

An Overview of Sustainability and Fast Fashion in the Indian Context

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ABSTRACT

This review paper examines the research conducted in the past 10 years on sustainability and fast fashion in the Indian context, aiming to identify key findings and trends in understanding the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion industry within India. Recent research studies have highlighted the environmental implications of fast fashion, including excessive water consumption, chemical pollution, and waste generation. The need for sustainable sourcing practices and waste management strategies in the Indian fashion industry has been emphasized. The social dimension of fast fashion has also received significant attention, with studies focusing on working conditions, labor rights, and ethical practices within the fast fashion supply chain. Fair wages and improved working conditions have been identified as key areas for improvement. To address the sustainability challenges posed by fast fashion, research has highlighted the importance of adopting circular economy principles. Recycling, upcycling, and sustainable consumption practices have been explored as potential strategies to reduce waste and promote a more circular and sustainable fashion industry in India. This review paper underscores the urgent need for industry-wide changes and policy interventions to mitigate the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion. Future research should focus on developing and implementing sustainable strategies tailored to the specific challenges and opportunities within the Indian fashion industry.

Key Words : Sustainability, Fast fashion, Environmental impact, Social responsibility, Circular economy

INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry has undergone a dramatic transformation in recent years, fueled by the rise of fast fashion (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). Fast fashion refers to the rapid production and consumption of inexpensive clothing, driven by constant changes in fashion trends and demand for affordable, disposable garments. This phenomenon has gained significant momentum globally, including in the Indian fashion market, which has witnessed a remarkable surge in the popularity of fast fashion brands (Gupta, 2018).

The Indian fashion industry, known for its rich heritage and traditional craftsmanship, has experienced a paradigm shift with the advent of fast fashion. As one of the largest and fastest-growing apparel markets in the

world, India has become a lucrative market for international fast fashion giants and domestic brands alike (Patel, 2019). The accessibility and affordability of trendy clothing options have captivated Indian consumers, leading to a surge in demand for fast fashion products.

However, the rapid growth of fast fashion has raised concerns about its sustainability, both in terms of its environmental impact and social implications. Fast fashion relies on a business model that prioritizes high-speed production, low-cost labor, and inexpensive materials, resulting in significant environmental degradation and social injustices throughout the supply chain (Joy *et al.*, 2012).

In the Indian context, the sustainability challenges posed by fast fashion are particularly pronounced. India faces unique environmental challenges, such as water

scarcity, pollution, and waste management issues, which are exacerbated by the high volume of textile production and consumption (Ghosh, 2020). Additionally, the fashion industry's labor practices, including low wages, long working hours, and unsafe working conditions, have come under scrutiny, necessitating a closer examination of the social aspects of sustainability (Das, 2021).

Recognizing the urgency to address these sustainability challenges, stakeholders within the Indian fashion industry are increasingly embracing initiatives aimed at promoting more sustainable practices. These initiatives encompass various aspects, including the use of eco-friendly materials, ethical sourcing, recycling and upcycling, and the adoption of circular economy principles (Choudhary and Verma, 2019). Indian fashion brands, designers, and policymakers are realizing the need to strike a balance between consumer demands and responsible, sustainable practices.

This review aims to provide an overview of sustainability and fast fashion within the Indian context. By analyzing existing literature and case studies, it seeks to explore the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion in India, while also highlighting the sustainable practices and initiatives that are being undertaken to mitigate these negative effects. Furthermore, it examines the challenges faced by the Indian fashion industry in adopting sustainable practices and explores the potential for collaboration among various stakeholders to drive positive change (Mishra *et al.*, 2018).

Overall, this review paper seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the current state of sustainability in the fast fashion industry in India. By shedding light on the complexities and opportunities inherent in this context, it aims to encourage dialogue, inspire action, and pave the way for a more sustainable and responsible fashion industry in India.

METHODOLOGY

This review paper follows a systematic approach to gather and analyze relevant literature and case studies on sustainability and fast fashion in the Indian context. The material and methods section outlines the procedures employed to ensure the reliability and validity of the information presented.

Literature Review:

A comprehensive search of scholarly articles, books, research papers, conference proceedings, and reports

related to sustainability and fast fashion in India was conducted using databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Scopus. Keywords such as “fast fashion,” “sustainability,” and “Indian fashion industry” were used.

Data Selection and Inclusion Criteria:

Relevant sources were selected based on their credibility, relevance to the research topic, and recent publication. Only studies published in English and focused specifically on sustainability and fast fashion in the Indian context were included.

Data Extraction and Analysis:

The selected literature was reviewed, and information regarding the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion in India, sustainable practices, challenges, and initiatives were extracted. The data were categorized thematically for analysis.

Case Studies:

In addition to the literature review, case studies were examined to provide real-world examples of sustainable practices and initiatives in the Indian fashion industry.

Data Synthesis:

The gathered information was synthesized to present a comprehensive overview of sustainability and fast fashion in the Indian context, identifying key findings, trends, challenges, and opportunities.

Critical Analysis:

The collected data and findings were critically analyzed to evaluate the strengths and limitations of sustainability in the Indian fashion industry, considering environmental, social, economic, and cultural aspects.

Framework Development:

A conceptual framework was developed based on the analysis to illustrate the interrelationships between fast fashion, sustainability, and the Indian context.

Limitations:

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of relying on secondary data from published sources and the potential exclusion of unpublished or industry-specific information. The scope of this review may not encompass all aspects of sustainability and fast fashion in the Indian context.

Despite these limitations, the material and methods used in this review paper ensure a systematic and rigorous approach to gather and analyze information, providing credibility and validity to the findings. The synthesis of literature and case studies offers valuable insights into the current state of sustainability in the Indian fashion industry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Environmental Impact of Fast Fashion in India:

The analysis of literature and case studies reveals that fast fashion in India has significant environmental consequences. The high demand for inexpensive clothing and the accelerated production cycles lead to increased resource consumption, water pollution, and waste generation (Ghosh, 2020; Mittal *et al.*, 2018). The textile dyeing and finishing processes contribute to water pollution through the discharge of hazardous chemicals (Ghosh and Mohapatra, 2021). Additionally, the extensive use of synthetic fibers, such as polyester, contributes to the release of microplastics into water bodies during laundering (Dasgupta *et al.*, 2019). The findings emphasize the urgent need for sustainable practices to mitigate these environmental impacts.

Social Impact of Fast Fashion in India:

Fast fashion also has notable social implications in the Indian context. The rapid turnover of fashion trends and the pressure to produce garments quickly and at low cost often result in poor working conditions for garment workers. Many workers in the Indian fashion industry face long working hours, low wages, lack of job security, and inadequate safety measures (Ghosh and Mohapatra, 2021; Mittal *et al.*, 2018). The prevalence of informal labor and the exploitation of marginalized communities exacerbate these challenges (Ghosh, 2020). Ensuring social justice and promoting fair working conditions should be a key focus in sustainable fashion initiatives.

Consumer Awareness and Changing Preferences:

Studies indicate a growing consumer awareness regarding the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion in India (Ghosh and Mohapatra, 2021). Consumers are becoming more conscious of sustainable practices and are inclined towards ethical and eco-friendly fashion choices. This shift in consumer preferences presents an opportunity for the Indian fashion industry to

adopt sustainable and circular business models (Ghosh, 2020).

Sustainable Initiatives in the Indian Fashion Industry:

Various sustainable initiatives and interventions have emerged in the Indian fashion industry to address the environmental and social challenges posed by fast fashion. These include the use of organic and natural fibers, adoption of eco-friendly manufacturing processes, promotion of fair trade practices, and the establishment of sustainable fashion brands (Mittal *et al.*, 2018; Dasgupta *et al.*, 2019). Collaborative efforts between industry stakeholders, government bodies, and non-profit organizations are crucial for driving sustainable practices and creating a more responsible fashion ecosystem in India.

Policy Framework for Sustainable Fashion:

To foster sustainability in the Indian fashion industry, the development and implementation of comprehensive policy frameworks are essential. Government support through regulations and incentives can encourage sustainable practices and hold brands accountable for their environmental and social impacts (Ghosh and Mohapatra, 2021). The integration of sustainability education in fashion curriculum and industry-wide certifications can also play a vital role in driving positive change.

Overall, the results highlight the urgent need for sustainable practices in the Indian fashion industry to mitigate the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion. Consumer awareness, industry collaboration, and supportive policies are critical for achieving a more sustainable and responsible fashion ecosystem in India.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the examination of sustainability and fast fashion in the Indian context reveals significant environmental and social challenges associated with the rapid growth of the fashion industry. The demand for inexpensive clothing and the accelerated production cycles have resulted in detrimental environmental impacts, including resource depletion, water pollution, and waste generation. The textile dyeing and finishing processes, as well as the use of synthetic fibers, contribute to water pollution and the release of microplastics. Additionally, fast fashion has led to poor working conditions and

exploitation of garment workers, particularly in the informal sector.

However, there is a growing awareness among consumers about the environmental and social consequences of fast fashion, signaling a shift in preferences towards sustainable and ethical choices. This provides an opportunity for the Indian fashion industry to embrace sustainable practices and circular business models. Various initiatives and interventions, such as the use of organic fibers, eco-friendly manufacturing processes, and fair trade practices, have emerged to address these challenges. Collaborative efforts between industry stakeholders, government bodies, and non-profit organizations are essential for driving sustainable practices and fostering a responsible fashion ecosystem in India.

To facilitate the transition towards sustainability, comprehensive policy frameworks that support sustainable practices and hold brands accountable are necessary. Government regulations and incentives can play a crucial role in promoting sustainable fashion. Integrating sustainability education into fashion curriculum and implementing industry-wide certifications can also contribute to positive change.

It is evident that sustainable fashion practices are imperative to mitigate the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion in India. By prioritizing sustainability, the fashion industry can protect the environment, promote fair working conditions, and meet the evolving preferences of conscious consumers. A concerted effort from all stakeholders is required to create a more sustainable and responsible fashion ecosystem in the Indian context.

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