



# Contribution Title Solution for Pollution: Creating Eco-friendly and Sustainable Fashion Choices

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**Abstract.** The dynamic, tech-savvy world of ours takes pride in the achievement of material needs in a hassle-free manner and within the least time possible. Our fashion and beauty choices are influenced by celebrities, social media influencers and peer groups. In an attempt to be impeccably stylish and outshine others, we jump into the bandwagon following trends that fade or get replaced sooner or later. To cater to the fashion choices of people globally, brands and fashion houses are promoting fast fashion. Fast fashion refers to the mass production of clothes at low rates and often compromising on quality. People are quick to order or design outfits to replicate the ones they see a celebrity wearing at some event. The trend places the producers at a vantage position. Knowing their preferences, they use this strategy to attract more customers. Everything save one aspect of this isn't glamorous. The price we pay is more than the retail price. It costs us our health, as well as the health of our future generations. Fast fashion brands pay little to no attention to the environment, their motive being, to make fast money from the existing trends. They make clothing from various materials that have low production costs and high retail value. Materials like nylon, polyester, acrylic, rayon etc are not only uncomfortable and toxic, the unmindful disposal of these non-biodegradable substances pollutes the environment. Apart from these, there are garments and accessories made from silk, wool, leather to name a few which inflict cruelty upon innocent animals for the sake the fashion. Almost all brands save a few are responsible for the degradation of the environment. The sustainable, eco-friendly fashion that is here to stay is called Slow Fashion. It might be difficult to find and afford such pieces, but with people realising, Slow fashion would soon take over Fast fashion. The purpose of the study is to reverse the damage done, thus it is essential to look for alternatives that provide sustainable fashion without compromising on the looks.

**Keywords:** Environment, Trends, Pollution, Fast fashion, Slow fashion

## 1 Introduction

As often quoted, Change is the only constant in life. We must learn to adapt ourselves to the pace with which the world is moving. But the changes concerning the fashion

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and clothing industries are quite rapid. Every other day introduces us to a variety of trends, endorsed and propagated among the masses mostly through celebrity actors, models etc. To cater to the demands of the people many fast fashion brands and industries have been mushrooming today. But the price of this short-term happiness is paid with the long-term effects on the environment. Large amounts of garments are produced using manual labour which gets lost with the disposal of clothes after being worn a few times. This unmindful act proves to be not just extravagant but also damaging to the environment. About 1% of the disposed items are recycled which is very minute to bring a positive impact. Most of the fabrics such as polyester, nylon, and rayon are non-biodegradable and are one of the major causes of land pollution as well as water pollution. The dyes used in these clothing can also be toxic to the environment. Even though the cost of producing these garments is quite low and the use of materials is not quite up to the mark, they are sold at twice or thrice the price. Clothes made from cotton and linen are environment-friendly and good for the wearers. They are light, breathable fabrics hence, a staple for summers. Carrying oneself with comfort is a trend that can never be out of fashion. Then why pay huge bucks for fashion that won't last a day? Repeating clothing is considered to be a sign of poor fashion. So to fit into the standards of society, we stock our closets with clothing that is rarely worn. We can even upcycle clothing items to help prevent wastage to some extent. With the dynamic celebrity culture, any outfit, or accessory being seen on a celebrity becomes a cult classic. Since, we look up to them as fashion icons, we jump into the bandwagon of trying them out on ourselves, often burning a hole in our pockets. However, there are many who want to appear trendy and updated about fashion but cannot afford overpriced designer brands. These days 'Airport looks', 'Gym Looks', and 'Holiday looks' of Bollywood celebrities are becoming the inspiration of fashion for the millennials and the GenZ. Some people do not hesitate to buy their favourite outfits without burning a hole in their pockets. This is where fast fashion markets play a significant role. Their businesses run on the principle of producing and catering to customers, low-quality clothes that can earn them heavy profits. Since they know that everyone cannot afford to buy designer outfits, they produce 'dupes' or 'replicates' of the outfits worn by so-and-so actor in some film and/or event that everyone goes gaga about. These dupes compromise on the quality and the prices of the materials so that they can be availed by more and more people. This happens more so in the case of women's fashion. Their garments are available in the choicest of fabrics, colours, silhouettes and varying from one occasion to another like casual to formal to partywear. Thus the production of bulk amount of fabrics piles up in landfills and takes up a lot of Earth's space. Other than the fact that they do not decay for years, there is also the added risk of stray animals accidentally ingesting pieces of plastic, fabric, wires, and elastics that is dumped and choking on them. This might even cause their death. Adopting 'veganism' or plant-based food is also becoming popular among many people. Although that is a very commendable step ahead in the future of a sustainable environment, veganism should also be a way of life in the fashion industry. Even as people are promoting vegetarian and vegan alternatives as a mode of life, most of them are yet to incorporate the same when it comes to the use of clothing, accessories, cosmetics and makeup. Starting with

clothing, Indian women's closets cannot be considered complete without at least one silk saree. But the cruelty that goes behind the production of silk surely calls for cruelty-free alternatives to make a fashion statement. Silkworms are made to feed on mulberry leaves after which they build a single-thread cocoon around themselves. They are then boiled to kill the silkworms and extract the cocoon which is used for making silk fabric. As is known the making of wool also involves cruelty. Animals such as sheep, goats, and rabbits are bred for their fur, which accumulates dirt and grime over a prolonged period of time. The shearing of fur also inflicts pain on them. Leather which is widely used to make jackets, shoes, belts, bags, and wallets is widely flaunted as a luxury and also involves the slaughtering of cows, buffaloes, pigs, crocodiles, leopards, snakes etc. Adopting fabrics like artificial silk, suede leather and eco-friendly materials like cotton, jute, and hemp can bring about positive changes in the environment. Even most of the cosmetics and makeup that we wear are carefully designed to be vegan and cruelty-free. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals(PETA) is a non-profit organization that boycotts anything that threatens the existence of animals. So it is high time that we incorporate sustainable and eco-friendly substitutes in our environment.

## 2 Literature Review:

In an article titled 'Fashion, Sustainability, and the Anthropocene' by Andrew Brooks, et al., (2017) the ecological models of fashion are discussed in the light of the Anthropocene. Anthropocene can be defined as the involvement of humans in the environment or as a part of the environment. Their activities impact the environment in a disturbing way, mostly owing to industrialization. However, they are a part of nature and they themselves have to make efforts to combat the degradation. The paper emphasizes on adopting eco-friendly methods such as 'closed-loop-recycling' wherein unwanted garments can be exchanged in the respective stores for money back and used as raw materials for the production of new garments. However, this process leads to people using clothes for shorter durations and the remanufacturing leads to huge amounts of disposal of microfibers. This initiative is taken up by brands such as H & M, C & A, Nike etc. Human activities have already contributed largely to global warming. In addition to that, large-scale production and mindless disposal of plastic, synthetic fibers, artificial microfibres, etc are causing threats to marine life. In Britain, the Industrial Revolution started a large number of textile industries and laundry services were mechanized, which increased the number the production and consumption of clothes. However, the popularisation of buying clothes from thrift stores is a progressive step forward.

According to a Research report titled "Gaps, challenges, and drivers for environmentally sustainable textile and garment manufacturing in India" by Jae Nikam(2023), the problems of fast fashion and the growing demands of fashion are discussed. Large amounts of textile waste are the reason for pollution in the environment. Moreover, overall sustainability also includes ensuring efficiency of energy, decent jobs, and a standard of life for those involved in the textile industries.

The report states that with the advent of fast fashion, the average wearing of a piece of clothing has decreased by 30%. Adding at least nine more months to it would help to reduce carbon, waste, and water footprint by 20-30% and reduce resource cost by 20% of garments. Thus it is important that consumers start adopting slow fashion, so the manufacturers would have to use sustainable materials that would last for a longer time than usual. This would help in judicious usage of resources and prevent wastage. Some of the methods by which sustainability can be achieved are:

- Practising regenerative organic farming of cotton
- Practising recycling of plastic instead of virgin polyester
- Manufacturing eco-friendly textiles to re-use them into fibres

Promoting sustainability of textiles in industries through various government schemes

In a Research article titled “The Role of Networks in supporting micro- and small-sized Sustainable Fashion Businesses, the author Claudia Eckert(2022) discusses the role and need of sustainable fashion. Even with the increasing number of fast fashion industries around us, there are markets and brands promoting their businesses on the principle of sustainability. It becomes tough for them as it demands good quality, long-lasting materials. Also, tracing supply chains and educating suppliers and consumers with the propagation of sustainable fashion needs a lot of effort. The idea is to promote it on the basis of four dimensions; environmental, social, cultural, and economic. It encourages practices like producing long-lasting fabrics, ensuring less wastage etc. It also involves cooperation among the agents in the business and building networks with other brands. Startup companies often lack the expertise and resources. They can develop by collaborating with professional and formal industry networks.

In an article titled “Drivers and barriers to fashion rental for everyday garments: an empirical analysis of a former fashion-rental company”, the authors Miriam Bodenheimer, et.al(2022) discuss the challenges and lessons learnt from a former German fashion rental company. A major part of pollution is attributed to the textile industries. The amount of products that are recycled and reused are even less than half of the used ones. Renting pre-worn clothes makes sure to increase their longevity. This also makes sure that this lessens the production of more clothes. This brand works not just to rent clothes for special occasions but also for everyday use. Another drive from the perspective of consumers is that they get to experiment with different styles without paying for the total cost of the item. However the aspect of sustainability in fashion does not convince every consumer, so they would rather be more convinced by being told that sustainable rental clothes are made with good quality materials. A barrier that concerns people is the hygiene and health issues. They are skeptical about the cleanliness of the garments. They are also concerned with liability in case of damaged products. Desire to own the products, availability of sizes, and transactional costs and efforts in renting are some of the barriers.

### 3 Objectives

- To ensure that good quality clothing and fashion accessories are being manufactured instead of those that get torn or damaged after being worn a few times.
- To ensure that more natural fabrics are being used in place of artificial, synthetic fibers that are harmful to the environment.
- To educate people on wearing cruelty-free, PETA-approved clothing and accessories.
- To make sure clothes are used more and recycle more in order to avoid wastage and overproduction.

### 4 Analysis

There are many instances based on which it can be said that many Fast fashion brands exploit the natural resources in their making which do not quite last for a long time. Most of them use cheap quality raw materials to process their garments. Sometimes they place their prices considerably low so that everyone can afford them; and also so that those who buy do not feel guilty about wearing them only a few times before disposing of them. This unmindful disposal ends up in piles in landfills and clogging water bodies which can harm aquatic life. so, the conditions under which the industry workers work seem questionable. Since they are exposed to synthetic fibers and artificial dyes, their health might get affected by them. Their labor does not pay off as fair since the garments are worn quite less. Brands such as Shein, Zara, and H & M are not quite transparent about the materials used and the conditions under which the clothes are produced. These international brands have paved their way into the Indian mainstream market and are flourishing, owing to the demands of the public. Most fast fashion brands are priced at higher rates, whether or not their materials are of good quality. In the article mentioned in the Literature Review, titled “Drivers and barriers to fashion rental for everyday garments: an empirical analysis of a former fashion-rental company” it is shown that buying pre-owned clothes or giving away clothes for rent can also be practised to reduce the damage on the environment to some extent. Those who are concerned regarding hygiene can wash them later.

### 5 Conclusion:

The love for impressive clothing and fashion is totally understandable. It may be altogether possible for us to shun our favorite pieces of clothing and fashion. But it is certainly in our hands to minimise the negative effect on the environment through subtle methods. Instead of buying anything and everything we see in the markets, we can be mindful about owning limited garments and wearing for quite a long time before carefully discarding them and re-stocking our wardrobe. It is better to invest in few good quality, eco-friendly fabrics and wear them over a longer period of time.

Though sometimes, they can cost more expensive, they would surely be value for money in the long run. In this way, we would be practising less wastage of resources and our money. Recycling, upcycling and re-using our clothes would be quite feasible ideas. For those who are not aware, there are a number of 'Slow Fashion' brands that people can buy from. Some of these are Doodlege, No Nasties, Suta etc. They fail to get adequate recognition among Indian markets because they are not advertised like other Fast Fashion brands and markets. We can also reach out to the local markets near us to buy clothes made out of cotton, linen, and muslin, which use natural dyes and are handpainted and hand-embroidered. One can even find natural accessories and home decor items from them. Buying from them would be like giving an ode to their efforts. It is high time that we break down the stigmas around clothing and fashion like repeating outfits, buying few clothes, wearing thrifted clothes etc. By making subtle changes here and there, we can help in creating a better future for ourselves and our future generations.

### ***Limitations***

Even though Slow fashion is an eco-friendly method, it is a new concept as of now. Startup brands have less expertise in the manufacturing and marketing of the products. They have to start everything from scratch, like sourcing raw materials, manufacturing them and marketing them, everything. Plus, one has to be aware of the needs and demands of the public and cater to them. Since they use high-quality materials, intricate designs, and other manual labor, the cost of manufacturing and retailing would also be on the higher side. Because of that reason, it fails to appeal to most people. This can be very disheartening to those who produce them with their sweat and blood. These people trying to leave a positive impact on the environment face a lot of difficulties. It would take them quite some time to reach the global market. However, some of these are flourishing as of now. As consumers, we can purchase from them, contribute a little to the environment, and prove ourselves to be good samaritans.

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