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CONSUMERS' ATTITUDE AND BUYING BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE APPAREL: AN EVIDENCE FROM INDIAN YOUTH

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ABSTRACT **DOI No: 10.36713/epra28046** **Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra28046**

The apparel industry is one of the major contributors to environmental pollution, necessitating a shift toward sustainable consumption practices. This study investigates consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions towards sustainable apparel among Indian youth. The research was conducted across multiple States in India using a stratified random sampling technique, with a sample size of 52 respondents aged between 19 and 28 years. Data was collected through an online questionnaire and analyzed using statistical tools like frequency, percentage and correlation. The findings revealed that although a majority of respondents were familiar with sustainable apparel; this awareness did not significantly translated into purchasing behaviour. Factors such as cost, income level, peer influence and personal preferences like quality and style played a more dominant role in decision-making. It was also found that income did not have any impact on sustainable buying behaviour whereas prior knowledge affected purchasing behaviour positively. The study concludes that while environmental concern exists, economic and social factors limit the adoption of sustainable apparel, highlighting the need for increased awareness and affordability.

KEYWORDS*: Sustainable apparel, Consumer behaviour, Indian youth, Environmental concern, Purchase intention*

1. INTRODUCTION

The global apparel industry has emerged as one of the most environmentally intensive sectors, contributing significantly to pollution, resource depletion and waste generation. In rapidly developing economies like India, the expansion of the textile and fashion industry has increased consumption patterns, leading to high environmental concerns. The industry is often regarded as the second largest polluting sector after the oil industry, with a substantial share in global carbon emissions. Additionally, the low rate of textile waste recycling and the growing dominance of fast fashion have intensified the environmental burden. If current trends continue, the environmental impact of the fashion industry is expected to rise sharply in the coming decades, making sustainable alternatives not just desirable but essential. Sustainable apparel has emerged as a viable solution to mitigate these environmental challenges. It encompasses clothing produced through environmentally friendly processes, ethical labour practices and resource-efficient technologies aimed at reducing carbon footprints and promoting ecological balance. In recent years, several apparel brands have introduced sustainable product lines, reflecting a shift toward greener production systems. However, the success of sustainable apparel does not depend solely on production innovations; it also requires active participation from consumers. Without consumer acceptance and adoption, the impact of sustainable initiatives remains limited.

Among different consumer segments, youth play a critical role in shaping market trends and consumption patterns. Young consumers are highly engaged with fashion and are more responsive to emerging trends, making them a key target group for promoting sustainable consumption. Their purchasing decisions have the potential to influence the market and drive demand for environmentally responsible products. Despite this potential, there exists a noticeable gap between awareness and actual purchasing behaviour. While many young consumers express concern for environmental sustainability, only a small proportion translates these concerns into consistent buying practices. Consumer behaviour toward sustainable apparel is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including economic constraints, personal values, social influence and product-related attributes such as quality, price and style. In many cases, financial limitations and the higher cost of sustainable products act as major barriers, particularly among students and young individuals with limited income. At the same time, peer influence and social norms can significantly shape purchasing decisions, either encouraging or discouraging sustainable choices. Furthermore, knowledge and awareness about sustainable apparel do not always lead to behavioural change, indicating the presence of an attitude–behaviour gap.

Given these dynamics, it becomes important to examine how young consumers perceive sustainable apparel and what factors influence their buying intentions. Understanding these aspects can help in designing effective strategies to promote sustainable consumption and encourage environmentally responsible behaviour. Therefore, the present study focuses on analyzing the attitude and behavioural intention of youth toward sustainable apparel, along with identifying the key factors that affect their purchasing decisions. By doing so, the study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on sustainable fashion and provide insights for policymakers, marketers and researchers working toward a more sustainable future.

1.1 Rationale of the study

From the review of literature it was found that many studies have been conducted in terms of consumers' attitude and behavioural intention towards sustainable apparel but still there is very less awareness on the consumers regarding sustainability of apparel which is continuously degrading the environment. Hence, the present study focuses on the attitude and behaviour pattern of consumers especially youth towards sustainable apparel.

1.2 Objectives of the study

- To determine the behaviour of young consumers towards sustainable apparel.
- To explore the factors affecting sustainable buying attitude and behaviour.

1.3 Hypothesis of the study

H_1 There is a positive relationship between income of the respondents and their buying behaviour towards sustainable apparel.

H_2 There is a positive relationship between existing knowledge of the respondents about sustainable apparel and their buying behaviour towards sustainable apparel.

2. METHODOLOGY

The Study adopted an exploratory research design to examine consumers' attitudes and behavioural intentions toward sustainable apparel. A total of 52 respondents were selected using a stratified random sampling technique from different states of India, including Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Bihar, Rajasthan, Delhi, Assam, Haryana, Manipur, Telangana and Gujarat. The sample mainly comprised youth aged between 19 and 28 years. The variables of the study included independent variables such as age, gender, income and knowledge level, while the dependent variable was the buying behaviour of consumers toward sustainable apparel.

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire combined with a Likert scale, covering general information, awareness, attitudes and factors influencing buying behaviour. The survey was administered online through Google Forms. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, primarily frequency, percentage and correlation analysis, to understand response patterns and distribution. These techniques were further used to examine the relationship between variables, particularly the influence of income and knowledge on sustainable apparel purchasing behaviour.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After collecting the data with regard to objectives i.e. buying behaviour of consumers towards sustainable apparels and factors affecting buying behaviour, it was analyzed and tabulated. The results thus obtained are presented, along with interpretation and discussion.

3.1 Profile of the respondents

This section presents the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents selected from different states of India. The analysis of age distribution (Table:1) revealed that the majority of respondents (54%) belonged to the age group of 21–23 years, followed by 38 per cent in the 24–26 years category. A smaller proportion (6%) fell within 19–20 years, while only 2 per cent was in the 27–28 years group, indicating that the sample was largely concentrated in the early-youth category.

The findings of the above study are supported by research done on sustainable apparel consumption among Indian youth, which also reported that young consumers in the age group of 18–25 years constitute the major segment showing awareness and behavioural intention towards sustainable fashion products. A study by Kumar *et al.* (2022) found that educated Indian youth demonstrated significant pro-environmental purchase intentions toward eco-friendly apparel, indicating the growing involvement of young consumers in sustainable fashion behaviour. Similarly, another study by Rajput *et al.* (2024) observed that Indian young consumers showed favourable attitudes and purchase intentions toward sustainable apparel due to increasing environmental awareness and changing consumption values.

S.No.	Age	Frequency	Percentage
1.	19-20	3	6
2.	21-23	28	54
3.	24-26	20	38
4.	27-28	1	2

Table 1: Age of the respondents

In terms of gender (Figure: 1), a significant majority (81%) of respondents were female, while males constituted only 19 per cent, suggesting a higher participation of females in the study. Regarding educational qualification, half of the respondents (50%) were graduates, followed by 25 per cent intermediates and 23.07 per cent postgraduates, with negligible representation from doctoral-level respondents. The marital status distribution (Figure: 1) showed that most respondents (96%) were unmarried, which aligns with the age group selected for the study.

These findings are supported by the research conducted by Rajput *et al*. (2024) which reported that the majority of respondents in sustainable apparel studies were young, educated, unmarried females pursuing graduate-level

education, indicating that this demographic segment is more aware of and responsive toward sustainable fashion practices.

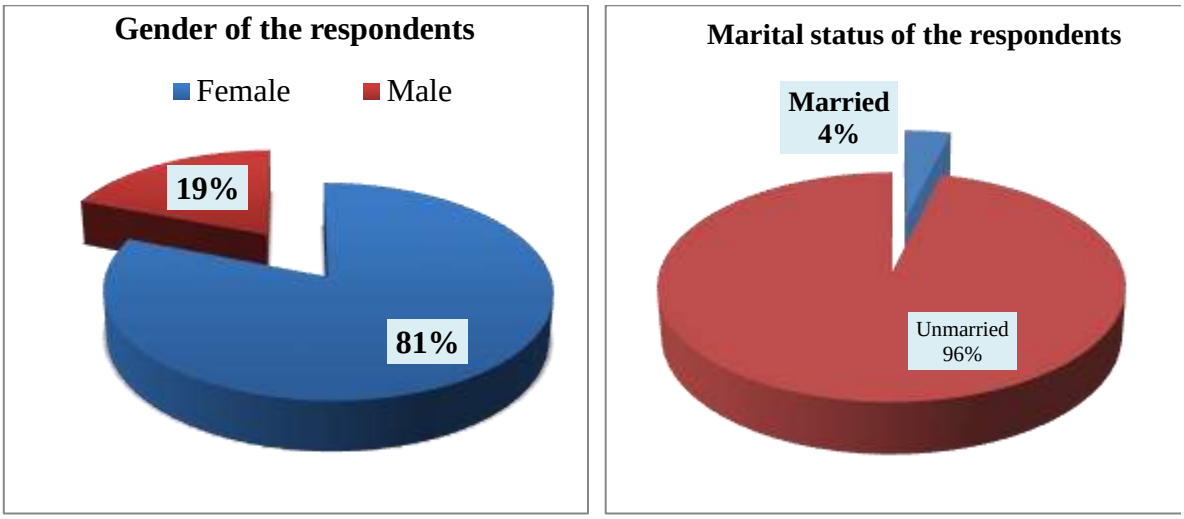


Figure 1: Gender and marital status of the respondents

The income profile (Table: 2) indicated that 46.15 per cent of respondents belonged to the ₹5,000–₹10,000 monthly family income group, followed by 23.07 per cent in the ₹10,000–₹20,000 category. Only a small proportion (11.56%) had family income above ₹50,000, reflecting moderate economic backgrounds. Occupationally, the majority (92%) were students, which explains their dependency on family income or stipends. Consistently, 75 per cent of respondents reported receiving a stipend or pocket money in the range of ₹5,000–₹7,000. Geographically, more than half of the respondents (53.84%) were from Uttarakhand, followed by Telangana (13.46%) and Uttar Pradesh (7.69%), while other states contributed smaller proportions.

The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents in the present study are supported by earlier research conducted by Chaturvedi and Kulshreshtha (2020) among young consumers and university students in India. Previous studies have shown that sustainable apparel research commonly includes respondents from middle-income households, with students forming the dominant participant group due to their greater awareness of environmental and ethical issues. Similarly, research by Khare and Srinivasan (2019) reported that college students and young adults constituted the major consumer segment interested in sustainable fashion products, with most respondents belonging to middle-income families and depending on pocket money or family support for apparel purchases. These findings support the socio-economic profile observed in the present investigation, where the majority of respondents were students from moderate-income backgrounds.

S.No.	Family Income	Frequency	Percentage
1	Below 5000	2	3.84
2	5000 -10000	24	46.15
3	10000-20000	12	23.07
4	20000-50000	8	15.38
5	Above 50000	6	11.56

Table 2: Family income of the respondents

3.2 Attitude and buying behaviour of consumers towards sustainable apparel

The analysis of consumer awareness (Table: 3) indicated that a large proportion (80.8%) of respondents were familiar with the term "sustainable apparel," while 11.5 per cent had no knowledge and 7.7 per cent were uncertain. This suggests that awareness exists among youth, although depth of understanding may vary.

The findings of the present study are supported by the research showing that awareness regarding sustainable apparel and environmentally responsible fashion is increasing among young consumers. A study by Kozar and Connell (2013) reported that young consumers' demonstrated awareness of sustainable clothing concepts and environmental issues associated with the fashion industry, although their level of detailed understanding and actual purchasing behaviour varied considerably. Similarly, research has indicated that consumers are generally aware of sustainability-related terminology, but their practical knowledge regarding sustainable materials, ethical production and eco-labels remains limited.

S.No.	Familiarity with term "sustainable apparel"	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	42	80.8
2	No	6	11.5
3	May be	4	7.7

Table 3: Familiarity with the term "sustainable apparel"

When examining purchase preferences (shown in Table: 4), it was observed that 57.7 per cent of respondents preferred high-priced sustainable apparel over low-priced non-sustainable alternatives, indicating a willingness to consider sustainability despite higher costs. However, 42.3 per cent still preferred lower-priced non-sustainable options, highlighting the influence of price sensitivity. Notably, when both sustainable and non-sustainable apparel were available at the same price, all respondents chose sustainable options, demonstrating a strong latent preference for sustainability when cost is not a constraint.

The findings of the present study are consistent with a previous study indicating that consumers, particularly young and environmentally conscious individuals, are willing to prefer sustainable apparel despite its comparatively higher price. However, price sensitivity continues to act as a major barrier to the actual purchase of sustainable clothing products. A study by Brookshire and Norum (2011) reported that consumers expressed positive attitudes toward socially responsible and sustainable apparel, but higher prices often limited their purchasing decisions.

S.No.	Preference between high price sustainable and low price non sustainable apparel	Frequency	Percentage
1	The item costing more	30	57.70
2	The item costing less	22	42.30

Table 4: Preference between high price sustainable and low price non sustainable apparel

The main motivation for purchasing clothing (Figure: 2) was primarily driven by quality (50%), followed by style (28.8%). Environmental concern accounted for only 9.6 per cent, indicating that sustainability is not a primary purchasing criterion. This finding reflects that functional and aesthetic attributes dominate consumer decision-making over environmental considerations.

The findings of the present study are in agreement with previous research done by Lundblad, and Davies (2016) indicating that consumers generally prioritize functional and aesthetic attributes such as quality, comfort, style and price over environmental considerations while purchasing apparel products. Similarly, research by Niinimäki, 2010 found that environmental awareness alone was insufficient to drive apparel purchasing behaviour, as consumers continued to value style, product quality and personal appearance more strongly than ecological aspects.

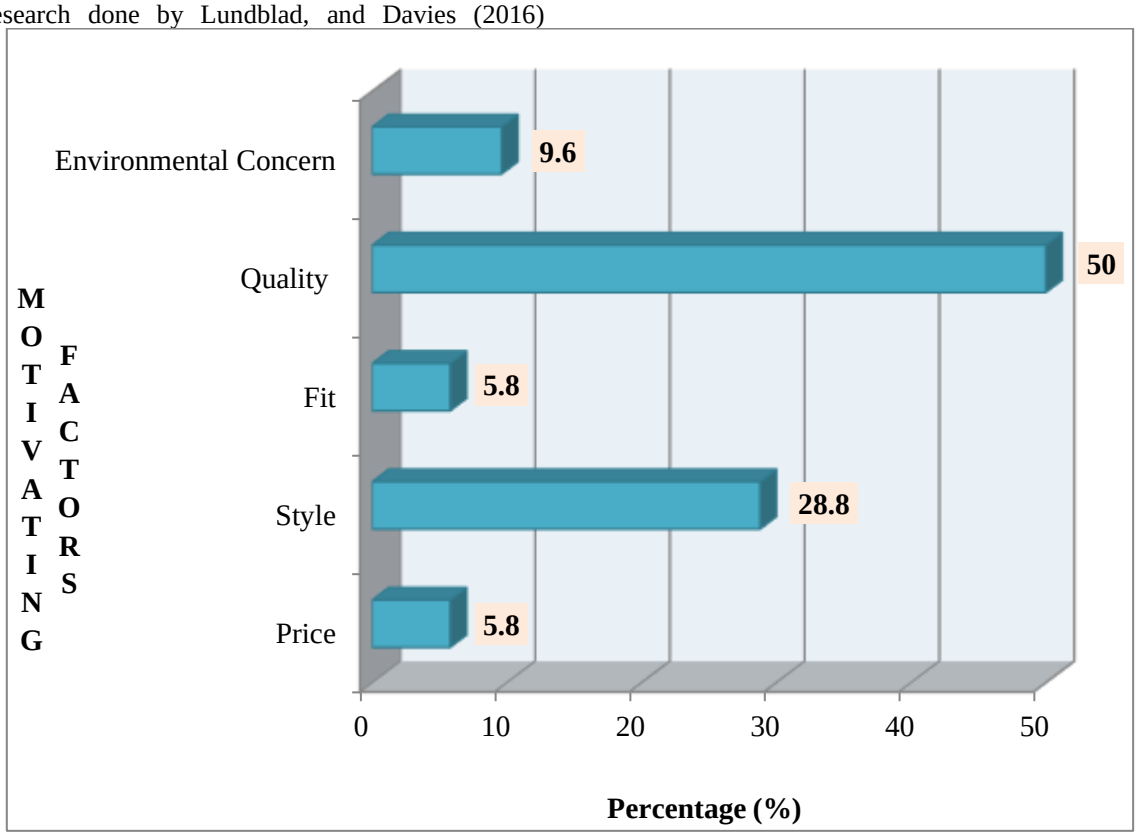


Figure 2: Motivating factors to purchase apparel

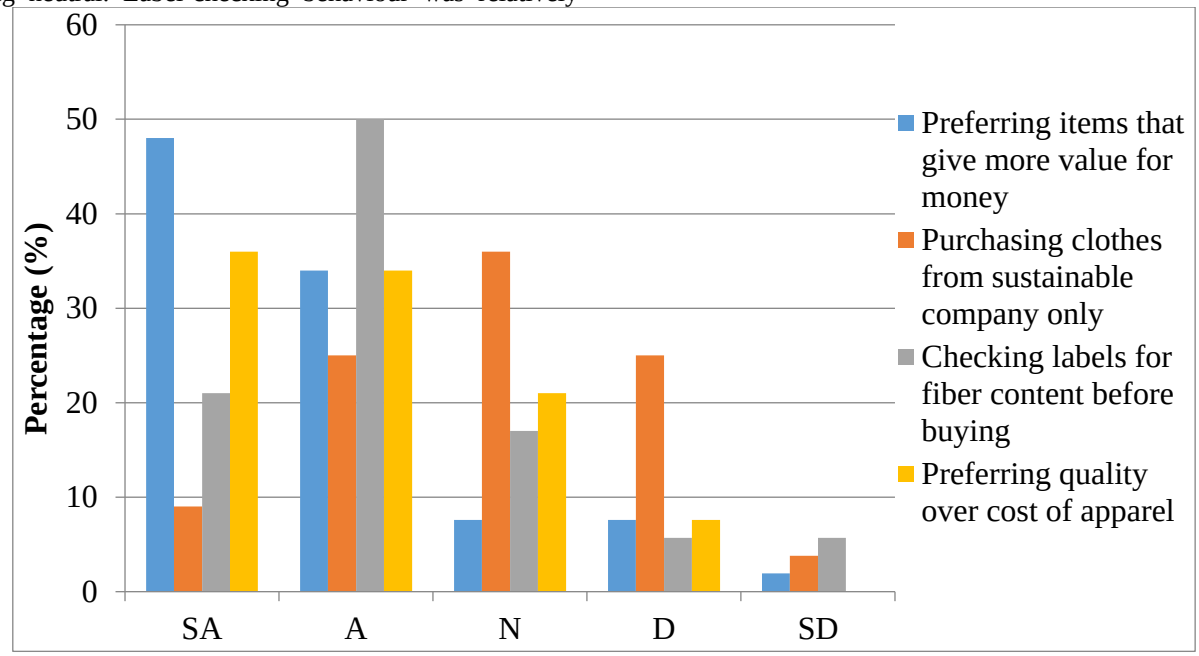
In terms of buying frequency, a majority (82.7%) reported purchasing environmentally friendly apparel only occasionally, while 13.5 per cent always purchased such items and 3.8 per cent never did (as indicated in Table: 5). This suggests that although awareness and positive attitudes exist, consistent sustainable purchasing behaviour is limited. Similar findings were given by Connell (2010) which says that many consumers purchased environmentally responsible apparel only occasionally despite being aware of sustainability issues, highlighting the existence of an attitude–behaviour gap in

sustainable clothing consumption. These findings align with the present study, where respondents demonstrated awareness and positive orientation toward environmentally friendly apparel, but regular purchasing behaviour remained limited.

S.No.	Frequency of buying environmental friendly apparel	Frequency	Percentage
1	Always	7	13.5
2	Sometimes	43	82.7
3	Never	2	3.80

Table 5: Frequency of buying environmental friendly apparel

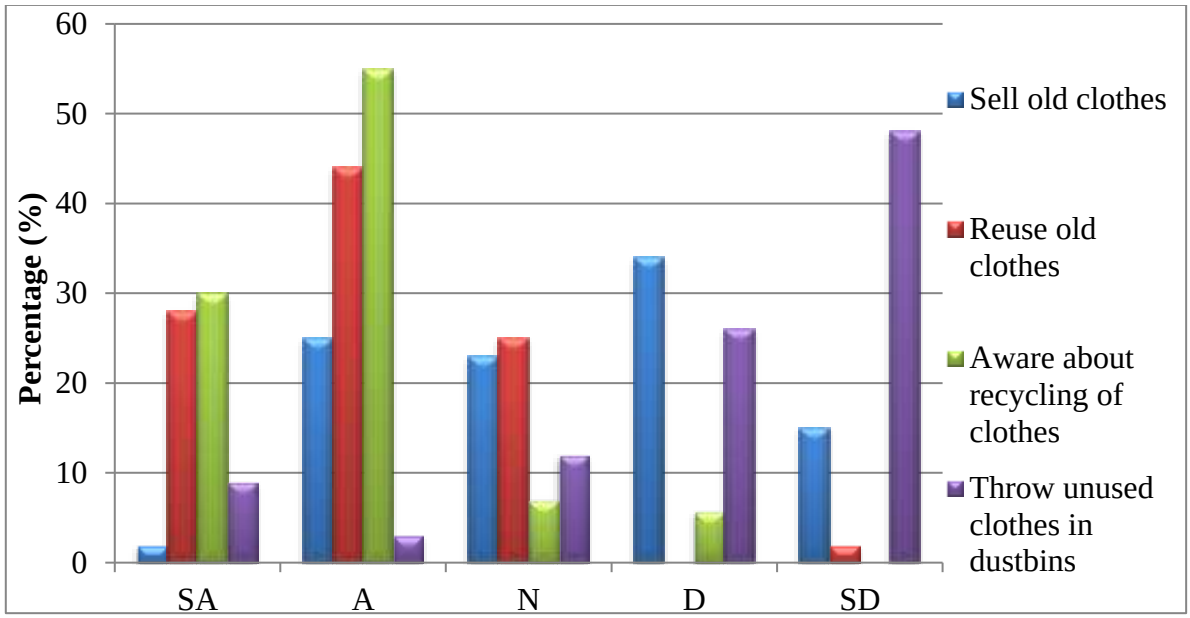
Further analysis of buying behaviour (shown in Figure: 3) revealed that a significant proportion of respondents preferred value for money and quality over cost considerations. Around 70 per cent agreed to prioritize quality even if it involves higher cost, while responses regarding purchasing exclusively from sustainable companies were mixed, with a large percentage remaining neutral. Label-checking behaviour was relatively common, indicating some level of consumer awareness regarding product composition. Similarly, McNeill and Moore (2015) observed that consumers often checked garment labels and product information to evaluate fabric composition and ethical attributes, reflecting growing awareness regarding sustainable clothing consumption.



SA- Strongly Agree, A- Agree, N- Neutral, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree

Figure 3: Buying behaviour of the respondents

The post-use behaviour of apparel (Figure: 4) showed relatively positive trends. A considerable proportion of respondents preferred reusing old clothes, with 44 per cent agreeing and 28 per cent strongly agreeing to this practice. Awareness about recycling was also high (approximately 85%). Moreover, the majority of respondents disagreed with discarding clothes in dustbins, suggesting environmentally responsible disposal behaviour. However, selling old clothes was not widely practiced, with many respondents expressing reluctance toward it. Bianchi and Birtwistle (2012) found that many consumers practiced clothing reuse and recycling due to environmental awareness, although resale or selling of used garments was less preferred because of social and cultural perceptions associated with second-hand clothing. This finding supports the present study, where respondents showed positive attitudes toward reusing and recycling apparel while demonstrating reluctance toward selling old clothes.

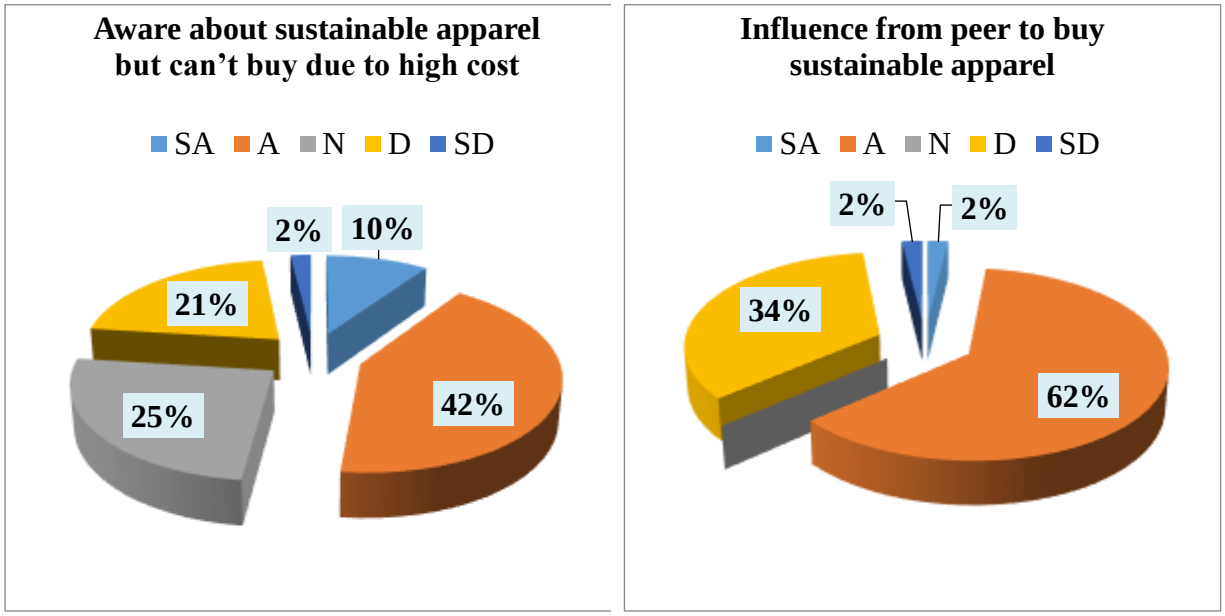


SA- Strongly Agree, A- Agree, N- Neutral, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree

Figure 4: Post buying behaviour of the respondents

3.3 Factors affecting the buying behaviour of sustainable apparel

The study identified several factors influencing the purchasing behaviour of consumers toward sustainable apparel. Cost emerged as a major barrier, with 52 per cent of respondents agreeing that they were aware of sustainable apparel but did not purchase it due to high prices. This highlights the critical role of affordability in shaping sustainable consumption. Similarly, Joergens (2006) found that while consumers showed concern for ethical and environmental issues in fashion, price remained a dominant factor influencing purchasing decisions, often outweighing sustainability considerations.



SA- Strongly Agree, A- Agree, N- Neutral, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree

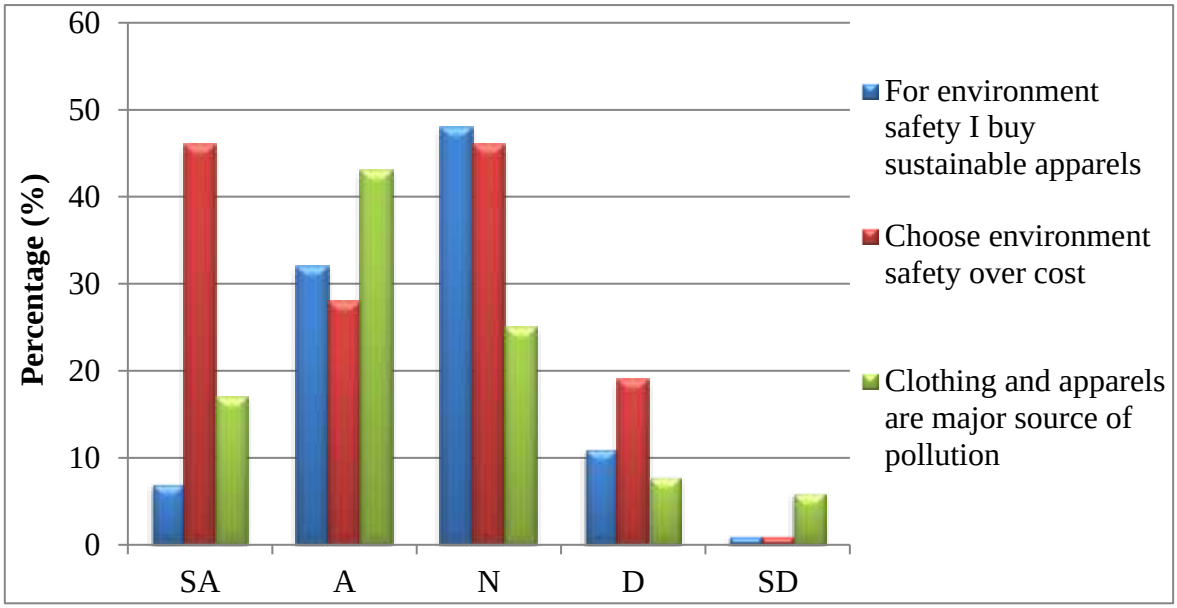
Figure 5: Factors affecting buying behaviour

Another important finding was the gap between knowledge and behaviour. Although 44.2 per cent of respondents reported having knowledge about sustainable apparel, a substantial proportion admitted that they did not translate this knowledge into actual purchasing decisions. This indicates that awareness alone is insufficient to drive sustainable behaviour.

Peer influence was found to play a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour (indicated in Figure: 5). A majority of respondents agreed that their peer groups preferred sustainable apparel, and 64 per cent acknowledged being influenced by peers in their purchasing decisions. This suggests that social norms and group dynamics can significantly impact sustainable consumption patterns. Environmental concern also influenced behaviour, but not strongly. While some respondents indicated that they considered environmental safety when purchasing apparel, a large proportion remained neutral. Only a limited number consistently prioritized sustainability over other factors such as price and quality. Additionally, only a small percentage strongly agreed that apparel consumption contributes

significantly to environmental pollution (Figure: 6), indicating limited awareness about the broader environmental impact of the fashion industry.

The findings of the present study are consistent with earlier research highlighting the existence of an attitude–behaviour gap in sustainable apparel consumption. Several studies have shown that consumers may possess awareness and positive attitudes toward sustainable fashion, yet fail to translate this knowledge into actual purchasing behaviour because of factors such as price, convenience, limited availability and habitual buying patterns. A study by McNeill and Moore (2015) reported that although young consumers expressed concern about sustainability issues, these concerns were not consistently reflected in their apparel purchasing decisions. Peer influence and social norms have also been identified as important determinants of sustainable consumption behaviour. Research by Chan and Wong (2012) found that social influence, peer acceptance and group behaviour significantly affected consumers' intentions to purchase environmentally responsible products, particularly among younger age groups. These findings support the results of the present study, where awareness and peer influence were evident, but sustainable purchasing behaviour remained inconsistent.



SA- Strongly Agree, A- Agree, N- Neutral, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree

Figure 6: Knowledge and behaviour of the respondents on sustainable apparel

Furthermore, although many respondents had knowledge about environmental safe clothing and were able to understand eco-labels and symbols, this knowledge did not consistently translate into sustainable purchasing decisions. A considerable proportion of respondents remained neutral or inconsistent in their behaviour, reinforcing the presence of an attitude–behaviour gap.

Table 6**: Correlation between income and knowledge of the respondents with sustainable buying behaviour**

Variable	**Buying behaviour**
Income	r = 0.048
Knowledge	r = 0.271*
*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level of significance	

Table 6 indicates the correlation between respondents' income and knowledge with sustainable buying behaviour. The results revealed that income had a very weak positive correlation with sustainable buying behaviour (r = 0.048), indicating that income did not significantly influence the buying behaviour of respondents towards sustainable products. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that there is a positive relationship between income and sustainable buying behaviour was not supported.

On the other hand, knowledge showed a positive correlation with sustainable buying behaviour (r = 0.271). Since the correlation was significant at the 0.05 level of significance, it indicates that respondents having greater knowledge about sustainable apparel were more likely to exhibit sustainable buying behaviour. Hence, the hypothesis related to knowledge and sustainable buying behaviour was accepted.

CONCLUSION

The present study highlights that although Indian youth exhibit a reasonable level of awareness about sustainable apparel, this awareness does not consistently translate into actual purchasing behaviour. A clear attitude–behaviour gap was observed, where respondents expressed positive perceptions toward sustainability but did not prioritize it during purchase decisions. Instead, factors such as quality and style were found to be the primary determinants of buying behaviour, while environmental concern played a relatively minor role. Economic constraints emerged as a major barrier, with many respondents indicating that the high cost of sustainable apparel

limits their ability to purchase it. This was further evident from the finding that all respondents preferred sustainable options when available at the same price, emphasizing the strong influence of affordability. Additionally, while knowledge about sustainable apparel was present among many respondents, it did not significantly impact their buying behaviour, suggesting that awareness alone is insufficient to drive change. Peer influence was found to have a notable impact on consumer behaviour, indicating the role of social factors in shaping purchasing decisions. Moreover, respondents demonstrated relatively responsible post-use practices such as reusing and recycling clothes, even though sustainable purchasing remained inconsistent. Overall, the study concludes that while there is potential among youth to adopt sustainable fashion, efforts must focus on improving affordability, strengthening awareness, and bridging the gap between knowledge and actual behaviour to promote sustainable consumption.

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