

# Consumer Behaviour towards Sustainable Fashion: A Comparison of Pre-and Post-Covid-19 Pandemic in India<sup>1</sup>

Girish Sharma,<sup>2</sup> Akriti Sinha,<sup>2</sup> Soumya Kaushik,<sup>2</sup> Akhil Srivatsa,<sup>2</sup> Harsh Bhardwaj,<sup>2</sup>  
Varun Miglani<sup>3</sup>

Symbiosis School of Economics (SSE), Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune, India

## Abstract

This article highlights the changes in the consumption pattern of fast fashion apparel and consumers' behaviour towards sustainable fashion against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic in India. The article uses the web-based survey of 691 respondents and 2 focus group discussions (FGDs). The FGDs find an understanding of sustainable fashion and awareness about the impacts of fast fashion on the environment among consumers. Kruskal-Wallis tests suggest that while knowledge, concern, and willingness to pay for sustainable fashion is same across income groups respondents, however belief about the same differs across. The analysis further substantiates a positive correlation between knowledge, concern and willingness to pay with the support of sustainable fashion. Following the mixed-method approach, the article argues that with the fast-fashion industry skyrocketing in recent times, the consumer base in India needs to recognise the importance of sustainable practices.

**Keywords:** sustainability, fast fashion, consumption patterns, consumer behaviour, sustainable fashion, Covid-19

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<sup>2</sup> T. Y. BSc. (Economics) Hons. Students at Symbiosis School of Economics (SSE).

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor, Symbiosis School of Economics and author for correspondence, Email: [varun.miglani@sse.ac.in](mailto:varun.miglani@sse.ac.in); Postal Address: Symbiosis School of Economics, Senapati Bapat Road, Pune – 411004, India.

## 1. Introduction

Since the late 1990s, the fashion industry's dynamics have changed as globalisation has extended the industry's boundaries (Djelic & Ainamo, 1999). The many aspects responsible for its vast global prowess include clothing as a necessity, clothing for stylistic choices, and high-end fashion. Between ramp-walks and chain store business models, the fashion industry has evolved due to low cost, flexible designs, and shorter duration between fashion cycles (Li, Zhao, Shi & Li, 2014). This has pushed retailers to produce exorbitant quantities of clothes at a swift pace (Doyle, Moore, and Morgan, 2006). By overpowering the traditional models of high-end fashion, clothes being manufactured for low market prices have gradually seized significant chunks of the fashion market, which were earlier based on conventional six-month cycles (Gabrielli et al., 2021). Many scholars have termed this phenomenon the "fast fashion model" (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015; Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang & Chan, 2012).

The "fast fashion model" can be characterised by cheap manufacturing, frequent consumption, and short-term garment use (Kalambura et al., 2020), which translates to a negative impact on the environment as well (Forsman & Madsen, 2017). To match the pace with changing demands of the consumer, fast fashion retailers started producing inexpensive knockoffs of high-end fashion and keeping up with the trends, many of which are made to be worn less than ten times (McAfee et al., 2004). This side of fashion choices emphasises individuality, creating temporary waves and engaging with the consumers' emotional utility (Gabrielli et al., 2013). It, in turn, results in fashion apparel implementing a 'speed to market strategy' to capitalise on fashion that is not available in their competitors' stores (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). Fast fashion giants eventually overcame this supply-meets-demand situation as they started deteriorating the quality of materials used in making their clothes. This ensures that their customer returns earlier than required to buy new clothes as a replacement, which would have become defective by then (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006).

As more and more people are becoming aware of this phenomenon, a counter-movement to fast fashion is emerging (Lundblad & Davies, 2015), often termed slow fashion or sustainable fashion. Slow fashion or sustainability cannot be achieved just by technology advancements, efficiency improvements, or producer-driven efforts; absolute consumption levels and consumer-driven demand must be reduced as well (Lorek & Fuchs, 2013). Hence, sustainability is a lifestyle choice, wherein the consumers take on the responsibility of consuming products that are ethically sourced and manufactured in eco-friendly ways (Lundblad & Davies, 2015). This contrasts with impulsive buying, where excessive consumption has contributed to a negative environmental impact (Shen, 2014). However, not all consumers acknowledge and turn to sustainable alternatives in their daily lives, as

many remain fashion-conscious or want to stay 'on trend,' thereby forgoing the opportunity to kick start a sustainable lifestyle (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009).

Reducing environmental impact and achieving sustainability requires fundamental changes in how society and the economy are organised on a macro level. However, individuals play an essential role at the micro-level by making voluntary sufficiency-oriented consumption choices for a simpler life (Gossen & Heinrich, 2021). The consumer behaviour for sustainability is not economically strict: their rationale is aware of the impending price paid by the environment for producing the goods they purchase, but that said, price is the paramount factor that a consumer compares while choosing between goods (Hur & Cassidy, 2019). Research studies concur that while acknowledging the impact of their decisions, consumers do not necessarily act on it, so knowledge does not always translate into sustainable behavior (Jaeger-Erben et al., 2015). The sustainable fashion industry spends a lot on resource allocation and labor costs (Puspita & Chae, 2021). All the input prices add up to be higher than that of a cloth produced cheaply by fast fashion giants. If they both make the same amount of profit, the market price of a sustainable good turns out to be higher than that of its competitor. This draws away from most consumers as their myopic vision uses base factors like prices, not the durability or the life of the good at hand.

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, people's lifestyles have been significantly altered (Zwanka & Buff, 2020). Their priorities have shifted, and so have their financial allocations. The pandemic has provided consumers with an opportunity of reassessing their finances, and as a result, many people have started spending less on clothing during the lockdown, and due to reduced social interaction, the need for a large amount of clothing has reduced as well (Urmínová & Kusá, 2020). In addition to changing personal lifestyles, people grew conscious of the environment (Urmínová & Kusá, 2020). This provides the authors with the opportunity to examine consumer behaviour and its relation to fast fashion in a new light. With Covid-19 in the backdrop, consumption patterns affected various spheres that make up our lifestyle. Hence, in our paper, we aim to find out the consumer sentiments towards sustainable fashion in Indian consumers and probe into any changes in 2020. Consumerism in India differs to a large extent if compared to the western countries due to a wide variation in class and income. Since the literature on consumer attitudes and decisions regarding fast fashion is limited, more research on price consciousness, quality-price trade-offs, consumer expectations and satisfaction, and willingness to pay for sustainable fashion is needed (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). In our research study, we aim to do the same to bridge the said gap and answer the following questions:

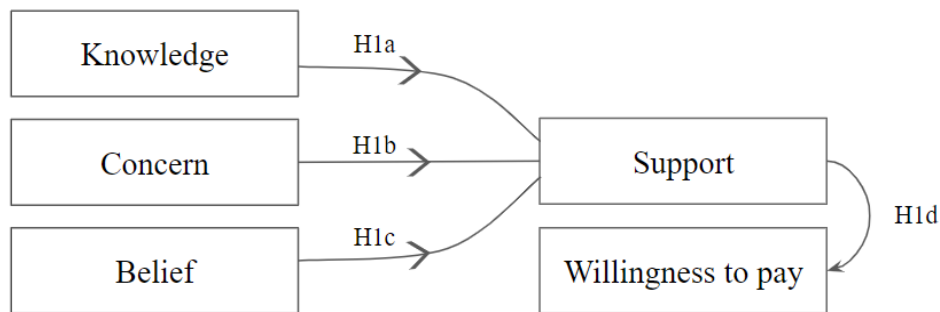
RQ1. What has been the consumer sentiment towards sustainable fashion during the year 2020?

RQ2. How has consumer behaviour towards fast fashion across income brackets changed during the pandemic lockdown in 2020?

To answer the second research question (RQ1), hypotheses (H1) is proposed to assess the association between the different variables; knowledge of sustainable fashion, beliefs about apparel manufacturing, and concerns for the environment, their support to sustainable fashion and their willingness to pay for sustainable fashion (Figure 1). Hypotheses, H1 are listed below:

- H1a: There is no relationship between knowledge and support of sustainable fashion
- H1b: There is no relationship between concern and support of sustainable fashion
- H1c: There is no relationship between belief and support of sustainable fashion
- H1d: There is no relationship between support of sustainable fashion and willingness to pay.

Figure 1- Research framework of H1:

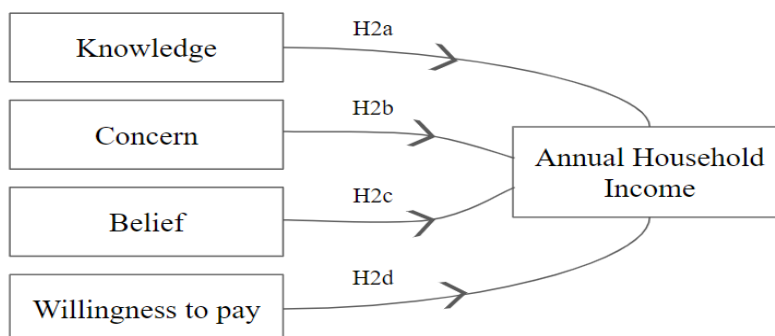


Source: Authors' own

Additionally, the hypotheses, H2, has been proposed to check the distribution of the variables mentioned above across strata of annual household income (Figure 2).

- H2a: The distribution of knowledge is the same across categories of Annual Household Income.
- H2b: The distribution of concern is the same across categories of Annual Household Income.
- H2c: The distribution of belief is the same across categories of Annual Household Income.
- H2d: The distribution of Willingness to Pay is the same across categories of Annual Household Income.

Figure 2: Research framework for H2:



Source: Authors' own

To answer the research questions, we rely on the web-based survey. The responses from the participants are analysed across social factors like annual household income. This is done to probe into the expediting and dynamic opinions of young Indian consumers. In addition to the survey, findings from focus group discussions have been comprehensively interpreted to acquaint the reader with the relevance of sustainable fashion in an Indian context. Methodology has been discussed in section 2, followed by a section on Results and Discussion in section 3 and 4 respectively. Section 5 concludes.

## **2. Data and Methods**

### *2.1 Data collection and Methodology*

The paper uses the web-based primary data collected during May-July 2021. A structured questionnaire was prepared and pre-tested. The pre-test was conducted, and the reliability of the questionnaire was analysed using Cronbach's alpha confidence coefficient on 20 responses. The coefficient value came 0.787; therefore, the questionnaire was accepted as reliable and was used in the research. The final questionnaire was circulated among social media of authors contact, and that of the college authors represent. A total of 694 responses were obtained, of which 691 were viable. The participants were culled from urban areas in India. Two focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted consisting of six people, each lying in the age range of 18 to 24 years. The main rationale of FGDs was to understand if consumers reduced their consumption and what do they think of sustainable fashion. The non-probability sampling method (convenience sampling) was followed for both the FGDs as the study centred around common fashion consumers who purchased fashion apparel. In total of 2 FGDs, we had 5 boys and 7 girls. Standard protocols were followed for FGDs. Both FGDs lasted for around 50-62 mins each. The group discussions were examined using thematic analysis. The textual analysis of the discussions was done using the three cycles of coding (Open, Axial, and Selective) to highlight and summarise the key points.

Spearman rank correlation was conducted to measure the association between consumers' sentiments and their support for sustainable fashion. Kruskal-Wallis test was used to identify the distribution of consumer sentiment across different strata of household income. The data analysis tool used was IBM SPSS 26.0 and Excel.

Based on the existing literature, this article explores the relationship between support for sustainable fashion, knowledge of sustainable fashion, Beliefs about apparel manufacturing, concerns for the environment, and their willingness to pay for sustainable fashion. We further explore the distribution of consumer sentiments (knowledge, belief, concern, and willingness to pay) across different strata of household income. The research framework to test the hypothesis proposed based on the research question is described in Figures 1 and 2.

## 2.2 Measures

The study made use of a 7-point Likert-type scale questionnaire composed of sections covering questions about the participants' knowledge of sustainable fashion, their current beliefs about the practices adopted by manufacturers, their degree of concern and responsiveness towards the harms of fast fashion, their support to the sustainable fashion, and willingness to pay for the same. The section on consumer sentiments is in conformity with Shen's (2014) questionnaire sample.

## 2.3 Sample profile

Table 1 presents the age and demographic profile of respondents. The majority (70%) of our respondents belonged to Gen Z (i.e., born between 1996-2003). There were marginally more females in the sample compared to males. 51.8% of the sample were graduate and above, while the rest were pursuing high-school and undergraduate degree. 20.5% of the participants had affirmed that their annual household income was less than Rs. 0.5 million, and 27.4% of the respondents stated that the same was between Rs. 0.5-1 million. 51.6% of the respondents asserted that their annual household income was more than Rs. 1 million.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents (N=691)

	N	%		N	%
Qualification			Sex		
Below 10th Standard	4	0.60%	Male	284	41.10%
10 <sup>th</sup> Pass	16	2.30%	Female	400	57.90%
High School Diploma/12 <sup>th</sup> Pass	311	45.30%			
Graduation	213	31.00%			
Post-Graduate and above	143	20.80%			
Age Groups (in years)			Annual Household Income in (Rs.)		
< 18	70	10.10%	< 0.5 million	142	20.50%
18-24	486	70.00%	0.51- 1 million	190	27.40%
24-30	66	9.50%	1.1- 2 million	201	29.00%
>30	7	1.00%	>2 million	157	22.60%

Source: Primary Survey 2021

Note: Rs. is equivalent to 0.013 US \$ in 2021; N: sample size

## 3. Results

### *Consumers' sentiments towards sustainable fashion*

### 3.1 Knowledge about sustainable fashion

Through FGDs, consumers' knowledge and familiarity with sustainable fashion and awareness about the impacts of fast fashion on the environment were assessed. While there is a basic and limited awareness about the harms of fast fashion, most of the respondents believe that the industry negatively harms the environment. Unsustainable manufacturing practices such as landfills and excessive chemical use highlight a sustainable alternative's need and awareness. However, there is a need to bring sustainable clothing in mainstream markets as availability, accessibility, and aesthetics are lacking.

*[...] Excessive chemical use of dyes used in clothing, when dumped from a factory in a waterbody, creates an adverse impact on what we eat, what we breathe, and what we wear,*

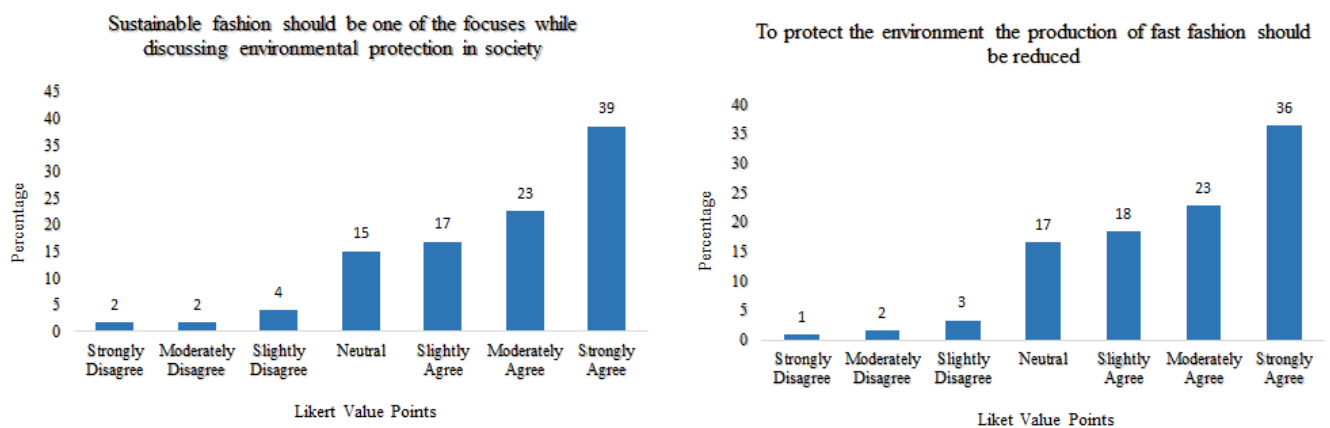
*[...] For consumers, if sustainable clothing is not available, being minimalistic would be a good place to start for us. Purchasing clothes when required, donating old garments, and purchasing from hand-me-downs are all good sustainable options.*

*[...] Renting and thrifting is a great solution to "keep up with the trends." Renting and thrifting are cost-effective and convenient solutions wherein there is no need to buy clothes every now and then to match up the trend.*

### 3.2 Concern about the environment

Figure 3 presents consumers' concerns for the environment and their extent of acceptance of the sustainability aspect in fashion using 7-point Likert scale. The survey questionnaire indicated that a majority of 39% of respondents agreed that Sustainable fashion should be one of the focuses while discussing environmental protection in society. The majority, 36%, also agreed that fast fashion production should be reduced to protect the environment, indicating a sense of concern about the environment and willingness to adopt sustainable fashion.

Figure 3: Survey responses for concerns about sustainable fashion



However, during the focus group discussions, concerns were raised around the lack of availability and accessibility of sustainable options. Since sustainable fashion requires typically higher quality than fast fashion, it reduces the ease of production for the producers. The concern was that it was overpriced and did not provide a very large variety of designs either.

*[...] For instance, on seeing a product made entirely of recycled plastic, there is more inclination to buy it as it is an individual contribution done to help the environment.*

*[...] There is a need to take one step at a time. Adopting a sustainable lifestyle, not just in the fashion sense but as a lifestyle choice, is essential, as it will reflect in many more eco-friendly and sustainable purchases than before.*

*[...] One problem with sustainable clothing is that there are not many alternatives; therefore, ending up purchasing apparel that is not environmentally friendly. There are not many well-established brands providing sustainable choices.*

### 3.3 Beliefs about the fashion industry

In this analysis area, consumers' beliefs about the fashion industry's negative impact on the environment were accessed. In the survey questionnaire, the respondents agreed that toxic chemicals are usually used in the production of fast fashion clothing manufacturing and that producers do not adopt sustainable practices in their production process. Most respondents believed that due to the mass production techniques, the industry was responsible for exploiting excessive chemicals, high water footprint and water contamination, degrading soil with landfills resulting in loss of wildlife. Further, through FGDs, it was highlighted that sustainability could be achieved through sustainable thinking, i.e., sustainable methods, e.g., using clothes for a long time, would attain sustainability. Participants argued that the Indian culture does not exclude sustainable practices from its daily routine; any product is used for the longest time until it becomes redundant. It shows that consumers believe that sustainability is a deep-rooted factor within them as a trait.

*[...] We have a habit of wearing and storing our clothes for an extended period of time, usually 3-4 years old, but still, we continue to use them.*

*[...] When it comes to clothing, Indians are quite adaptive. It usually starts from the elder most sibling, then it becomes ours, then it's worn for Holi and finally used as a rag.*

### 3.4 Support for sustainable fashion

Through consultations and survey questionnaire, it was realised that awareness about the harmful impact of fast fashion on the environment has led to the inculcation of respondents' accountability, leading them to believe that they are responsible for leading the change towards sustainability than the producers and government.



Furthermore, it was not just the awareness and education but also the general mindset of the respondents is highly inclined towards durability. This mindset, combined with the sense of responsibility and accountability, has resulted in many already owning various sustainable pieces in their wardrobe and being open to other sustainable options like recycling.

*[...] A fair chunk of my clothes is hand-me-downs from my family. I believe that when my parents were younger, the concept of sustainability meant that they had to wear that same piece of apparel for as long as possible. This concept, I believe, has been instilled in me as well.*

### *3.5 Willingness to pay a premium for sustainable fashion*

Consumers seek low prices, the best quality, and convenient channels for purchasing clothes. However, through primary analysis, it was realised that the opinions and preferences differ about sustainable fashion. Since their opinions are significantly different from their normal consumption behaviour; a lot of them believe that they would be willing to pay a little more than their usual expenditure amount to support sustainability.

*[...] I do not object to spending a bit more on it. I would not worry if it states something like 40 to 50 percent, which is on the upper end of a price differential. I will surely buy it if it is a sustainable alternative to cheap clothing.*

### *Consumption patterns and sustainable attributes*

In this section, the article explores the consumption patterns of consumers in the pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve this, we investigated the quantity in which the consumers purchase fast fashion items or clothes in general before and during the pandemic. To further examine the reasons behind their purchasing behavior and the changes in their consumption patterns due to the pandemic, the factors which govern consumers' purchasing decisions were analysed. Moreover, to analyse if the consumers adopted sustainable practices, we asked them when they bought new clothes and what they did when they stopped wearing them.

#### *3.6 Frequency of clothes purchased*

Table 2 and Figure 4 presents the cross-tabulation of frequency of purchase of a number of clothes pre-covid-19 pandemic and during the pandemic. In pre-pandemic, the majority of 42.3% of respondents used to purchase 6 to 10 cloths annually; however, only 28.4% of the respondents purchased clothes in that frequency during the pandemic year. The majority, 57.4% of the respondents, purchased clothes fewer than 5 compared to 22.7% respondents, pre-pandemic, in a year, highlighting the fall in purchasing pattern of the consumers.

Additionally, 67% of the respondents who purchased 6-10 cloths annually reduced their consumption

to fewer than 5 during the pandemic. Moreover, 80% of the respondents purchasing 11-20 cloths reduced it to fewer than ten during the pandemic. Further, only 18% of the respondents retained their frequency of purchasing 21-40 cloths a year, while 41% reduced it to 11-21 cloths, 27% to 6-10 cloths, and 10% to fewer than five cloths in a year.

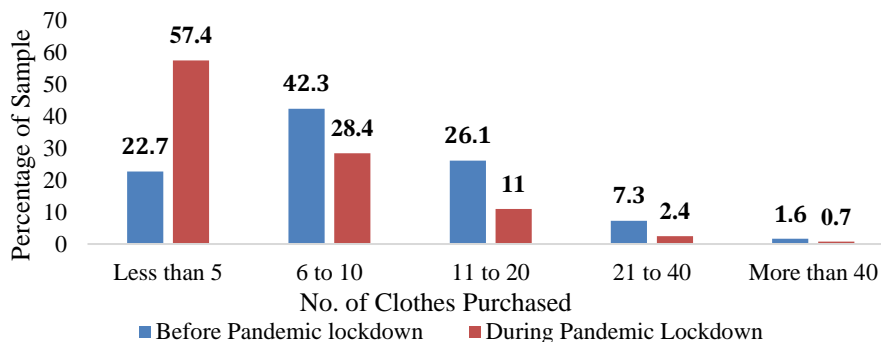
Table 2: Cross Tabulation of clothes purchased during pandemic/lockdown

		No. of clothes purchased during pandemic/lockdown (in 2020)					Total (n=694)
		Less than 5	6-10	11-21	21- 40	More than 40	
No. of clothes purchased before pandemic/lockd own (Per year)	Less than 5	87	12	1	0	0	100
	6-10	67	27	6	0	0	100
	11-21	32	48	17	3	0	100
	21- 40	10	27	41	18	4	100
	More than 40	18	9	36	18	18	100
Total		57	29	11	2	1	100

Source: Primary Survey 2021

Note. The figures are in percentage, and it is calculated as row percentage

Figure 4: Clothes purchased before and during the lockdown



Source: Primary Survey 2021

Note. Sample size(n) =694

*[...]Since pandemic did not allow us to step out of our houses, there was no point in purchasing new and fancy clothes.*

*[...] The lockdown has structurally shifted our purchasing habits, especially apparel. We confined ourselves to minimum apparel purchases during the pandemic, and it is unlikely that we will purchase anything more than necessities, even in the post-pandemic era.*

### 3.7 Factors influencing buying behaviour

The significant factors influencing the purchasing decision of the individuals are price, accessibility, style, and comfort. However, of these factors, a significant majority of the respondents prioritised price as the leading factor. In contrast, respondents gave the least priority to durability, accessibility, and eco-friendliness. The relatively less prioritisation of durability and high price consideration highlights the respondents' inclination towards cheap clothes that may or may not last.

Nevertheless, not many shops were open and freely accessible during a pandemic, making accessibility an essential factor. Furthermore, the pandemic and the lockdowns made it difficult and riskier for people to buy clothes frequently; hence, it gave more importance to the durability of the clothes to ensure that the clothes last longer without the need to buy new ones frequently. Therefore, respondents' priorities shifted, ranking accessibility and durability higher than before in determining purchasing behaviour.

*[...] When we walk into a store, we first look for whether or not this specific piece of apparel will complement us. The first thing that comes to mind for me is comfort and price. As a result, I will seek the cloth's composition.*

*"[...]I spend much time looking for styles and trends that I love wearing and that are comfortable for me."*

### 3.8 Purchasing attributes against annual household income

To understand the use of sustainable practices amongst respondents, conditions or motivation of purchasing new clothes are presented in Table 3. Nearly 65% of the time, respondents with an income of fewer than Rs. 0.5 million selected that they are likely to purchase clothes during special events and festivals, followed by 56% times to replace worn-out clothes. This pattern can be attributed to the traditional custom of purchasing and wearing new clothes on auspicious days and special events in India. While most income categories follow a similar trend, a slight difference can be observed amongst the respondents with an income higher than Rs. 2 million. Apart from purchasing on festivals and special occasions, respondents from that category substantially buy clothes to enrich their wardrobe.

Table 3: Reason of purchase of clothes by Annual Household Income

Why Buy clothes							
As Gift	To replace worn-out clothes	To enrich wardrobe	Part of daily routine	During Events/Festivals	Special	Other	

	Row %	%	%	%	%	%	%
Annual Household Income	< 0.5 million	23	56	27	6	65	1
	0.51- 1 million	18	67	28	4	60	3
	1.1- 2 million	26	65	46	4	60	1
	>2 million	20	70	54	6	64	1
	Total	22	65	39	5	62	2

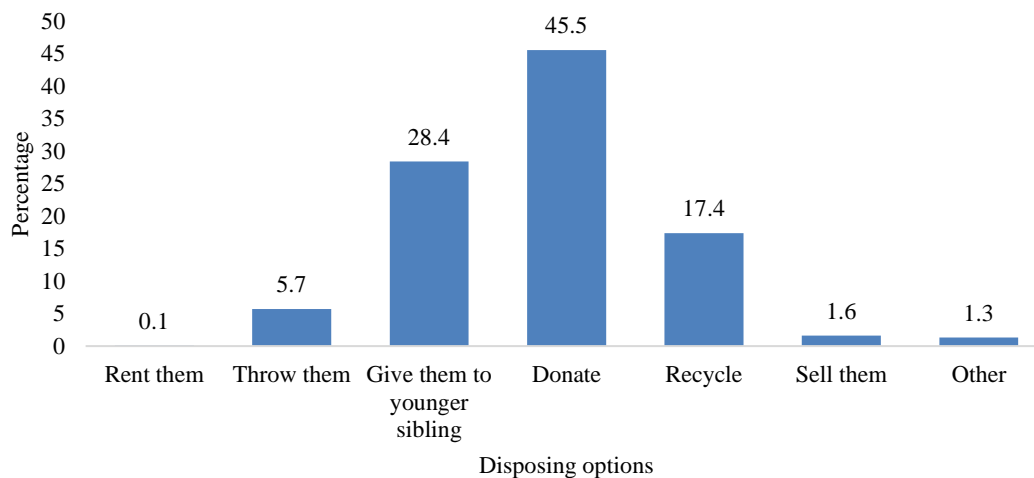
Source: Primary Survey 2021

Note. Showing row percentages calculated based on total cases as the question accepted multiple responses

### 3.9 Consumers' disposition behavior

Figure 5 analyses the behavior of consumers towards the clothes that they stopped wearing. 45.5% of the respondents donate their clothes, which they do not use anymore. While 28.4% of the respondents gave their clothes to younger siblings, 17.4% recycled their clothes, which they were not wearing anymore. Only 5.7% of the respondents chose to throw away their clothes, highlighting that they sample practice sustainable disposing options for their clothes.

Figure 5: Disposing behavior of consumers of clothes which are not worn



Source: Primary Survey 2021

Note. Sample Size (n) =694; Consumers were asked what they did with the clothes they did not use anymore.

### Hypothesis testing

The hypothesis formulated to assess the consumer sentiments towards sustainability was tested using the Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient. The variables, knowledge, concern, and belief, were tested with Support for Sustainable fashion and Willingness to Pay.

Spearman's rank-order correlations were run to examine the relationship between the level of Knowledge, Belief, Concern, and Willingness to Pay, i.e., H1. Results of Spearman's rank-order

correlations are presented in Table 4. There were positive and significant correlation between Knowledge and Support,  $\rho=0.257$ ,  $n=681$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , Concern and Support,  $\rho=0.443$ ,  $n=677$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , and Support and Willingness to Pay,  $\rho=0.479$ ,  $n=678$ ,  $p < 0.01$  indicating that if a person supports sustainable fashion, they are prospectively Willing to Pay more as well. However, there was a negative and insignificant correlation between Beliefs and Support,  $\rho= -0.003$ ,  $n=687$ ,  $p > 0.01$ , indicating that as the belief of respondents towards the current practices of the fashion industry and retailers increase (increased loyalty), the support for an alternative, i.e., sustainable fashion falls. With increased positive beliefs, respondents tend to assume the current fashion practices to be ideal.

Table 4: Hypothesis Test Summary of Relationship between Independent and Dependent Variables using Spearman Correlation coefficient

	Null Hypothesis	rho	Sig.	Decision	Remarks
1	There is no relationship between knowledge and support of sustainable fashion	0.257	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis	A very weak, yet significant relationship
2	There is no relationship between concern and support of sustainable fashion	0.443	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis	A moderate and significant relationship
3	There is no relationship between belief and support of sustainable fashion	-0.003	0.947	Do not reject the null hypothesis	A very weak, negative non-significant relationship
4	There is no relationship between support of sustainable fashion and Willingness to Pay	0.479	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis	A moderate and significant relationship

Source: Primary Survey 2021

Note. rho is the Spearman Rank-order correlation coefficient.

Asymptotic significance is displayed. The significance level is .01.

Furthermore, to test H2, the distribution of the variables was tested across strata of annual Household Income using a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was employed. A Kruskal-Wallis test (Refer Table 5) does not reveal a statistically significant difference in knowledge of sustainable fashion across different strata of Annual Household Income,  $\chi^2(3, N=684) = 2.88$ ,  $p > 0.05$ .

Similarly, for concern for sustainable fashion, the test does not reveal statistical significance across categories of Annual Household Income,  $\chi^2(3, N=679) = 1.52$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . Concern for sustainable fashion was the same in Annual Household Income less than 0.5 million ( $Md=6$ ) and more than 2 million ( $Md=6$ ). For belief about the fashion industry, the test revealed a statistical significance difference across categories of Annual Household Income,  $\chi^2(3, N=690) = 13.99$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Belief in the fashion industry was lower in the Annual Household Income bracket Rs. 1-2 million and more than Rs. 2 million households ( $Md=3.70$ ) in comparison to less than 0.5 million ( $Md=4.30$ ) and 0.5-1 million ( $Md=4.00$ ). For the willingness to pay, the test does not reveal statistical significance across all categories of Annual Household Income,  $\chi^2(3, N=680) = 2.62$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . Willingness to pay was

the same in Annual Household Income less than 0.5 million ( $Md=4.70$ ) and more than 2 million ( $Md=4.70$ ).

Table 5: Hypothesis Test Summary of distribution of independent variables across strata of Annual Household Income using Kruskal-Wallis test.

Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
The distribution of knowledge is the same across categories of Annual Household Income.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	0.409	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
The distribution of concern is the same across categories of Annual Household Income.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	0.677	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
The distribution of belief is the same across categories of Annual Household Income.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	0.003	Reject the null hypothesis.
The distribution of Willingness to Pay is the same across categories of Annual Household Income.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	0.454	Do not reject the null hypothesis.

*Note.* Asymptotic significance is displayed. The significance levels.

H: The distribution of independent variables is the same across different strata of Annual Household Income

## 4. Discussion

The aim of our article was to analyse the consumption patterns concerning fast fashion among young consumers in India and if the said patterns have changed in the context of the pandemic. In 2020, fashion consumption saw a significant decrease due to the pandemic. Many consumers decreased their purchasing habits: reduced social activities due to the restrictions imposed in the pandemic aided this behavior. For a majority of the consumers, the prices of clothing articles were the primary factor upon which they based their purchasing decisions. As the pandemic came into the picture, the consumers emphasised the accessibility and durability of the clothing. Thus, the price was not the only factor they considered then.

The results imply that not everyone among our targeted respondents was aware of sustainability as a substitute for fast fashion, but their behavior was positively suggestive of a sustainable start due to their changing practices and preferences. With the consumers giving importance to durability, quality, and how long an article of clothing lasts, they consciously try to buy lesser clothes, which is an aspect of inculcating sustainability into their lives.

It is pertinent to scrutinise consumers' purchasing habits and utilise the resources purchased (Bruce et al., 2019). For the same, a household factor, 'annual household income,' was considered to understand collective consumption at consumers' end. Across the income brackets considered in our study, while there are no differences regarding paying a premium price for a sustainable product, the

beliefs of the categories show a parity. In addition to this, the same income brackets show no variation in their concerns regarding sustainable fashion. Knowledge for sustainable fashion is significant but a weak relationship, this could be due to the fact that the knowledge does not always translate into implementation whereas, in the case of belief for the fashion industry, the respondents from both the questionnaire and the FGDs indicate a negative view for the fashion industry. They believe that the fashion industry contributes to the rising pollution in the environment. Using toxic chemicals, contamination of water, and polluting lands in the form of landfills are examples of the same. We can observe that the following variables convince us that the support in favour of sustainable fashion is significant as the values for the concern for sustainable fashion and the willingness to pay for sustainable fashion are significant to those of the support for sustainable fashion.

These findings remain relevant to the subject of 'consumer behaviour towards fast fashion' where literature has been scant compared to other topics related to fast fashion. In a market where all age groups across income brackets are targeted (Colucci & Scarpi, 2013), and in a country that proves to have great potential for apparel producers (Srivastava, 2008); it is significant and pertinent to examine how an unexpected event of a grave magnitude in its influence such as the Covid-19 pandemic affected the average consumer. Hence, the paper also touches upon how the Covid-19 outbreak provided the fashion market, inclusive of fast and slow fashion, new opportunities to remould its working into the consumers' expectations, and how the consumers themselves adjusted their behaviour as their lives shifted in its constraints.

## **5. Conclusion**

A key finding of our research is the shifting trend of consumer behaviour towards sustainable practices. As aforementioned, they are not instilling such practices consciously, but they are helping concoct a sustainable way into the coming years. For consumers, the emerging importance of durability and quality of clothing can be seen as a constructive implication in determining the consumer sentiment towards sustainability. The failure to confirm the hypothesis implies that our sample lacks concrete credence to support sustainability.

This research has clarified that factors like price and comfort are of paramount importance for a typical consumer. In 2020, in the backdrop of the pandemic, there has been a rise in the prioritisation of durability. While this can be a sign towards inculcating a sustainable practice within regular habits, the high prices of sustainable clothing, among other products, discourage consumers from opting for the same. To conclude, future studies should comprehensively focus on explorative methods and how sustainable products can be incorporated into consumers' lifestyles.

Taking a mixed approach method proved beneficial to our research as the finding of our questionnaire survey could be cross-verified with the participants of our FGDs. In our quantitative research, the results were significant, and therefore, no confident remarks can be made about the degree of influence of independent variables Knowledge, Concern, and Belief on Support and Willingness to Pay. While it was observed that the beliefs regarding sustainability and sustainable fashion showcase a disparity across different income brackets, other variables, including concern and knowledge, showed no significant results. This could be interpreted as the sample forming no sound opinions about their support towards sustainability.

Within the limits of the size and scope of this research paper, this study features a specific emphasis on the sustainability of fast fashion from a sole consumer perspective. This research aimed to investigate the consumption patterns of consumers with reference to the pandemic and further examine their sentiments towards sustainability. However, this research was limited only to the consumer's aspects of sustainability. The future areas where this study could be further developed would be by taking a larger region-specific sample; Also, since our data collection method was over google forms, thus one can assume responses coming from less than Rs. 0.5 million Household Income has modest access to resources, thus undermining the inputs of the necessitous. There is further scope to quantify the impact of the concepts described in this study with a deeper quantitative analysis. Future studies could also focus on exploring the point of view of the producers, industry experts, and distributors about sustainability in the fashion industry.

### **Declaration of interests**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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