

**Consumer Insights on Sustainable Fashion: A Study of Young Consumers in Pune**

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<p><b>Peer Review Information</b></p> <p><i>Type: Article</i> <i>Received: 22 March 2026</i> <i>Revised: 18 April 2026</i> <i>Accepted: 06 May 2026</i> <i>Published: 29 May 2026</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>Sustainable fashion has emerged as a critical concern in the global apparel industry amid growing awareness of climate change, overconsumption, textile waste, and unethical labor practices. This study investigates the awareness, perceptions, and behavioral patterns of young consumers (aged 18–30) in Pune, India, with respect to sustainable fashion. Primary data were gathered through a structured online questionnaire distributed via social media platforms, yielding 147 usable responses. Findings indicate that while approximately 71% of respondents had heard of the concept, only 45% demonstrated accurate conceptual understanding. Although 80% of participants acknowledged the ecological and ethical importance of sustainable fashion, actual purchase decisions continue to be governed by price, style, comfort, and brand familiarity. Sustainability ranked last as a purchase driver, selected by only 24% of respondents. A Chi-Square Test of Independence (<math>\chi^2 = 1.388</math>, <math>df = 3</math>, <math>p = 0.708</math>) confirmed that awareness alone does not significantly predict purchase behavior, thereby formally affirming the awareness–behavior gap. These results suggest that bridging this gap requires a multifaceted approach: price-competitive sustainable products, enhanced stylistic diversity, improved market accessibility, and stronger brand transparency. The study contributes empirical evidence from an emerging urban consumer market and provides actionable recommendations for brands, marketers, and policymakers.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Sustainable Fashion; Consumer Behavior; Awareness–Behavior Gap; Young Consumers; Fast Fashion; Pune.</p>
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## Introduction

Fashion represents one of the most visible dimensions of contemporary consumer culture. For young people especially, clothing functions as a medium of self-expression, social identity, and cultural belonging. Over the past two decades, fast fashion—characterized by compressed trend cycles, low production costs, and high-volume output—has democratized access to stylish apparel while generating severe environmental and social externalities. The fashion industry accounts for approximately 10% of global carbon dioxide output annually, consumes enormous volumes of freshwater, and produces millions of tonnes of textile waste [1].

Sustainable fashion has emerged as a countervailing movement that emphasizes eco-friendly materials, circular production models, ethical labor conditions, and conscious consumption. Despite growing media coverage and increasing industry-level sustainability commitments, a persistent gap exists between consumer awareness and actual purchasing behavior. This gap is especially pronounced among younger consumers who, while digitally informed and ostensibly environmentally conscious, continue to engage heavily with fast fashion ecosystems.

Pune provides a distinctive and underexplored context for this inquiry. As one of India's fastest-growing cities with a large student population and a culture of trend-consciousness, Pune's young consumers are simultaneously exposed to global sustainability discourses and the everyday realities of budget-constrained consumption. Understanding how this demographic navigates the tension between sustainability ideals and practical purchasing constraints is both academically valuable and commercially relevant.

### *Research Objectives*

The objectives of this study are: (a) to assess the level and accuracy of awareness about sustainable fashion among young consumers in Pune; (b) to examine attitudes, perceptions, and factors influencing clothing purchase decisions; and (c) to test whether awareness of sustainable fashion is significantly associated with purchasing behavior.

## Literature Review and Hypotheses

Research on sustainable consumer behavior draws on multiple theoretical frameworks. The Theory of Planned Behavior [2] posits that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control collectively shape behavioral intention. Applied to sustainable fashion, this framework predicts that positive environmental attitudes should generate sustainable purchasing. However, empirical findings have frequently documented a divergence between attitudes and behavior—commonly termed the green attitude–behavior gap [3].

Joy et al. [4] demonstrated that even consumers expressing strong environmental values often continued purchasing fast fashion due to its hedonic and social gratifications. Beard [5] argued that sustainable fashion occupies a luxury niche that renders it inaccessible to price-sensitive youth segments. Niinimäki et al. [1] further highlighted that circular economy models in fashion require not only production-side changes but also demand-side behavioral transformation.

Within the Indian context, limited empirical research has specifically examined how urban youth negotiate between sustainability ideals and purchasing realities. The present study addresses this gap by focusing on Pune's young consumer segment. Two hypotheses are tested:

*H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the level of awareness about sustainable fashion and the purchasing behavior of young consumers in Pune.*

*H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between the level of awareness about sustainable fashion and the purchasing behavior of young consumers in Pune.*

## Research Model

The conceptual framework positions sustainable fashion awareness as the independent variable and purchasing behavior—operationalized as the degree to which respondents find sustainable fashion appealing and express willingness to purchase—as the dependent variable. Mediating and moderating influences include price sensitivity, style preference, brand trust, and social media exposure. The model is informed by the attitude–behavior framework, which recognizes that the pathway from awareness to action is filtered through practical and experiential determinants.

## Methods

### *Research Design*

A descriptive, cross-sectional survey design was employed. Quantitative data were collected via a structured online questionnaire administered through Instagram, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn, targeting respondents between 18 and 30 years of age residing in Pune. The instrument captured demographic information, awareness levels, attitudinal orientations, purchase drivers, and future purchase intentions.

*Sampling and Instrument*

Convenience sampling yielded 147 valid responses, a sample size consistent with comparable exploratory studies in the sustainable consumption literature. The questionnaire comprised closed-ended items including multiple-choice and Likert-type questions. Key constructs measured were: (a) awareness of sustainable fashion; (b) conceptual understanding; (c) perceived importance of sustainability in fashion; (d) primary purchase drivers; and (e) future purchase intention.

*Analytical Techniques*

Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were computed for all survey items. Inferential analysis employed the Chi-Square Test of Independence to assess the association between sustainable fashion awareness and purchase appeal. A significance threshold of  $\alpha = 0.05$  was applied.

**Analysis And Results**

*Awareness of Sustainable Fashion*

A majority of respondents (71%) reported awareness of sustainable fashion (Table I). The 18% expressing uncertainty suggests that nominal exposure does not always translate into conscious recognition of the concept.

*Table 1. Awareness of Sustainable Fashion (n = 147)*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Respondents (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes, aware	104	71%
Maybe / Not sure	27	18%
No	16	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Accuracy of Understanding*

Only 45% of respondents demonstrated an accurate understanding of sustainable fashion (Table II). The remainder held partial or incorrect interpretations—for instance, equating sustainability with premium pricing. This signals a substantive knowledge gap beneath surface-level awareness.

*Table 2. Conceptual Understanding of Sustainable Fashion*

<b>Level of Understanding</b>	<b>Respondents (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Correct (eco-friendly, ethical production)	66	45%
Partial understanding	55	37%
Incorrect / Unsure	26	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Purchase Drivers*

Price and style dominated purchase decisions, while sustainability ranked last at 24% (Table III). This underscores that environmental considerations currently occupy a peripheral role in purchase cognition among young Pune consumers.

*Table 3. Factors Influencing Clothing Purchase Decisions*

<b>Purchase Factor</b>	<b>Respondents (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Price / Affordability	93	63%
Style / Trend appeal	82	56%
Comfort and fit	69	47%

Brand image	48	33%
Sustainability	35	24%

### *Future Purchase Intention and Hypothesis Test*

Approximately 76% of respondents expressed conditional or definite willingness to adopt sustainable fashion in the future, contingent primarily upon affordability and stylistic appeal. To formally test the link between awareness and behavior, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted.

*Table 4. Contingency Table — Awareness vs. Purchase Appeal*

Awareness	Neutral	Not Appealing	Somewhat Appealing	Very Appealing
No	11	11	14	21
Yes	18	12	27	28
<b>Total</b>	29	23	41	49

*Table 5. Chi-Square Test Results*

Test Statistic	Value
Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ )	1.388
Degrees of Freedom (df)	3
p-value	0.708
Significance level ( $\alpha$ )	0.05
Decision	H <sub>0</sub> Accepted

### *Chi-Square Computation*

The Chi-Square statistic is computed using:

$$\chi^2 = \sum (O - E)^2 / E$$

where O = observed frequency and E = expected frequency. Expected frequencies were calculated as E = (Row Total × Column Total) / Grand Total. For example, for the first cell: E = (57 × 29) / 147 ≈ 11.24. Summing across all cells yields  $\chi^2 = 1.388$  with df = (2-1)(4-1) = 3. The resulting p-value of 0.708 far exceeds  $\alpha = 0.05$ , and therefore H<sub>0</sub> is accepted.

### **Discussion**

The findings present a nuanced portrait of sustainable fashion consumption among Pune's youth. The 71% awareness rate and 80% attitudinal support for sustainable fashion are substantive figures for an emerging market. Yet the formal statistical analysis confirms that awareness does not translate into purchase behavior—a finding that echoes established literature from European and North American markets [3][4], suggesting that structural barriers to adoption are not unique to India but may be more pronounced given the income constraints facing young Indian consumers.

The finding that sustainability ranks last among purchase drivers, selected by only 24% of respondents, implies that environmental attributes are perceived as supplementary rather than core. For sustainable fashion to achieve mainstream adoption, it must transition from a niche preference to a primary value proposition. This requires both supply-side innovation and demand-side deepening of environmental literacy.

The conditional willingness expressed by 37% of respondents represents commercially exploitable latent demand. These individuals are not ideologically opposed to sustainability; they are pragmatically constrained. Brands that lower the price premium and align sustainable product aesthetics with prevailing youth trends are well-positioned to convert this latent demand into active purchasing behavior.

### **Recommendations**

*For Brands and Retailers*

Develop budget-conscious sustainable lines with tiered pricing, student discounts, and exchange programs to reduce the price premium. Commission collaborations with youth designers and influencers to create trend-relevant sustainable collections. Increase presence on mass-market digital platforms (Myntra, Instagram Shopping) and establish pop-up experiences at colleges and youth events.

*For Marketers and Communicators*

Replace technical environmental language with relatable, short-form video narratives demonstrating the tangible everyday impact of sustainable choices. Publish supply chain data, material sourcing information, and third-party certifications to build consumer trust and combat greenwashing.

*For Educational Institutions and Policymakers*

Integrate sustainability literacy into academic curricula through brief, engaging modules on the fashion industry's environmental footprint.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined the awareness, perceptions, and behavioral patterns of young consumers in Pune regarding sustainable fashion. Evidence from 147 respondents reveals that consumers are increasingly aware of and sympathetic toward sustainable fashion, yet purchasing behavior continues to be governed by economic and aesthetic priorities. The Chi-Square analysis formally confirmed that awareness does not significantly predict purchase behavior ( $p = 0.708$ ), reinforcing the view that information provision alone is an insufficient strategy for behavioral change.

Meaningful progress toward sustainable fashion adoption requires structural interventions—affordability, accessibility, and design relevance—alongside educational initiatives that move consumers from nominal awareness to genuine understanding. Sustainable fashion in India stands at an inflection point: it is neither a peripheral luxury nor an unattainable ideal, but an emerging mainstream movement whose realization depends on closing the gap between what young consumers believe and what they ultimately buy.

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