "The consumer is rewriting that definition of workwear. And it might be a little while for employers to figure this out".

But very soon customers have realized that we are just 'out of office' and in the new 'on-camera' zone, where looking and feeling best will bring confidence and motivation to your work.

Customers have started giving preference to 'comfort', and the fashion industry taught all, that comfort doesn't mean sacrificing style. The new customer lifestyle comprises of casual-aesthetic, and brands are focusing on the launch of the 'athleisure' collection.

Brands just need to revise their marketing strategies through weighted content which influences the customer to buy, as women are not buying lipsticks as it gets smudge inside the mask but are buying eye makeup as it emphasizes their 'smize'.

Why Retailers are Betting Big on Sustainable Fashion?

Though the retail fashion industry is known for 'trends' and 'fast-fashion', there is a shift seen in the popularity towards sustainable fashion and eco-friendly shopping

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Sustainability is a strategic decision of operating in the ecological, social and economic environment without leaving any negative footprint. Businesses these days are focusing on being ethical and sustainable where social media is also acting as an essential tool in educating customers about its importance. Businesses too are promoting their activities and stories, raising awareness towards sustainability. As today's consumer is well-educated and environmentally conscious, thus making the fashion brands deliver the same too.

Though the retail fashion industry is known for 'trends' and '**fast-fashion**', there is a shift seen in the popularity towards sustainable fashion and eco-friendly shopping.

As per the report by UN Environment Programme, "10 percent of global carbon emissions are produced by the fashion industry". Quoting that this is "more than all international flights and maritime shipping".

Fashion brands are now focusing on trending pieces in consumer's wardrobes with responsible and ethical choices. The consumer is making conscious buying decisions keeping the organic and natural brand value of the retailer in mind, as the same reflects their personality too.

There is a huge increase in search of 'sustainability-related keywords' as per the report by Lyst, which include searches like 'recycled polyester', 'vegan leather', 'organic hemp', 'Econyl', 'organic cotton', 'modal' and many more.

Fashion and Environment

Fashion brands are ready to change the game with the ultimate goal of 'good for people and planet'. The global ethical fashion market is expected "to grow to \$9.81 billion in 2025 and \$15.17 billion in 2030 at a CAGR of 9.1 percent" as per the numbers by sustainable fashion industry statics.

There is a huge shift observed in consumer behavior during a survey made by McKinsey towards sustainability goals. Consumers are more conscious in terms of their lifestyle to lessen the environmental impact, they are looking for more for recycling of the product and even expecting environment-friendly packaging too. Thus, sustainability is going to be on top of the mind of consumers and brands in the coming future by building emotional attachment and delivering end-to-end sustainable brands.

Elisa Niemtow, VP, Consumer Sectors & Membership at BSR (Business for Social Responsibility) mentioned, "Consumers' growing interest in 'zero-waste' and 'no buy' in fashion and beauty signals growing sensitivities in consumers to question their purchases and align them with their values."

A meaningful change is expected if consumers, businesses, and brands align their functions with SDGs for everyone with everything on it.

Sustainable and Conscious Fashion Brands

The brand which achieved the highest rating when it comes to sustainability in fashion is 'Stella McCartney' known as a pioneer of eco-friendly ethical luxury fashion, which offered sustainable wardrobe alternative. The strategy of the brand stands on 4 strong pillars, which takes care of people (ensuring smooth supply chain), respect for nature (ensuring environmentally friendly fabric), caring for animals (ensuring animal welfare), and providing circular solutions (3R as environmental Mantra).

Keeping all these benefits of being sustainable various brands are saving the planet from harmful pesticides and toxic chemicals. Every brand has a different focus in terms of serving Mother Earth and being sustainable, like empowering the rural weavers (FabIndia), using full natural Indian textiles (The Jodi Life), handspun fabric for fashion enthusiasts (KhadiCult), using organic cotton (Pero), recycled cotton (Chola The Label), engaging women in making re-cycled bottle (The Body Shop), eco-friendly textile (Anokhi), empowering rural women (Okhai), using organic fibers (Nicobar), zero waste mission (Doodlage, Insom, Homanwear), surplus cotton fabric (Pomogrenade) and many more.

Many brands are adapting to a new eco-friendly fashion by a sustainable lifestyle, Mio Borsa producing vegan leather, Maati using up-cycled fabric, B Label is a revolutionary agro-based co., Viscose Staple Fibre by Aditya Birla Group as LIVA fabric, and a wide range of vegan apparel is made available by No Nasties.

Today's consumer is ready to pay more for the brands promising for a healthy environment, up-cycling waste material, eco-friendly structure and reaching out to older generation to millennials by narrating their brand stories.

Sustainable Fashion for Better Future

Brands have to be conscious from manufacturing (making) to end of use (disposing of) in the context of fashion. The practice of being ethical and sustainable should be a norm to be practiced by all fashion players in the coming time.

Your consumer is well educated, show them in detail the fabric of your cloth, how the same is different from others with the business model your business is aiming for.

According to a FashionScope report by McKinsey, "Sustainability is making ground in India, where the local market is forecast to reach nearly \$60 billion in revenues in 2022, making it the sixth-largest in the world after the U.K. and Germany".

The government is also making its efforts towards making Indian fashion more sustainable; Arvind Mills and Raymond are promoting Khadi products in partnership with Air India and bamboo charcoal fiber was also highlighted by NITI Ayog Forum for North East.

Whether the product is sustainable or not, brands have to market the same in an environment-friendly way by making the product more durable as well as focusing on the supply chain.

How India is becoming a hotspot for global kids wear fashion retailers

Many global brands are exploring growth opportunities in emerging markets as economic growth and birth rates slow in western markets, and India is seen as a high-potential market.

Guest author



Designer clothing for children has been around since Christian Dior started making it in the 60's. However, in India, luxury kids lines has surged in recent years. The market for children's fashion and luxury is fast becoming one of the most profitable retail segments in India. Many global brands are exploring growth opportunities in emerging markets as economic growth and birth rates slow in western markets, and India is seen as a high-potential market. The fact that India is one of the youngest nations in the world with 29 per cent of its 1.2 billion population being under 14 years, according to the World Bank—makes it an attractive market for brands. For the US, Europe and Japan shares of children in their population are 19 per cent, 16 per cent and 13 per cent, respectively.

Among the emerging economies, India has the distinct advantage of being a country with promising economic outlook coupled with growing kids population and increasing discretionary spending on kids. Talking about facts, in 2015, the retail value of the kids apparel market in India was pegged at Rs. 79,000 crore, according to industry estimates. A large portion of the demand has been driven by Indian consumers shifting to the organized market. According to a March 2016 category briefing by Euromonitor International, spends on branded children wear products are on the rise in urban centres in India with kidswear expected to reach sales of Rs 1.6 trillion by 2020.

All children are extensions of their parents and want to wear what their father is wearing. Luxury labels like Gucci, Burberry, Armani, Little Marc Jacobs and premium brands like Hugo Boss, Karl Lagerfeld, Carrement Beau and among others see value in bringing kidswear to India.

The market for kids' apparel in India exceeds Rs. 13000 crore, of which around Rs. 3000 crore is constituted by branded kids' wear. The kids' wear market is growing at the rate of 10 per cent per annum, which makes it one of the fastest growing markets.

Some major changes in trends are taking place in the market for kids' apparel. One of the important changes is the increasing preference for branded apparel. This shift is taking place on account of changes such as a rise in the disposable income of the people and the increasing influence of foreign culture. The other important change that is taking place in this area is the emergence of kids as an independent buyer group. Influenced by mass media and peer pressure, today's kids are more informed and self-conscious. Indians are increasingly spending more than they ever have on clothes for children. Infact, Indian and Chinese mums are the only ones, globally, willing to stretch their budget to buy branded products for their children.

Earlier, kids' wear market in particular had been dominated by non-branded players since parents did not believe in investing in kids' clothing. But those days are passé with global brands like, Pepe, Gap, Benneton, Tommy Hilfiger, Pony, Pima and Reebok and designer labels vying for space.

A study by industry body Assocham has estimated that kidswear market in the country will be worth Rs 95,000 crore by 2016, growing at a compound annual growth rate of about 20 per cent. Kids today are also becoming brand conscious and have their own preferences while the parents are ready to shell out money; probably it is the feeling that they couldn't do it so they want it for their kids.

Children's apparel is a growing market in India that has huge untapped potential. Apparel makers all over India are making forays into this huge market, in an attempt to make favorable use of the prevailing trends. They are also coming up with collections that would create new trends.

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