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Bridging the Green Gap: An Analysis of the Intention-Behavior Gap in Sustainable Fashion Consumption Among Young Consumers in Nepal

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Original Article
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Abstract

Background: The global fashion industry, a major economic driver, is undergoing a significant transformation shaped by digitalization, evolving consumer demographics, and heightened environmental concerns. While the sector demonstrates resilience, it faces criticism for its environmental impact, including pollution and waste from fast fashion. This has catalyzed a shift towards sustainable practices, such as thrifting, upcycling, and support for eco-friendly brands, driven particularly by younger generations. However, consumer perceptions of these sustainable fashion trends, especially in emerging markets like Nepal, remain an underexplored area in management literature.

Objectives: This study aims to assess customer perceptions of sustainable fashion trends, focusing on thrifting preferences, upcycling interest, eco-friendly brand engagement, environmental awareness, and the role of social influence.

Methods: A descriptive, quantitative research design was employed. Data were collected from a sample of 204 clothing customers in Nepal using a structured questionnaire featuring a 5-point Likert scale. Participants were selected via convenience sampling and were either current

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or former students, ensuring familiarity with local trends. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) to interpret attitudes and behaviors.

Findings: The results indicate a strong positive perception and high environmental awareness among consumers. Respondents acknowledged the affordability and uniqueness of thrifting (Mean=3.93) and recognized the effectiveness of upcycling in reducing waste (Mean=3.87). There was a notable willingness to pay more for sustainable brands (Mean=3.79) and a strong consensus on the need for stricter industry regulations (Mean=4.02). However, the actual frequency of thrifting to reduce environmental impact was moderate (Mean=3.10). The primary barriers identified were affordability and accessibility, with the highest agreement (Mean=4.07) on the statement that consumers would buy more sustainable fashion if it were more affordable and widely available.

Conclusion: The study concludes that while Nepali consumers, particularly younger demographics, exhibit highly favorable attitudes and strong intentions toward supporting sustainable fashion, a significant intention-behavior gap exists. This gap is predominantly influenced by practical constraints related to cost and availability.

Implication: The findings imply that for sustainable fashion to become mainstream, industry stakeholders must strategize to enhance affordability, improve accessibility through wider distribution channels, and intensify educational and promotional efforts. Policymakers can support this transition by implementing regulations that incentivize sustainable production and consumption.

Keywords: Sustainable Fashion, Consumer Perception, Thrifting, Upcycling, Eco-Friendly Brands, Gen Z, Nepal.

Introduction

The fashion industry is one of the largest and most dynamic sectors in the global economy, serving as a significant economic driver by employing millions worldwide and contributing substantially to global GDP (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Despite challenges such as economic downturns over the past decade, the industry has demonstrated remarkable resilience, experiencing accelerated growth and transformation (Brydges et al., 2020). This transformation is marked by a broadening consumer base, driven by increased global life expectancy and changing demographics, requiring fashion businesses to adapt and cater to diverse age groups with personalized offerings (Mohr et al., 2022).

The contemporary fashion landscape remains uncertain, shaped by ongoing geopolitical tensions and economic instability. Since the 2008 financial crisis, external disruptions have influenced market dynamics, pushing the industry toward digital transformation. The rise of e-commerce and social commerce has revolutionized brand-consumer interactions, with platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube becoming central to marketing and sales strategies (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This shift is further underscored by the decline of traditional retail and the exponential growth of online fashion sales, particularly in luxury segments (McKinsey, 2020).

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Alongside digital integration, investments in information and communication technologies (ICT) have become essential for enhancing operational efficiency and sustainability. These advancements enable shorter production cycles, cost reductions, and increased transparency, which are crucial as fast fashion accelerates (Remy et al., 2016). However, technological progress also presents challenges, such as potential workforce displacement in manufacturing hubs (ILO, 2019). In this volatile context, agility and responsive supply chains have emerged as strategic imperatives, allowing companies to swiftly adjust to market changes and consumer demands (Rigby et al., 2016; Choi et al., 2020).

Market consolidation through mergers and alliances reflects ongoing pressures to scale and innovate. Meanwhile, consumer expectations are evolving rapidly, especially regarding environmental and ethical issues. Fast fashion's negative impacts such as high water usage, pollution, and labor concerns have heightened consumer demand for transparency and sustainability (Niinimäki et al., 2020). In response, brands are increasing disclosure, setting sustainability goals, and engaging in cross-sector collaborations to promote responsible production.

A notable shift in consumer behavior is the growing preference for access over ownership, with rental models and second-hand markets gaining traction due to their alignment with sustainability values (Becker-Leifhold, 2018). This trend underscores broader cultural changes favoring affordability, ethics, and environmental consciousness.

Given these evolving dynamics, this study aims to explore customer perceptions of sustainable fashion trends, a topic that remains underexplored in management literature. The increasing emphasis on sustainability and circular economy principles, especially among younger generations such as Generation Z and Millennials, is reshaping the fashion industry's competitive landscape (Henninger et al., 2016).

Objective of the Study

To assess customer perceptions of sustainable fashion trends.

Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design with a quantitative approach to explore customers' opinions about sustainable fashion trends. The target population comprised clothing customers of all ages residing in Nepal. To make the study manageable and representative, a sample of 204 respondents was selected. These participants were either currently studying or had previously studied in Nepal, ensuring their familiarity with local fashion trends and cultural contexts. Convenience sampling was used to select respondents, allowing for efficient data collection within the constraints of time and resources. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire featuring a 5-point Likert scale, where respondents rated each statement from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

For data analysis, descriptive statistical methods were applied to summarize and interpret the participants' responses, providing insight into prevailing attitudes and behaviors toward sustainable fashion.

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Results

The data was collected by floating questionnaire among students (male and female) of different universities in Nepal. This section covers the respondents' demographic profile and how it was analyzed and interpreted on the basis of the primary information gathered through questionnaires. This will make it easier to understand the demographic traits of the respondents. The profile of the respondents comprises the respondent's gender, age and educational background.

Table 1 Sample Distribution of Age

Age Group		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below 20	58	28.4	28.4	28.4
	21-25	105	51.5	51.5	79.9
	26-30	20	9.8	9.8	89.7
	31-35	10	4.9	4.9	94.6
	36-40	3	1.5	1.5	96.1
	40-above	8	3.9	3.9	100.0
	Total	204	100.0	100.0	

The result in table 1 indicates that out of 204 respondents, 58 (28.4%) were below age 20 years, 105 (51.5%) within age 21-25, 20 (9.8%) age 26-30, 10 (4.9%) age 31- 35, 3(1.5%) within age category of 36-40 and 8 (3.9%) 41-above. The results of the study indicate that, there is high consumer rate in sustainable fashion within age group Below 20 and 21-25. We can also know that the age group above 30 are not much interested in fashion trends.

Table 2 Sample Distribution of Gender

Gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	80	39.2	39.2	39.2
	Female	124	60.8	60.8	100.0
	Total	204	100.0	100.0	

The table 2 shows that the result of the study was inquired as male and female. Out of 204 respondents, the maximum were females with number 124(60.8%) and males were 80(39.2%).

Table 3 Sample distribution of Education qualification

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SEE	11	5.4	5.4	5.4
SLC	33	16.2	16.2	21.6
Undergraduate	42	20.6	20.6	42.2

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Bachelor	93	45.6	45.6	87.7
Masters	23	11.3	11.3	99.0
Diploma	1	.5	.5	99.5
Chartered Accountancy Professional – II	1	.5	.5	100.0
Total	204	100.0	100.0	

The result of the survey indicates that, based on educational level of respondents, respondents have some appreciable level of education. The results show that 23 (11.3%) of the respondents had their master degree, 93 (45.6%) had completed their bachelor's degree, one has a Diploma 1 (0.5%), 11 (5.4%) has completed SEE, 33 (16.2%) has passed SLC, 42 (20.6%) are Undergraduates and 1(0.5%) is at Chartered Accountancy Professional – II level.

Descriptive analysis

This section focuses on the descriptive analysis of the data gathered through questionnaires throughout the course of the research. Calculating statistical measures including mean, standard deviation, as well as maximum and lowest values, is a component of descriptive analysis. With regard to frequencies and aggregation in relation to the research questions and variables, these numbers aid the researcher in their analysis of the data. Five-point Likert scale questions, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Agree), and 5 (Strongly agree), were asked to the respondents for this purpose. Sustainable Fashion Trend is the dependent variable in this research and this section analyzes the level of respondent's consumer behavior. It was analyzed based on 25 items. In the previous section, the tables presented respondents' information. However, descriptive analysis of each item of all variables has been presented together with mean and standard deviation in the following table.

Table 4 Descriptive Analysis of Sustainable Fashion Trends

Statement	**N**	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Std. Dev.**	**Variance**
Thrifting Preference						
I frequently shop at thrift stores to reduce my environmental impact.	204	1	5	3.10	1.110	1.232
Thrifted clothing is just as good in quality as new clothing.	204	1	5	3.35	1.092	1.194
I find unique and stylish clothing options when thrifting.	204	1	5	3.59	1.015	1.031
Thrifting is a more affordable alternative to buying new clothes.	204	1	5	3.93	0.902	0.813
I prefer thrifting over buying from fast fashion brands.	204	1	5	3.38	1.074	1.154
Upcycling Interest						

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I enjoy repurposing or modifying old clothes to create new styles.	204	1	5	3.57	1.022	1.045
Upcycling is an effective way to reduce textile waste.	204	1	5	3.87	0.933	0.870
I feel creative and satisfied when I upcycle clothing.	204	1	5	3.77	0.883	0.779
I would participate in workshops or tutorials on clothing upcycling.	204	1	5	3.79	0.941	0.886
Upcycled fashion should be more promoted as a sustainable option.	204	1	5	3.92	0.898	0.806
Eco-Friendly Brand						
I actively research brands before buying to check their sustainability practices.	204	1	5	3.72	0.918	0.843
I am willing to pay more for clothing from eco-friendly brands.	204	1	5	3.79	1.002	1.005
Eco-friendly brands offer stylish and trendy clothing options.	204	1	5	3.80	0.890	0.792
I trust the ethical claims (e.g., fair trade, organic materials) of sustainable brands.	204	1	5	3.89	0.832	0.692
Sustainable brands are doing enough to promote environmental responsibility.	204	1	5	3.76	0.886	0.784
Environmental Awareness						
Fast fashion significantly contributes to environmental pollution.	204	1	5	3.77	0.941	0.885
I feel guilty when buying from non-sustainable fashion brands.	204	1	5	3.57	1.022	1.044
Reducing textile waste should be a priority for consumers.	204	1	5	4.00	0.800	0.640
I understand the environmental benefits of sustainable fashion.	204	1	5	4.02	0.784	0.615
The fashion industry needs stricter regulations to promote sustainability.	204	1	5	4.02	0.865	0.748
Social Influence & Accessibility						
My friends/family influence my decision to buy sustainable fashion.	204	1	5	3.55	0.968	0.938
Social media encourages me to thrift, upcycle, or buy eco-friendly brands.	204	1	5	3.82	0.958	0.918
Thrift stores and sustainable brands are easily accessible in my area.	204	1	5	3.52	1.121	1.256
Sustainable fashion is often portrayed as trendy and desirable in my social circle.	204	1	5	3.67	0.949	0.901
I would buy more sustainable fashion if it were more affordable and widely available.	204	1	5	4.07	0.788	0.620

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Based on the descriptive statistics provided, the analysis reveals key insights into consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward sustainable fashion trends. The results indicate a growing awareness and acceptance of sustainable fashion practices among respondents.

A notable majority of participants expressed moderate to high agreement with statements supporting sustainable behaviors. For example, many respondents recognize the affordability and uniqueness of thrifted clothing, with a mean score of 3.93 for the belief that thrifting is a more affordable alternative to buying new clothes and 3.59 for finding unique and stylish options while thrifting. However, the mean for frequently shopping at thrift stores to reduce environmental impact is 3.10, indicating a less frequent but still present behavior pattern.

Upcycling also appears to be a widely accepted sustainable practice. Statements like “Upcycling is an effective way to reduce textile waste” (Mean = 3.87) and “I feel creative and satisfied when I upcycle clothing” (Mean = 3.77) show that consumers not only value the environmental impact but also find personal satisfaction in these activities. Additionally, willingness to participate in workshops or tutorials on upcycling (Mean = 3.79) reflects a proactive attitude towards sustainability education.

In terms of brand awareness and ethics, consumers show a growing sense of responsibility. For instance, the mean for “I actively research brands before buying to check their sustainability practices” is 3.72, and 3.89 for trusting ethical claims made by sustainable brands. Similarly, the willingness to pay more for eco-friendly clothing is supported (Mean = 3.79), suggesting that price is not the sole determinant for ethical consumers.

Environmental concerns are further evident in the responses. High mean values for statements such as “Reducing textile waste should be a priority for consumers” (Mean = 4.00), “I understand the environmental benefits of sustainable fashion” (Mean = 4.02), and “The fashion industry needs stricter regulations” (Mean = 4.02) underline a strong demand for more responsible and regulated fashion practices.

Social influence also plays a role. Respondents acknowledge that social media (Mean = 3.82) and friends/family (Mean = 3.55) influence their sustainable fashion choices. However, access remains a challenge: the mean score of 3.52 for the statement about the accessibility of sustainable brands and thrift stores suggests room for improvement in availability and convenience.

The highest mean value (4.07) was recorded for the statement “I would buy more sustainable fashion if it were more affordable and widely available,” indicating that cost and access are the most significant barriers to sustainable consumption.

In summary, the data suggest that while consumers generally support sustainable fashion and exhibit positive attitudes toward practices like thrifting, upcycling, and ethical brand choices, practical barriers such as affordability and accessibility remain critical challenges. These findings point to the need for greater promotion, education, and industry support to mainstream sustainable fashion behaviors.

Thus, this study reveals a significant intention-behavior gap among Nepali consumers, where strong positive attitudes and high environmental awareness toward sustainable fashion—evidenced by the recognition of thrifting's affordability (Mean=3.93), upcycling's effectiveness

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(Mean=3.87), and the demand for stricter industry regulations (Mean=4.02)—are not fully translated into consistent action, as the moderate mean score for frequent thrifting (3.10) demonstrates. The primary drivers of this gap are the formidable barriers of affordability and accessibility, a finding powerfully underscored by the highest level of agreement with the statement that consumers would buy more sustainable fashion if it were more affordable and widely available (Mean=4.07). This suggests that while social influence and digital media are effective in shaping perceptions, the current sustainable fashion market in Nepal is not adequately meeting practical consumer needs for cost-effective and convenient options. Consequently, for sustainable practices to become mainstream, the findings imply that the industry must prioritize strategic interventions that directly address these economic and logistical constraints, moving beyond awareness campaigns to create tangible, accessible, and affordable circular economy models for the local market.

Conclusion

The analysis shows that consumers are increasingly aware of and supportive toward sustainable fashion practices such as thrifting, upcycling, and choosing ethical brands. Many appreciate the affordability and uniqueness of thrifted clothing, though not everyone shops at thrift stores frequently. Upcycling is recognized as an effective way to reduce waste and brings a sense of creativity and satisfaction, with a good number of people interested in learning more through workshops. Consumers also pay attention to the sustainability practices of brands and are willing to invest more in eco-friendly clothing. Despite positive attitudes, challenges remain regarding the accessibility and affordability of sustainable fashion options. Overall, while there is strong support for sustainable fashion, practical barriers like cost and availability still limit broader adoption.

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